Teacher Talk and Classroom Practice:
An Analysis of the Constitution of Pedagogic Identities

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Given that (a) native wit is not determined by social class, and (b) all children now receive equivalent basic schooling, why are those children who fail to become educated almost all from the lower working class? (Halliday, 1995: 127).

Over the past three decades, sociologists in education have attempted to grapple with this question and provide explanatory accounts of how schools work to (re)produce inequality. As Ladwig, Luke and Lingard (1999: 15) argue ‘the sociology of school knowledge has given us ample reason to believe that much of the source of our current problems in finding ways to produce socially just schooling outcomes lies with the most foundational structures of current curriculum and pedagogy’ (emphasis added). In this paper, we endeavour to contribute to the literature in the sociology of education by examining the structures of classroom practice, specifically the structures of curriculum and pedagogy, that may constitute differential learning experiences for students. We also examine the relation between the professional-academic discourses produced by teachers and enactments of classroom practice in order to think about possible implications for teacher professional development work.

The paper is organised in four sections. In the first section, we delineate a theory of pedagogy by drawing on the work of Basil Bernstein. We then turn to a review of literature about the relation between teacher interview talk and classroom practice. In the third section, we describe the case study schools that provided data for this study. We then analyse the interview and classroom data collected from three teachers who worked in these case study schools. In the final section of the paper, we offer some tentative comments about the relation between professional-academic discourses produced by teachers, the constitution of pedagogic practice, and the content and form of pedagogies that may make an educational difference.

Theorising Pedagogy

Specifically, in this paper we analyse the pedagogic relation constituted between classroom teacher and cohort of students in three lessons, in order to think through which pedagogies may make an educational difference for students attending culturally diverse secondary schools situated in low socio-economic areas in an Australian city. Basil Bernstein’s theorisation of the structure of pedagogic discourse and practice guides the analysis of interview and classroom lesson data collected from two schools. Bernstein (1971: 123) argued that ‘the particular form a social relation takes acts selectively on what is said, when it is said and how it is said’. It is through this social relation that a child acquires a specific social identity and orientation to meaning. Thus, Bernstein (1981) was fundamentally concerned with analysing the pedagogic relation between transmitter and acquirer, such as the relation between teacher-student, student-student, textbook-student, and computer-student in terms of the constitution of school knowledge.

Bernstein proposed that an analysis of the pedagogic relation must take account of both ‘what’ knowledge is constituted, and ‘how’ this knowledge is constituted. The concept of pedagogic discourse was developed by Bernstein to analyse both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ components of school knowledge. He proposed that pedagogic discourses are comprised of an instructional and regulative component. Instructional discourse is the knowledge that is selected, organised, and defined in evaluative criteria, for the purposes of teaching and learning. Regulative discourse establishes the order within the instructional discourse. It generates principles of selection, organisation, pacing and criteria of skills, concepts and
information (i.e., the arbitrary internal ordering of school knowledge). It also mobilises theories of instruction, and thus contains within itself ‘a model of the learner and of the teacher and of the relation’ between teacher-learner (Bernstein, 1996: 49). Thus the specialised mode of social interaction or communication between teacher and student, that is, whole class teacher monologue, triadic dialogue (teacher question-student response-teacher evaluation), seatwork activities, are constituted by the regulative discourses. However, the model of the learner, teacher and teacher-student communication ‘is never wholly utilitarian; it contains ideological elements’ (Bernstein, 1996: 49). Thus regulative discourses perform a crucial ideological function because they conceal the relations of power and control generating the arbitrary internal ordering of instructional discourse. Moreover, regulative discourse is always the dominant discourse because it regulates ‘what’ knowledge is selected and included in classroom practice, ‘how’ this knowledge is organised (sequenced and paced), as well the selection of criteria used to evaluate student acquisition of this knowledge.

Pedagogic discourses not only constitute classroom practices, but also the professional-academic talk of teachers in general staff room discussions about students, as well as specialised meetings designed to review school curricula or teaching strategies. In parent-teacher interviews, as well as researcher-teacher interviews, teachers are also likely to speak from a position within particular pedagogic discourses.

**Theorising Teacher Talk and Classroom Practice**

However, the relation between: (1) the knowledge articulated by teachers in the discursive contexts of a research interview, staff room discussions, curricular planning meetings; (2) the knowledge constituted by these same teachers in interactions with students in classroom discursive contexts; and (3) student learning outcomes has been the subject of considerable debate in the research literature. For example, Mirza (1992: 54) proposed that there was no evidence in her study to suggest a direct correlation between teachers’ negative accounts of students, low self-esteem of black students, and poor educational outcomes. Indeed, Mirza (1992) revealed that black working class students maintained pride in their ethnic/cultural identity and communities despite the negative comments of some teachers, and strived to achieve educational success even in those circumstances where teachers provided little or no encouragement. However, Mirza (1992: 130) did argue that:

> in order to succeed in their chosen career, they [black girls living in low socio-economic communities], more than any other group, required the information, assistance, resources and encouragement that only an educational institution could provide. This dependency appeared to put these girls at a severe disadvantage in pursuing their occupational career.

Thus, while there was no automatic translation between teachers’ negative accounts, racist classroom interactions, students’ low self-esteem and poor educational outcomes, Mirza (1992) did indicate that the informational resources provided by teachers made a significant difference in the educational outcomes attained by working class black students. Similarly, Maureen Stone (1981) argued that teachers’ assumptions about innovative curriculum for educationally disadvantaged students influenced the selection of knowledge included in classroom practice and thus educational outcomes. Likewise, Anstey (in Anstey & Bull, 1996: 96) indicated that interviews with teachers about the knowledge they accessed and their beliefs about literacy teaching which had arisen from this knowledge revealed that it was differences in beliefs and knowledge between teachers that related to their different teaching styles.
Moreover, Anstey's interview and classroom based study revealed no significant statistical relationships between the professional and personal backgrounds of 25 teachers and their teaching style. The variables or factors included in this study were: age, gender, professional qualifications, range of teaching experiences, years of teaching, professional development undertaken and the socio-economic status of the school in which they taught.

In terms of the analysis undertaken in this paper, it is proposed that the interview data collected from teachers provide access to professional-academic talk about classroom practices for students in culturally diverse low socio-economic communities. When producing accounts of classroom practice, teachers take up positions within a pedagogic recontextualising field by aligning themselves to particular interest groups such as subject-specific affiliations (e.g., English Teachers Association), modes of pedagogy (e.g., progressive vs conservative approaches), and/or ethnic or social class identifications (resident in the local community). Professional-academic discourses make available terms for naming people as members of a group although they may not necessarily know one another. These are terms for imagining unity; for presupposing connectedness and identification amongst individuals who might never meet (Anderson 1991; Bauman 1999). Through this process of imagination, a professional-academic group is called into being (Singh & Dooley 2001). Thus the talk or accounts produced by teachers in interview contexts are not construed as a source of direct insight into how and why teachers constitute specific classroom lessons. Rather, teachers' interview talk is conceptualised as informational resources upon which they may draw in terms of planning and enacting secondary school classroom lessons.

**Case Study Secondary Schools**

Interview and classroom data for this study were collected from two case study schools, Sanunder and Bluehills High. Both schools were located in urban areas that were statistically ranked in the lowest 5% of local areas in the state of Queensland with respect to median household income. In addition, the youth and adult unemployment levels of 31.4% and 21.7% respectively were substantially higher than the city averages of 14.1% and 9.9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). A State Electoral Commission profile indicated that the electorates centred on Sanunder and Bluehills had the highest percentage of overseas-born residents in Queensland (33.67% compared to a state average of 17.41%). This document also revealed that the aforementioned urban areas had the highest percentage of residents speaking languages other than English at home (26.77% compared to a state average of 7.16%) (Electoral Commission Queensland, 1998).

At the time of the research study (1996-1998), the administrators (principals and deputy principals) at both schools stated that the student population (approximately 700) was comprised of four major ethnic groups, namely, Aboriginal (14%), Pacific Islander (14%), Asian (mainly Vietnamese) (21%), and white working class (40%). There were 30 to 40 different nationalities represented at both schools, and English was not the main language of communication in the homes for many of the students. According to the administrators, both schools faced similar educational issues, including:

- conflict-ridden teacher-student and student-student pedagogic relations,
- large numbers of non-English speaking background students and insufficient resources to cater for this clientele,
- low educational attainment levels (1/3 of the students do not obtain junior certificates),
- high percentages of students from social groups (students living in poverty, and Indigenous and Pacific Islander students) identified as ‘at risk’ in terms of attaining equitable educational outcomes, and
• declining enrolments as students travelled out of the local area to attend public (or low fee private) schools perceived to provide ‘safe’ and academically challenging learning environments.

Specific Pedagogic Discourses and Practices

In what follows, classroom lesson data collected from the case study secondary schools are analysed in terms of ‘the what’ (curriculum) and ‘the how’ (teaching/learning) of pedagogic discourses. The data analysis focuses on the discursive (selection, organisation and evaluative criteria of knowledge) and social (conduct, character and manner of participants) rules of the classroom. In two of the classrooms extended conflicts between teacher and student occurred regularly which often resulted in the need for overt behaviour management strategies. In these classrooms the teacher had to shift the focus of the lesson from the discursive order of instruction to the social order of classroom interaction in an attempt to manage student disruptions or challenges to the curricular content (instructional order). Teachers did this by exercising overt control or making explicit the social rules of conduct, character and manner acceptable or appropriate for classroom interaction (Classroom A, Bluehills State High School; Classroom B, Sanunder State High School). By contrast, in the third classroom student resistance to learning was not only relatively rare, but also downplayed by the teacher. Moreover in this latter classroom, teacher and student attention rarely shifted from the discursive instructional order to the management of social relations within the classroom (social order) (Classroom C, Sanunder State High School).

In addition, interview data produced by the teachers who conducted the Year 10 English classroom lessons are analysed in this section of the paper. The analyses focus on the relation between teacher’s articulation of knowledge about students attending the case study secondary schools, inclusive curricula and pedagogy, behaviour management strategies, and the pedagogic discourses constituting the classroom lessons. It is proposed that successful pedagogic practices are likely to be characterised by teachers who work with students to construct school curricula that is intellectually demanding and connected to students’ background knowledges, real-life, and/or focussed on solving intellectual and/or real world problems. Moreover, this knowledge (the ‘what’ of schooling) is taught (the ‘how’ of schooling) via pedagogic relations that enable students to exercise some control over the sequence, pace, and outcomes of the lesson. In addition, the teacher constantly makes explicit the criteria that s/he is using to evaluate students’ acquisition of knowledge (see also Lingard, Mills and Hayes, 1999).

Classroom A: BlueHills State School – Ms Jameson

Ms Jameson, the teacher in Classroom A, was in her fifth year of teaching service. Since graduating from university with a major in History, she had taught English and Studies in Society and Environment at BlueHills State High School. During the course of the interview, Ms Jameson spoke about the ‘frustration’ voiced by teachers of English in the staffroom in relation to teaching a diverse student population. She suggested that teachers were frustrated by popular misconceptions held by other subject specialist teachers who did not differentiate between mundane knowledge of English, that is, ‘every day’ use of the English language, and the ‘really complex’ (esoteric) knowledge of English taught in the classroom. Other subject specialist teachers would often question ‘what’s so difficult about it (subject English)’. Ms Jameson talked about her own curricular and pedagogic initiatives designed to assist students to acquire the complex, technical knowledge of subject English. She stated ‘I certainly try with my choice of novels … to choose the things that I feel are socially um, worthwhile or relevant, ideas in them to teach, so I like doing that.’ When asked to provide an example of relevant curricula, Ms Jameson stated that she had selected:
a novel that looked at the relationship between a black boy and a white boy. Um, it was simple language, really short chapters, like two pages per chapter, um, really structured and went in and looked at um, issues such as, applying for a job if you're black, and like got down to the real nuts and bolts and did stuff like that.

She claimed that such a novel would be suitable for a Year 10 class ‘that does have a couple of Samoan kids in it as well as um, Aboriginal kids, just as great a proportion of them.’ Moreover, in response to a question about how she challenged racist pedagogic relations in her own classroom practices, Ms Jameson stated:

*I'm fairly liberal in my classroom, um, with the way I interact with the kids. Even, you know, even my year eights, you know, I try to be um, human, but, you know, I'm also in charge, and they learn, they learn to know me, and um, ((pause)) they know that I don't, I don't, there's certain attitudes such as say against women and against other races ( ) and so they learn to avoid it, because I tell them, I explain to them, you know, I don’t appreciate that.* (emphasis added).

Thus, Ms Jameson’s professional-academic talk focused on her control over the content and form of school curricula (discursive rules), as well her control over the social rules of classroom interaction. At no stage in the interview did she talk about how she negotiated the discursive and social rules of classroom practice with the cohort of students. Ms Jameson remained perplexed by the fact that she experienced ‘great difficulties’ with some cohorts of students ‘in getting them to accept .. that I am the teacher and I am here to be respected, in the way that I set up, and, you are here to learn.’ She provided anecdotal details of student resistance to learning, including examples of derogatory insults directed at herself.

The lesson represented in Extract One (a – c) focused on the reading habits of the class. However, the objective of the lesson and the evaluative criteria were not made clear to students until the culminating activity. Only after a student request for clarification about assessment requirements, did Ms Jameson make criteria explicitly available to all students. Specifically, she stated that students were expected to write a 400 word journal entry on a novel of their choice and complete an oral book review for this particular unit of work. The first two lessons of the unit of work were designed to elicit information about the reading world of the students. The relation between the discursive (selection, sequence, and pace) and social rules (conduct, character and manner of participants) of these lessons and the final assessment criteria for the unit of work was not delineated. In other words, the teacher did not negotiate with the students the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of curricular content (discursive rules) nor the mode of interaction (social rules of communication).

The 40-minute lesson was comprised of two main instructional topics. The first topic related to students’ reading practices during the previous day. The second topic related to students’ recollections of their pre-reading, early childhood and primary school reading experiences. For both topics, the teacher drew on her personal experiences to model appropriate literacy practices and what would count as legitimate criteria for the worksheet or journal entry. However, Ms Jameson’s attempts to create a common world of reading were constantly challenged by the students (see also Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Mercer, 1995). Forms of student resistance included:

- delaying tactics (e.g., ‘I didn’t read nothing’, ‘Miss; I’m prejudiced against reading’),
- introducing taboo content (e.g., ‘Read a cigarette packet in the school toilets’; ‘Read pornos Miss’), and
- direct confrontation with the teacher (e.g., ‘That ((question)) is so stupid’; ‘She ((my mother’s)) not that stupid’).
In developing the first topic, Ms Jameson drew on examples from the local community such as reading traffic lights and the menu at the local Vietnamese bakery to evoke a shared world of reading experience with the students. Early in the lesson Ms Jameson had indicated that the focus was on ‘what sort of reader you are, how you read, how you respond to reading, what you like, what you don’t like’. Within the turn, however, she had flagged that ‘you (students)’ were actually part of a common world of readers to which she also belonged: ‘So, today and tomorrow, we’re doing lots of little exercises to try and work out what sort of reader we are, and what we like reading, and what the difficulties are that we have’. Thus, while Ms Jameson attempted to connect the knowledge constituted in the classroom to students’ real world experiences, her selection and reinterpretation of students’ knowledge was in terms of her world experience.

In the extract of data below students resisted the discourses selected by the teacher to describe her own reading habits. Specifically, the teacher attempted to display her liberal Anglo middle class cultural style, namely a predilection for ‘wonderful ('little')’ ethnic eateries and purveyors of exotic foodstuffs to the class of students.

Classroom Lesson A: Extract (1a)

1. **Ms Jameson**: Oh and on my way here, I forgot to have breakfast, so I went to the lovely Vietnamese bakery ( ), and I had to read a list. What was it about? It was about the prices. Has everyone, anyone been to that bakery?
2. **Students**: No
3. **Students**: Yes
4. **Steven**: [Yes] and the cream is off.
5. **Ms Jameson**: Well I don’t [have the cream.]
6. **Robert**: [Stale bread] and all that.
7. **Ms Jameson**: Oooh no, the croissants, it’s beau-, they’re beautiful.
8. **Student**: Is that just in one morning?
9. **Ms Jameson**: So I wanted a croissant.
10. **Robert**: They got stale bread.

In the dialogue represented in Extract Three (a), the students explicitly challenged the common world of reading that the teacher tried to establish. This common world was designed to produce informational resources from which the students could legitimately select content for completing the seatwork activity which entailed recording their reading practices on a worksheet. Ms Jameson then continued to clarify the criteria for completing the worksheet by initiating triadic dialogue on the topic of students’ own reading from the previous day.

Classroom Lesson A: Extract (1b)

1. **Ms Jameson**: Now, there’s a whole list of things ((I read)). ((pause)) I want you to think of one thing you read yesterday, I want you to think about it now, and then I’m going to ask you about it. ((Pause)) Simone, what did you read yesterday?
2. **Simone**: When I was at home, I read Dolly magazine.
3. **Ms Jameson**: Good, read your Dolly magazine. Gilbert, what did you read yesterday?
4. **Gilbert**: Nothing.
5. **Ms Jameson**: Did you read the computer screen while Jason was playing Sim City?
6. **Gilbert**: Yeah.
7. **Ms Jameson**: Right, well so what did you read?
8. **Gilbert**: Information, the computer, data.
9. **Ms Jameson**: John, what did you read?
10. **John**: TV pages.

11. **Ms Jameson**: TV pages, good.

((Six turns of similar interaction omitted))

12. **Ms Jameson**: And Michael B., what did you read, you did lots of reading yesterday?

13. **Robert**: He read (gay magazines)

14. **Mark**: My work

15. **Tali**: Snakes

16. **Michael**: Yeah, I read about snakes.

17. **Ms Jameson**: Yeah good. Now can you think, see how I’ve got a balance between things at school and at home. Jason would you have a balance of things you read at school and at home?

18. **Jason**: Nah.

19. **Ms Jameson**: Where do you do most of your reading?

20. **Robert**: At school.

21. **Mark**: At home.

22. **Jason**: Aarh, in my room.

23. **Ms Jameson**: What sort of things do you read in your room?

24. **Jason**: Penthouse magazine

25. **Tali**: Playboy magazine

26. **Students**: ((Laugh))

27. **Ms Jameson**: Aarh, so you do read, Jason?

28. **Jason**: Yeah.

29. **Ms Jameson**: Right. Don't forget, like I said to Gilbert before, don't forget that computer screens, when you read information on computer screens, that's just as much information.

As she worked through the questions listed on the overhead transparency (a replica of the worksheet to be completed by the students during seatwork), Ms Jameson attempted to establish criteria for recognising experience from which content for the reading logs could be legitimately selected. The reading of magazines, computer screens, the TV pages, and schoolwork all received Ms Jameson’s approval. Teacher control of the specialised interactional practice through which these discursive criteria were established was strong. For example, when Gilbert indicated that he had not read the day before (Turn 4), Ms Jameson proceeded to set up a weighted choice (Turns 5-7) that pressured him into stating that he had, in fact, read. In turn 29, the teacher held the class accountable for the criteria refined in this dialogue with Gilbert. Specifically, she reminded the whole class that working on the computer constitutes reading.

Jason’s response to the teacher’s question about what the students had read the day before seems to have been an attempt at student control of the pedagogic discourses of schooling. In introducing the issue of sexuality (Turn 24) he broached a subject matter that is more or less taboo in pedagogic discourse. Hence, his response could be interpreted as a contestation of the teacher’s strong control over the selection of content for this lesson and hence her imposition of her social reality (the middle class reading world of an English teacher). This interpretation has credence because the teacher had directly asked Jason if there was a balance between his reading practices at home and school, using the example of her own reading habits as a model. This contestation was negotiated by the teacher via a retroactive definition of Jason’s response as a legitimate answer to her question: ‘Aarh, so you do read, Jason?’ The weighted choice offered Jason in this agreement elicitation represented very strong teacher control of the pedagogic discourse. It can be interpreted as an effort to turn the student challenge into a contribution to the common world of reading from which meaning could be legitimately selected for the reading log. As Extract Three (c)
indicates, however, this strategy was a risky one because it set up conditions for further student contestation of the pedagogic discourses which constituted the reading lesson. The extract opens with the transition to seatwork:

Classroom Lesson A: Extract (1c)

1. **Ms Jameson**: I’ve got one of those recording sheets for you now. Using the list of things down the bottom, I want you to tell me everything that you read yesterday and I want you to write it down.
2. **Robert**: The whole day?
3. **Tali**: I didn’t read nothing.
4. **Ms Jameson**: The whole day!
5. **Tali**: Oooh no.
6. **Michael**: I read Penthouse last night.
7. **Ms Jameson**: Michael, you would not know what to do if you read a Penthouse.
8. **Michael**: Ooh-ooh wouldn’t I?
9. **Students**: ((Laugh))
10. **Mark**: He wouldn’t be too busy reading them, Miss, he’d be doing something else.
11. **Ms Jameson**: They’re pretty tame though really, aren’t they?
12. **Students**: ( )
13. **Ms Jameson**: Have you got access to black label, Michael, then?
14. **Michael**: Your story, Miss.
15. **Mark**: Too busy with your pants down, hey Michael?
16. **John**: Yeah, and you watching, hey?

In Turn 1 Ms Jameson explicitly marked the transition to independent seatwork. One student seemed to seek clarification of the criteria for the task: ‘The whole day?’ However, this response could also be interpreted as a delaying tactic in terms of completing the written work task. Others overtly engaged in resistance by claiming to have read nothing (Turn 3) or read Penthouse (Turn 6). These claims entailed resistance to both the specialised interactional practice and the instructional texts of the lesson. Two students did not comply with the teacher’s injunction to ‘write it down’. By contrast, Michael picked up on the latitude apparently offered by the teacher earlier by loudly proclaiming that he had read Penthouse. However, because he did not engage in the written work task, Michael’s claim about his magazine reading experience could be considered as a form of student resistance. The teacher met Michael’s challenge by getting personal and embarrassing him: ‘Michael, you would not know what to do if you read a Penthouse’. Michael’s subsequent defiance (‘ooh-ooh, wouldn’t I?’) was followed by what seemed to be a conspicuously nonchalant display of worldliness on the part of the teacher enacted through a strongly controlled agreement elicitation that might have brought the challenge to a close: ‘They’re pretty tame though really, aren’t they?’ However, the start of the independent seatwork for this cohort of male students was further delayed. From the transcript it is not clear whether all the other students in the class were witnessing the dialogue between the teacher and the cohort of male students or were engaged with the seatwork activity. In either case, the classroom practice exemplifies problems with behaviour management and inattention to the co-construction of intellectually challenging and engaging school knowledge that was connected to the real world or background knowledges of the cohort of students.

Classroom B: Sanunder State High School – Mr Axel

Prior to his transfer to the school, Mr Axel had taught for eight years, acquiring extensive experience in schools with multicultural student populations in urban poverty areas. During several interviews conducted for the study, Mr Axel stated that he had opted to teach in a ‘more working class environment’ because he came from a ‘working class background’. He
also noted that his own parents were not ‘particularly well educated’, and that he had
completed tertiary studies as a mature age student after a career in clerical and
photographic work. Mr Axel described his experience at Sanunder as ‘hell, in a word …
probably the most difficult’ in his teaching career. He explained that the ‘ratbag behaviours
… of some kids’, that is, ‘swearing through the grounds’, ‘swearing at teachers’, and
not ‘respecting’ teacher instructions specifically, and the rules of school conduct more
generally, made his experience at Sanunder particularly difficult. This was despite the fact
that Mr Axel had taught in low socio-economic schools neighbouring Sanunder (i.e., Bluehills
and Newell) and had been commended by the administrators of those institutions. Mr Axel
argued that he spent a considerable ‘amount of time and attention on classroom
management’ and tended to ‘stay more at the front of the class where ((he could)) see
everything’. Throughout the interviews, Mr Axel emphasised the importance of teaching
students to abide by the rules of school and classroom conduct (social rules). He repeatedly
stated that he would not ‘tolerate’ or ‘accept’ students swearing at him: ‘It might be their
culture but it’s not mine. ( ) I respect their culture but I’m not going to let mine be trampled
on’. He suggested that students ‘don’t know where the limits are. They don’t know where the
line is drawn.’ Thus, he claimed that one of his primary responsibilities was to construct ‘well
defined structures’ in the classroom, and ensure that all students were socialised into the
rules of these social structures. Consequently, if students arrived unprepared for English
lessons, that is, without the requisite textbooks, paper, pencils and homework completed, he
refused to supply them with the materials needed to engage in school work, until he had
‘exhausted all possibilities’. Only if it appeared that students might ‘become disruptive’, did
Mr Axel provide them with a blank sheet of paper that he expected to be returned the next
day. He suggested that while some of his practices might appear ‘pretty mindless’ or
overly ‘disciplinarian or authoritarian’, they were designed to inculcate the ‘internal
discipline’ that is required for success both at school and in the workforce.

In the seatwork activity taught by Mr Axel, the students were expected to identify the
techniques by which a given radio commercial elicited audience attention. This activity was
part of a media unit that culminated in the students writing radio commercials. The lesson
from which the activity was drawn consisted of a series of specialised interactional practices
that developed the following topics: i) radio stations target particular demographics; ii)
commercial radio stations make profits by selling advertising; iii) advertisements need to
appeal to particular demographics; and iv) there are specific techniques for eliciting
audience attention. The seatwork was the penultimate activity in the lesson. It was preceded
by teacher-student dialogue about whether a particular commercial excited attention, and
was followed by a whole class activity in which the teacher asked the students to discuss the
seatwork activity.

Mr Axel started the lesson by asking the whole class a series of questions pertaining to the
types of music played by different radio stations (eg. Rap, Heavy Metal). Thus, he attempted
to connect the knowledge of the classroom to the knowledge already held by teenagers who
frequently listen to the radio. However, Mr Axel rarely elaborated on student responses, or
asked students which problems like these, identified by teachers, students and community
members, arose. The analysis points to the potential for confusion and disruption that was
inherent in the relatively implicit control exercised by Mr Axel over ‘the what’ of the
instructional text, as well as his explicit attention to the social rules of conduct, character and
manner, that is, the moral or regulative order of the classroom.

Mr Axel expected students to participate in introducing content into the activity by inducing
from the script of a given radio commercial the technique used to elicit audience attention.
Students were thus assumed to share the teacher’s competence in abstracting generic
conventions from text exemplars. This represents less explicit teacher control of ‘the what’ of
the activity. It is a form of social control typical of lessons where teachers are trying to
promote ‘thinking’ on the part of students. The result in this case may have been incomprehension, or possibly a tactical move to delay written work: "What?" (Turn 8). In response, the teacher exercised overt control over the social interaction through which the students were expected to introduce content into the lesson. The teacher did not make explicit the rules or generative principles for abstracting generic conventions of radio commercials. In other words, ‘the how’ of classroom interaction, rather than ‘the what’ and ‘the how’ of instruction (i.e., concepts and skills and their relation) was here made explicit to the students.

The interactive form of the activity, it was stated earlier, was a variant of teacher-directed dialogue. The students were expected to reply in writing to a teacher question and to do so at a given pace: ‘I’ll give you two minutes’ (Turn 7). Student behaviour was, therefore, explicitly controlled by the teacher through the communicative obligations of a specialised interactional practice. This interactional form of control was strengthened as students answered back and did not comply with directives. In Turn 9 the teacher treated student incomprehension (‘What?’) as incomprehension of content expectations: the question about techniques for eliciting audience interest was re-iterated. The teacher did not attempt to clarify the content of the lessons for the students. Rather, attention was directed to the forms of classroom interaction, and these were explicated in the imperative form for the cohort of students. In three successive turns an interactive directive which had been implicit in the preparatory discourse was stated clearly: ‘write it down’ (Turn 9, 11, 13).

Maintenance of the less explicit organisation of instructional content set up conditions for ongoing disruption of the lesson. In the dialogue that preceded the seatwork, students’ personal opinions on the effectiveness of the exemplar commercial were elicited: ‘Do you think it would be effective, the commercial, would it be the one that people would (listen) to? What do you think?’ The meanings elicited were particularistic, local and context-dependent. The teacher did not so much evaluate the truth value of student answers, as react: ‘Interesting comment’. Up to this point in the lesson, the teacher had repeatedly invoked his own experience and that of the students, within the experiential circumstances of the classroom, to build an everyday knowledge about the effectiveness of commercials: ‘I think most people are a bit like me when a commercial starts ... I just deliberately switch my head off. I deliberately don’t hear them. Now a lot of people are like that’. In Turn 7, however, the students were expected to engage with specialised knowledge on the discursive work of generic conventions, where the preceding talk had been everyday discourse on ‘what we all know about commercials and attention’. The student statement in Turn 10 entailed deliberate or inadvertent slippage between these two discourses: ‘They wouldn’t((get my attention)).’

In addition, the student comment continued an earlier dialogue during which the teacher had failed to elicit the students’ agreement that the radio commercial would actually elicit listeners’ attention. That dialogue had ended with the teacher resorting to hypothetical agreement on this point: “Okay, so the next person writing the commercials says that’s, that a very good one”. It was then that the teacher moved to the activity that required the students to ascertain the method by which the ‘very good’ commercial engaged audience attention. In other words, the teacher had not only shifted implicitly from an everyday to a linguistic knowledge in the seatwork, but had imposed an everyday perspective with which some students did not agree (from this data it is difficult to discern student motives). This set up the interactive conditions for the disruption of the seatwork activity that followed. Problems like this did not arise in lessons where teacher expectations about ‘the what’ of instructional texts were more explicit or clearly delineated; where less was left to student inference.
Classroom C: Sanunder State High School – Ms Bryce

The lessons organised and implemented by the teacher in Classroom C were remarkable for the absence of the type of disruption described above in Classroom A and Classroom B. Ms Bryce was in her first year of teaching at Sanunder State High School. Prior to requesting a transfer to Sanunder, she had taught for two years at a school that she described as ‘authoritarian’ and ‘rigid’. Her transfer request was specifically linked to the behaviour management problems she experienced when attempting to implement what she described as the authoritarian modes of pedagogy sanctioned by the administration at her previous place of work. By contrast, at Sanunder High, particularly in the Year 10 classroom lessons, Ms Bryce claimed that she spent ‘a negligible amount of time on behaviour management.’

Like sometimes, there might be one particular student who’s not doing much, and I might need to sort of sit with them and encourage them a bit, but it wouldn’t be actually taking time out of what I’d already set for the other people to do. I don’t ever have to stand and wait for them. Wait ages for them to be quiet or anything like that.

Ms Bryce lived in the suburb neighbouring Sanunder and cycled to work each day. She stated that she had ‘always liked the idea of … living in the community where ((she)) worked’, and while she was not in ‘exactly the same suburb’, she was in the area described as the ‘support centre network’ of Sanunder. Like Ms Jameson and Mr Axel (classroom A & B teachers), Ms Bryce evoked the moral category of respect when describing pedagogic relations. Specifically, she stated:

… you get respect, if you show them ((the students)) respect, then you get respect in return and that’s the sort of teaching I really, really like. I don’t like to have to go in and assert authority because that’s what is expected of me. I like to be able to go in and um, by earning the respect myself get the respect as well and um, and really enjoy working with the students and have a friendly relationship with them.

The lesson discussed below was extracted from a six-week media unit of work on the genre of stories. Ms Bryce suggested that the unit of work aimed to ‘look at the concept of stories. I’ve got short stories or folk tales. Like a story way of telling stories and a newspaper report way of telling stories and the TV news report way of telling stories.’ For the unit assessment, students were expected to write a story utilising one of the following genres: newspaper reports, TV news, folk tales or short story. Moreover, they were expected to transpose one story format or genre to another. Ms Bryce explained: ‘so they’ll take a TV news, and make it into a newspaper report or they’ll take a news report and make it into a short story.’ Her decision to use the folk tale of the ‘Three Little Pigs’ in this unit of work was based on the assumption that all students in the class would have heard about the story. Thus Ms Bryce used a story that was familiar to the cohort of students to introduce unfamiliar or new intellectually demanding knowledge about the structure of information in folk tales. Moreover, Ms Bryce claimed that she did not adopt a ‘really critical approach’ in her English lessons. However, she did encourage students to think about how the selection and organisation of content in a TV news program, for example, was geared to providing entertainment rather than strict reportage of objective facts.

The data extracted below was taken from a lesson in the third week of the media unit. Ms Bryce specified the objectives of this particular lesson.

… in this lesson … I want to emphasise that in a newspaper report, you put the most important information right at the top whereas in a short story you’re building up to that gradually. So I want them to be able to shuffle it ((newsworthy information
extracted from the folk tale, ‘Three Little Pigs’) around and end up with the newspaper report structure for this story.

Thus the 40-minute lesson was comprised of three main instructional topics. The first topic related to identifying relevant sections in a folk tale that could be considered newsworthy information for a newspaper report or story. This topic had been covered in a previous lesson, and students were expected to finish underlying newsworthy sections on a worksheet (folk tale of the ‘Three Little Pigs’) for homework. The specialised interactional practice of whole class triadic dialogue (going over homework and revising the previous day’s work) was used to elicit student’s knowledge on this topic. Moreover, Ms Byrce elaborated on responses elicited from the students by using the specialised interactional practice of teacher monologue to review the literacy skills and information that had been introduced in the previous lesson. The following extract of data (3 a) taken from the lesson illustrates this point.

Classroom Lesson C: Extract (3a)

Ms Byrce: Okay, so all you need, the thing that I'm trying to emphasise with this, is you only need to pick out little, little bits out of what's happening. You only need to know who's doing the action, what happened to them, and what the outcome of that was. Okay? And it happens three times in this story which is probably not what would actually happen in the newspaper report. It normally, there'd be one person with one thing happening to them and some sort of outcome ... Okay?

The students were expected to practise the literacy skills of identifying newsworthy information by underlying, or checking that they had already underlined, relevant information on the worksheet, and then producing summary notes of this information. Moreover, Ms Byrce emphasised the cognitive aspects of this literacy task, and practically demonstrated how to complete this task (see also Anstey & Bull, 1996). In other words, she explained her thinking processes (regulative discourse) while she enacted the literacy skill/task (instructional discourse). The following extract of data illustrates this point:

Classroom Lesson C: Extract (3b)

Ms Byrce: .... So we're down to one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Paragraph 7. The big bad wolf watched from behind the trees. Okay, so we've got first little pig, straw, big bad wolf watched from behind the trees. So think about the way that we've been going through this, and the way that I'm only picking out really little bits. It doesn't matter if you feel like you're leaving most of the story out. You're just trying to get the basic facts. So think about that for the next paragraph. The little pig worked and worked until the sun went down. By this time the house of straw was finished. So we probably don't need to know about him working and working until the sun went down. What do you think is the next, next most important bit?

The second topic of the lesson related to the ‘inverted pyramid structure’ of the newspaper report. Ms Byrce used the specialised interactional practice of teacher monologue to talk about the content and organisation of newspaper reports utilising an article that the class had discussed in a previous lesson. Students were expected to practise the skills taught in this review activity by marking their worksheet (newspaper report) with numbers corresponding to items listed on an overhead projector transparency sheet (OHT). In other words, students were expected to identify the content or main ideas covered in each of the paragraphs of a newspaper report activity sheet, namely:

1. location and context,
2. explanation of the event,
3. order of when what happened,
4. relation to the circumstance,
5. reinforcement of interesting point (direct speech used to show it really happened), and
6. rounding off piece of information.

The third and final topic of the lesson entailed transposing the relevant pieces of information extracted from the folk tale into the structure of a newspaper report. This was the only new topic introduced during the lesson. The preparatory phase of the seatwork activity is represented in the following data extract (Four c). This phase was conducted in whole class spoken discourse. It was followed by a phase of independent work during which students were permitted to consult with peers, while the teacher circulated around the room, assisting students and occasionally addressing the whole class. The transition to the independent phase was free of the extended conflicts between teacher and student that were observed in Classroom A: Ms Jameson’s lesson and Classroom B – Mr Axel’s lesson. The extract opens at the beginning of the preparatory phase with the teacher checking that all the students had a copy of the newspaper article on which they had previously marked the generic features of news reports or stories:

Classroom Lesson C: Extract (3c) [bold denotes modal items]

1. **Ms Bryce:** Okay, has everyone got those, the things it’s marked on? Okay. Now, what I want you to use that for is to see the sort of information groupings that you could make with your ‘Three Little Pigs’, so you could do the same sort of thing. Divide it up, even, into six sections, and make your news, and note that your news report was going to be, say about this length, and you could start off with a headline, the lead which is the most interesting thing but doesn’t contain a lot of details, and then tell me the details in order, a bit of direct speech, something else interesting that happened and a final, a final thing to round it off with.

((student-teacher questioning about the final assignment of the unit elided))

2. **Ms Bryce:** So, we’ve only got five or so minutes left, but what I’d like you to start to do, while you’ve got people here to talk to and the person next to you to ask about, just turn up the page of your book, put up your heading, Newspaper Report for ‘Three Little Pigs’. So this can be your heading. And before we got that information there, start to put down what order, or start to think about the order that you’re going to write your report in. And you might like to do just a summary of the things that you’ve got to put in each of these. … Or would you prefer just to go straight into writing about them in that order as a report? Have you got any thoughts? Okay, straight into the writing. Kelly? What would you (reckon)? Straight into the writing or do a summary first? Okay, anyone got any other thoughts?

3. **Beth:** What, Miss?

4. **Ms Bryce:** What I’m wondering is whether you wanted to summarise the events that you’re going to do in that order first or whether you want to just write the report straight out as a rough draft in that order.

5. **Beth:** Can we do, like headlines and ( )?

6. **Ms Bryce:** Yeah, so you want to start off with the proper headline and the proper report?

7. **Beth:** Yeah.

8. **Ms Bryce:** Yep? All right. If as long as you feel confident to start straight, straight into the report.
Potential confusion and disruption was addressed by the way in which Ms Bryce prepared the students for both ‘the what’ and ‘the how’ of the upcoming independent phase of the seatwork activity. Specifically, students were told that they were to produce a written display of newsworthy information organised under six themes while interacting with peers. The six themes (Extract Four c: Turn 1) had been modelled repeatedly in previous lessons and revised during the second topic of the current lesson. This thematic structure was repeated here to make explicit the evaluative criteria for selecting and sequencing content (newsworthy information from the folk tale) for the production of a news report or story. Ms Bryce’s pedagogic mode was thus oriented to the performance expected of the students.

Interpersonally, a great deal of effort on Ms Bryce’s part went into establishing working relations for the students. In the preceding extract of data, the modality is very marked in the teacher’s discourse. Her means of establishing control in the class were often indirect. In the words of Fran Christie (1995: 231)

[(t)his probably reflects, in part, the fact that she … recognizes that she will be more successful if she seeks their [students] cooperation rather than overtly order them to do their work. In addition, it reflects her concern to set up a congenial working relationship, one on which a great deal of what is to be taught and learned will be negotiated. At issue is her very strong expectation and requirement that the students cooperate. A value is at work here, to do both with establishing respect for the teacher and with the values of the students respecting each other and learning to work together harmoniously. Such a value is constantly affirmed through the regulative [discourse]. It has consequences for the building of the pedagogic subject …]

Discussion

The limited case study reported in this paper examined the discourses of educational disadvantage produced by three secondary school English teachers. All of these participants talked about the moral category of ‘respect’ in terms of the pedagogic relation between teacher-student, and student-student (regulative discourse).

Pedagogic relations between teacher-student and student-student in two of the classrooms (Ms Jameson and Mr Axel) portrayed in this paper were characterised by frequent displays of student talk that disrupted the discursive and social order of pedagogic practice. Ms Jameson and Mr Axel suggested that students from the local community did not know how to conduct themselves in secondary school classrooms. Both teachers demanded respect from the students, but made few attempts to negotiate respectful pedagogic relations in the classroom. The pedagogic discourses constructed by Ms Jameson and Mr Axel focussed on inculcating the students into a particular version of the social rules of classroom conduct, character and manner, that is, the rules of doing and being middle class, academic school student. The school curriculum was not academically challenging, and did not transmit valued informational resources. Many of the students in classrooms A and B resisted the pedagogic discourses or common world of knowledge constructed by the classroom teacher. This resistance took the form of delaying tactics, introducing taboo content, engaging in off-task activities, and direct confrontation with the teacher.

By contrast, Classroom C was characterised by a lack of disruptive and disrespectful student behaviours. Ms Bryce, the teacher in Classroom C, worked hard to build respectful teacher-student, and student-student pedagogic relations. The pedagogic mode was oriented to the achievement of academically challenging literacy performance outcomes. Explicit instruction was provided in terms of ‘the what’ (instructional discourse) and ‘the how’ (regulative discourse) of English literacy. Moreover, Ms Bryce modelled her own literacy practices by
explaining her thinking processes while she practically demonstrated specific skills. Interpersonally, Ms Bryce exercised strong control over the specialised interactional practices (regulative discourse) of the classroom. However, she did not overtly order students to complete tasks. The regulative discourses constituting teacher-student pedagogic relations (i.e., conduct, character and manner) in this classroom established the values of working together harmoniously. In turn, this had implications for the subject positions and identities taken up by students within the pedagogic discourses of the classroom.

Although this case study was limited by the number of participants, schools and classroom lessons, it is suggested that the social constructions of the dis/advantaging effects of pedagogic discourses revealed by the detailed analyses hold currency in environments far greater than that of the designated disadvantaged Australian secondary school.

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Notes:

REFERENCE LIST


