"Departmental advisers as official interpreters: Torchbearers and holders of official knowledge"

Abstract:

This paper examines the work undertaken by departmental advisers who assist teachers to implement particular state education policies such as syllabus and curriculum documents. It draws on the author's doctoral thesis which involved an analysis of the interactions between teachers, the texts of the Queensland English Syllabus, and two women who worked as 'official interpreters' guiding teachers in their uses of the texts. The author argues that there is a need for greater recognition of the complexity of the positions taken up by the interpreters, a recognition that would involve making better use of their expert knowledge in future implementations of new policy and syllabus documents.

Introduction

The mediating role that departmental advisers, or 'official interpreters', play in the introduction of new syllabus and curriculum documents is often ignored in schools, in education departments and in research on the acceptance of new policies by teachers. When there is any recognition of these advisers or 'interpreters', there are often assumptions made about the work they undertake and the positions they hold. Some of these assumptions include that they are agents of change, that their task is to correctly interpret policy for teachers, that they are 'good' classroom teachers while at the same time being experts in the knowledge that needs to be interpreted. In this paper I will disrupt some of these assumptions, while making visible the complexity of the work done by the interpreters, and the positions they hold. I draw on the analysis I undertook for my doctoral thesis to argue that there is a need for schools and education departments to recognise and make better use of the work done by the advisers.

The research context

In my doctoral thesis, I analysed the interactions between teachers, these official interpreters, and the texts of the Queensland English Syllabus (Department of Education, Queensland, 1994a). I used Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of knowledge as a rhizome, and Alvermann's (2000) understanding of a 'rhizo-textual analysis' to construct my analysis and the thesis text. Alvermann's description of a rhizo-textual analysis is drawn from Deleuze and Guattari's work where:

Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be... A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, social sciences, and social struggles (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7).

Rhizomes do not have clearly identifiable beginnings and ends; a rhizo-textual analysis concentrates on the middle, rather than trying to follow the linear paths of more traditional linguistic analyses. It is impossible, then, in a rhizo-textual analysis, to provide a linear description of the journey taken through and across a rhizome. Each of the chapters of the thesis focused on a different tuber, a different middle, while still providing tracings and linkages, connections to other tubers, other parts of the rhizome. Here I wanted to avoid what St Pierre (1997, p. 179) calls the "ruthlessly linear nature of the narrative of knowledge production in research methodology".
Undertaking a rhizo-textual analysis allowed me to explore the connections and linkages between the texts of the syllabus documents, the texts of interviews with two teachers and two official interpreters and the texts of two classroom lessons observed and videotaped. Woven throughout this analysis and forming other connections and linkages were my own lived experiences as a classroom teacher of English in primary schools in Queensland and as a school based interpreter of the English syllabus.

At the time of data collection I worked with the two interpreters I interviewed at a school support centre in a large regional city in Queensland. I had known both women as colleagues and friends for some years, and these relationships formed yet another connection and linkage between their interviews and my analysis of their talk. At the time of the interviews Kate was a Key Learning Area Regional Coordinator (KLARC) for English, and Sue was an Educational Adviser - English (EA) but I had previously known them as fellow student, as teaching colleague, as school based key teachers in English, as regional advisers in English, as curriculum co-ordinators for English in schools, and as fellow 'experts' in English.

Using a rhizo-textual analysis allowed me to make use of our shared prior experiences and our relationships as colleagues to help explain my analysis of their talk in interviews as well as their work with teachers. I was not the researcher as a distant other but my experiences became as much part of the analysis as the words within the syllabus texts and on the transcribed page. One of the methods I used to make my lived experiences visible within the text of the thesis was the (re)production of memories or stories that I wrote in a poetic form.

The stories of how I became positioned and positioned myself as teacher informed the story of my thesis. Sometimes my stories appeared as markings on the pages as I transcribed them from my memories, while at other times their visibility occurred through the ways in which I approached the tasks of analysis.

Pastoral bureaucracy

One part of these lived experiences that infiltrated my analysis was my understanding of the assumptions made about the official interpreters' work within the department. Many of these assumptions are based on their participation in the 'pastoral bureaucracy' (Hunter, 1993). As Ian Hunter has shown in his genealogy there are certain ethical competencies associated with belonging to this bureaucracy:

To conduct themselves as the agents of a complex forensic and decision-making organisation - whose technical capacities they cannot 'personally' embody and to whose ends they may not be 'personally' committed - bureaucrats must acquire a specific kind of ethical competence. Far from being (as they appear in the humanist imaginary) signs of ethical failure, strict adherence to procedure, dedication to a special expertise, a 'service' mentality, and the subordination of the 'person' to the 'office' are positive abilities only acquired through the mastery of specific ethical practices (1993, p. 262).

In Kate and Sue's cases, their expert knowledge of the syllabus illustrates their mastery of particular ethical practices associated with the pastoral bureaucracy Ian Hunter describes. Yet this same expertise and the mastery of these practices, commits both Kate and Sue to self-governing practices. In this paper, I show how some of these regulatory mechanisms work to govern the official interpreters. This governing work is only made possible because of the interpreters' expert status and their membership of the 'pastoral bureaucracy'. Because they have mastered the 'ethical practices' associated with this bureaucracy, their positions as experts are strengthened. But at the same time, their expertness requires them
to submit to the regulatory practices available in the syllabus texts. Not only do they have to submit to these practices, but their expertness requires them to assist in the regulation of their teaching colleagues. As torchbearers, they make certain that the governing practices and regulatory mechanisms are visible to the teachers they work with. But this is not, as Hunter would say, a sign of some 'ethical failure' on the interpreters' part. Their work to assist in the regulation of their colleagues is not insidious or immoral. Rather, it is an illustration of the ethical competence they have achieved.

**Sue: expert and holder of official knowledge**

Both official interpreters constitute themselves, and are constituted, within the collective of expert. As Bronwyn Davies says, "each person speaks from the positions made available within those collectives through the recognized discourses used by that collective, and has desires made relevant by those discourses" (2000, p. 66). The interpreters' positions as experts inform the ways in which they speak as embodied beings. Their desires are informed, 'made relevant', by the discourses about 'expertness' in which they locate themselves. These desires involve being seen to be a power(full) person, as the discourses about 'expertness' attach power to the position of expert.

The sense of being some power(full) holders of official knowledge, and the desire to be so positioned, is directly expressed by Sue. Here, she discusses her sense of having some form of power when she became an official interpreter for the first time. The position that we talk about here, the 'key teacher role', was a school-based position tied to the implementation of the draft English Language Arts Syllabus (D. E. Q, 1991). It was because of her experience as a key teacher that she was offered the EA position in which she was working when I interviewed her.

_E Did you apply for that key teacher role? Or were you_  
Sue: Nominated?

_E Thrust had it thrust upon you (laughter)_  
Sue: *(laughter)* Yeah. Um I think it was open to all the staff if they'd like to apply for it um, but certainly there wasn't any written expressions of interest. But I know BW asked me if I would like to do it. And what a dumb little sucker I was I said yes *(laughter)*

_E: But why did you say yes? What interested you about the new_  
Sue: A sense of power. Um *(laughter)*

_E: *(laughter)* What for yourself or for?_  
Sue: No for myself I'm totally egocentric (...) Being in on what was seen as the groundbreaking, you know, being, having that knowledge and really, you know, looking back on it now, looking at my own personality, a lot of it is a form of power, because I like to be up on
what is new, what is happening, so that I can make the links to my own practice but also I guess so that I can be seen as a bit of a leader or something like that which is

E: So what you?

Sue: possibly not a very good personality trait to have (laughter)

E: oh I don't know about that.

While Sue desires to be seen to be power(full) as the holder of official knowledge, she also desires to be seen to be colleague to me, someone who does not want to accept a higher status. She also needs to show that the power she desires is linked to her classroom practice. At first, Sue identifies herself as a 'dumb little sucker'; this allows Sue to be positioned as a teacher who is unwillingly coerced into taking on the higher status position of expert. I introduce the possibility of being positioned in this way through my naming of the coercion (the task being thrust upon you). I perform this introduction because I am, at that moment, speaking about the position of key teacher in a taken-for-granted manner (it is a burden, extra duties, unpaid, requiring significant amount of time away from your own classroom; anathema to many primary school teachers). While at first Sue joins me in this usual way of speaking, through naming herself as a 'sucker', she then honestly acknowledges her desire for the power held in such a position of higher status.

This desire to be power(full) could be read as conflicting with her desire to be seen as a teacher who 'makes links to [her] own practice'. This conflict is managed, however, by Sue, through the self-deprecating comments she makes about her 'personality', and through the distance created by 'looking back at it now'. So her audacious 'grab' for power is tempered by dealing with it as something that has happened in the past, and something that is attempted because of her desire to be a good teacher.

The importance of being seen to be a teacher who holds 'groundbreaking' knowledge about classroom practices, could be linked to Sue's relationship with me, not only as researcher and interviewer, but as colleague, at university and in schools. This relationship is explored here in this memory I have of Sue:

I met Sue in a tutorial group at teachers' college. The subject was children's literature. The discussions were often as hot as the moist air outside the classroom, but Sue seemed to remain cool, conservative, dispassionate.

I envied her.

Years later I arrived at a new school. Her name mentioned by the principal three times in my first meeting with him. She was admired by the teachers, by the parents, the students, the administration.

I envied her.

She moved on to an advisory position, developing teachers' knowledge of the new English syllabus. Her knowledge was greater than mine, even though I was conceited in my expertness.
I envied her.

She was awarded the golden apple of English advisory positions in the region. Her expertise was publicly acknowledged and rewarded, while I struggled in the down and dirty coalface of a Grade 7 classroom.

I envied her.

Is Sue's desire to be the holder of power(full) new knowledge about classroom practices related to our relationship as teaching colleagues? Does she engage in self-deprecation because she recognises the envy I have expressed in this memory of our relationship? Does this memory of mine infiltrate the discourses I use while interviewing Sue? Is Sue's position as expert in our interview only made available through my envious eyes? Unanswerable questions such as these illustrate the dangers in accepting interview data at 'face value', or any attempt to describe the data as some unassailable truth. These questions highlight the "indeterminate ambiguity of interviewing" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 75). Because of this ambiguity, I can only provide possible interpretations of the answers given during the interviews, but I believe these interpretations provide some insight into the ways in which official interpreters, like the two women I interviewed, constitute themselves, and are constituted within, various discourses made available to them.

**Kate: expert and holder of official knowledge**

The possibilities of enacting a power(full) position when working as an official interpreter seems to be a given, taken-for-granted, in the talk of the other interpreter I interviewed. In this extract, Kate expresses her views of the syllabus in a forthright, and forceful manner. The words she uses, that I have underlined in this extract, allow her to construct for herself this power(full) position:

*Kate: It's becoming more and more pivotal to what I do that this syllabus is a fairly revolutionary document. ... Its foundation in the context-text model is absolutely crucial although the syllabus does contain aspects of growth and process models and cultural heritage models (...) It's the context-text model that's the central part. And that is unlike any other syllabus that I've seen in any other state. ... Um, it's, it's a philosophical approach to the teaching of English which is revolutionary in that it puts ideology right in there. ... But I believe that this is the answer (laughter) to um education for the 21st century.*

Through the words that I have underlined, such as 'absolutely crucial', 'revolutionary' etc, Kate constitutes the knowledge she owns as power(full). The link between her status and the knowledge she holds is made in the first line when she describes the 'pivotal' importance of the 'revolutionary' nature of the texts. Her status as expert is enhanced by her own 'knowing' that she knows 'the answer to education for the 21st century'. The syllabus is so complete, so replete with power that it is unlike anything else seen. It is only because of the power(full) status of the syllabus, that Kate's position as knower of that syllabus is itself power(full). It would seem then, that the knowledge that Kate holds about the syllabus allows the transference of the power, inherent in that knowledge, to Kate herself. After all, she is
the expert, the one who holds the key to this knowledge, the one who opens the doors to this knowledge for classroom teachers.

Kate takes for granted the position as power(full) holder of power(full) knowledge in much of her talk. She knows that she is speaking from the position of expert, and only occasionally does she express the desire she has to hold and maintain such a position. The laughter in the following excerpt, and the comment on not knowing what genre was, illustrate the simultaneous desires to be seen to be both expert and appropriately practical professional. Here, Kate is describing publication of work by a teacher network of which she was a member:

Kate: It was published by the department first. A series of about six or eight little beige-ish booklets that had a unit of work in each one.

E: Ohh

Kate: You can still sometimes find them out in schools and they're still not bad. They're literature based, whole language-ish to a degree, actually the unit of mine that was published was the only one that was a genre unit. And I didn't know what it was. So there you go (laughter)...it was, for those times, it was not a bad model, looking back at it.

Kate’s desire to be seen as both expert and teacher is expressed through the modification work she does here ('not a bad model', 'still not bad'). These modifications assist to establish Kate’s position as a teacher, whose knowledge is only power(full) if it affects classroom practice. The good teacher is one who does not call attention to her desire to be expert, but is allowed to make comments about improving her classroom practice. The self-deprecating work that Kate does through the modifications and the laughter, allows Kate to manage both her desires, to be seen as official expert, and to be seen as professional colleague, at one and the same time.

The interpreters and the syllabus

As an official expert interpreter, Kate demonstrates her simultaneous positioning as master of, and submission to, those discourses which maintain her expert status. For example, when Kate talks about the philosophy and the beliefs present in the syllabus, there is often a fuzziness, a blurring between the syllabus and Kate’s own beliefs. An example of this blurring occurs in the following extract:

Kate: We've got to teach them the metalinguistic understandings so that they can function (...)

E: And you believe that that comes through in this syllabus.

(pause)

E: Right well I'm interested
Kate: (laughter) (...) would you like to

E: I think, I think, what you just said started to sound to me like it was what you believed what your theory of language learning is.

Kate: OK

E: OK so now try and distinguish between. Because you're so close to the syllabus it'll be hard, harder for you. But where does your own theory of, of language learning stop and the syllabus start. Or where's the match? Between your own theory and the syllabus's theory? I mean um I agree with all of what you've said but

Kate: But is it in here?

E: But is it in there? Or is that just what you believe. Not just what you believe

Kate: (laughter)

E: (...) 

Kate: I just made it up

E: Yeah (laughter) 

Kate: Um I believe it is in here

E: Right

Kate: Um I think the the answer goes back to the orange handbook the guide where you've got those different approaches

E: Show me

Kate: Yeah um getting back to your question about where my thinking stops and the syllabus starts. I don't think (...)that. I believe that what I said is the syllabus’s philosophy

E: Right

K: to the teaching of English and I guess if you look in the syllabus, in the assumptions about language section, in here, you'll see that about cultural ideology and cultural context and what not, it's all there.
There is a fuzzy merging here between what the syllabus texts say, and what Kate says. The pause after I ask the first question ('you believe that comes through in this syllabus') is lengthy. In my memory of this pause, jolted by listening again to the tape, Kate seems to be puzzled by my question, puzzled by my attempt to distinguish between what 'we've got to teach' and the content of the syllabus. She is puzzled by my attempt to draw a line between what she has said, and what 'comes through in this syllabus'. To Kate, there is no line to be drawn between her own knowledge and the syllabus content. As Butler says, "the subject eclipses the conditions of its own emergence; it eclipses power with power" (1997, p. 14). Kate's own knowledge, or her knowing about her knowledge, is rendered invisible by the light of the knowledge she holds as official interpreter. Kate answers my questions, about the links between the syllabus texts and her own beliefs, by continually referring back to the texts. The laughter that she and I share when we consider the possibility of her 'just making up' what she has said about learning language draws attention to the power of the texts' discourses, and the position of the texts themselves as policy documents, as well as the power of the position she holds, and the invisibility of that power. It seems laughable to both of us that she could possibly draw attention to the power of her status by claiming ownership of the knowledge that is sustained by that power(ful) status.

There is no way that Kate can answer the question 'about where my thinking stops and the syllabus starts', because she has taken up the documents as her own: her own discursive practices are just as much part of the syllabus as the words/texts of the syllabus. She attempts to make clear to me that there is no line to be drawn, 'I believe that what I said is the syllabus's philosophy'. Her ownership, her mastery and subordination to the discourses in which she is located as expert, demand that there is no line.

In Sue's talk, also, this blurring and fuzziness is also visible, when I ask her to distinguish between her own beliefs and the syllabus:

E: So that, that's your way of looking at empowerment. Now do you think there's a match between that and the way the syllabus talks about empowerment?

Sue: I guess that's my interpretation of what I believe the syllabus is trying to say.

Here, Sue's own understanding of 'empowerment' is subsumed by her official 'interpretation' of the syllabus texts. Her own knowledge is deemed inferior to the official knowledge that she expresses as expert. It would also seem that, as official interpreter, Sue can make judgements about what the 'syllabus is trying to say'. Her official knowledge allows her to read between the lines, to make the 'correct' interpretation of the way in which ideas about empowerment are expressed in the texts. Her mastery/subjection to the discourses that position her as expert necessitates the claiming of the 'official' knowledge as her own.

**Tagging as torchbearing work**

As I mentioned earlier, as official interpreters, both Kate and Sue are members of a pastoral bureaucracy and this membership requires them to assist in the regulation of their teaching colleagues. As torchbearers, the official interpreters shine light on the correct lines, the trails that teachers must follow through the syllabus texts in order to be seen as effective teachers. Once on these paths, teachers must agree to the regulation of their practices, and the interpreters work to make sure this agreement takes place. The 'tagging' sessions that both Kate and Sue offer to teachers provide illustrations of how this regulatory work occurs.
One of the features of the work done by the official interpreters is an emphasis on helping teachers to make sense of the interconnections and linkages between the seven documents that form the syllabus texts. The focus here is on making the 'correct' links, the links suggested by the syllabus itself. Kate refers here to the difficulty of making these interconnections as she describes her inservice 'party trick':

Kate: We offered sessions with staff, we've offered you know guided tours of the syllabus documents. Schools don't want to know about it. Um that's a pity. Because it is difficult. It's it's an awesome task to find your way around that lot. But I believe there are easier ways (...) which could be done. And one of my most successful little party tricks is the tagging of the syllabus session, spend an hour with staff and they put little tags on the bits that are important to them. That helps.

Here, Kate acknowledges her position as torchbearer, one who conducts 'guided tours'. Her position as power(full) holder of official knowledge is reinforced through her knowing that gaining such knowledge is a difficult, 'awesome' task, but she can share some of this knowledge through a party trick. But why does Kate call this a 'party trick'? Is she suggesting that this sharing is only artifice, a pretence, that allows teachers to see themselves as holders of the official knowledge that, in reality, belongs to Kate and other official interpreters?

The success of this 'party trick' may depend on the last statement that Kate makes here, that staff "put little tags on the bits that are important to them". Although at first glance, these tagging sessions could be read as mandating a path through the syllabus for teachers to follow, the choices made available to teachers in this last statement may allow the tagging sessions to be read as allowing teachers some degree of freedom in their selection. But I would suggest that the information that teachers might find 'important to them', is actually clearly laid out by the official interpreters. They, as holders of the official knowledge, know which parts of this knowledge they want to share with teachers.

Having engaged both as a teacher, and as an official interpreter myself, in these tagging sessions, my own experiences inform my understanding of the selection of appropriate knowledge, or the ways in which official interpreters decide on the correct path teachers should follow. As a teacher in one of these sessions, I was directed to sections of the syllabus texts that should be read in order to understand the intent of the syllabus. In turn, when I became the expert on the syllabus in one school where I worked, I used these tags to show other teachers what parts of the syllabus were 'important'.

Neither Kate or Sue tell me of how they learned which parts of the syllabus to tag. But there are distinct similarities between the appearances of their copies of the texts, and my own copies, as well as the copies owned by the two teachers I interviewed. The tags are in similar places; the copies of the 'blue' book, the syllabus itself (D. E. Q, 1994a) are all filled with such tags, while other texts are empty (for example, my copy of A guide to analysing texts in English (D. E. Q, 1994b) is almost pristine, hardly touched. During the interviews, I noticed that this book was also barely referred to by any of the women).

These tagging sessions may be an illustration of the complexity involved in the interpreters' positions. On the one hand, they demonstrate their expertness in the official knowledge they hold, through the guiding, tagging work they do with teachers. But the selection of the tags,
the choices made about which parts of the syllabus documents to highlight, are made
because of the interpreters' regulation by the discourses surrounding their official
knowledge.

Planning as a regulatory mechanism

One of the mechanisms visible in the syllabus texts that works to regulate teachers'
practices is the emphasis on the production of written plans. These plans act as self-
surveillance mechanisms for teachers, as they work to produce them for some mythical,
imaginary other person, who might one day descend on their classrooms to check the
quality of the written documents. The production of these plans has become a main feature
of the implementation of the Queensland English Syllabus, so important that the quality and
effectiveness of the implementation of the syllabus does not seem to be related to the
changes in teachers' practices, but rather is deeply intertwined with the correct production of
planning documents. Advising and assisting teachers to produce these correct documents is
an essential part of the official interpreters' work as guides, as torchbearers through the
texts. Indeed, this is such essential work that to one official interpreter, the emphasis on
planning is one of the strengths of the syllabus:

Kate: Um the other strength would be the notion
of the unit planning. The three phases of the
learning activities. So at the end of the unit of
work you come up with something that's
worthwhile that kids can now do that they
couldn't do before. That focus is very important.

It would seem that here Kate is describing this idea, (that 'at the end of the unit you come up
with something that's worthwhile') as different, as unique to the syllabus. Jo-Anne Reid calls
attention to the place of programming in primary teachers' work:

The act of programming is characteristic of English teachers' work. It serves a central
and significant function within primary English teaching - very much a matter of both
curriculum and classrooms, and very much taken for granted in teaching practice

So perhaps what Kate sees as unique and different is the emphasis on the 'three phases of
learning activities', or the structure and format of the unit plans that is recommended,
mandated, in the syllabus texts. This structure and formulaic prescription of how to set out
one's unit plans is a significant feature of the interpreters' planning sessions. Much attention
is paid to the layout of the plans. While one layout is included in the syllabus texts, (D. E. Q,
1994c, p. 28), most interpreters I have worked with have their own collection of adaptations
to this layout that they share with teachers during these planning sessions.

What Kate sees as an important focus in the syllabus is then translated into an important
part of the interpreting work she and other official interpreters do. This focus on planning in
the inservice they offer is also deemed to be successful:

Kate: Um one of the more successful things that
we've been doing as a professional
development team has been unit planning with
teachers

Why is planning so important then? The interpreters' work in assisting teachers to construct
written plans provides tangible evidence that they are indeed successful 'experts'. Written
plans provide direct evidence that the syllabus is being used, and such evidence can then support the interpreters' constitution of themselves as power( full).

Both Sue and Kate can see changes in planning, they can identify ways in which they can guide teachers through the syllabus so they construct correct plans. So they both focus on making sure that teachers follow this mandated path, make certain that the requirements of the syllabus are obeyed by teachers:

Sue: And even something as simple as, um, in the, the actual section on planning a unit of work when it talks about the background thinking that you do, it doesn't actually make the links to the term, heading, of assumptions about language or language learning. That the teachers have to put into their unit planning.

Kate: And people are surprised when they find out that yes there is stuff here that you need to refer to every time you plan

Sue makes sure that teachers make the links that are not provided literally in the documents. She ensures this linking work is done in the tagging sessions that she provides. So the tagging of the 'correct' parts of the knowledge contained in the syllabus texts is intertwined with the emphasis on planning. Sue and Kate both use their official knowledge to show teachers what must be included, 'every time you plan'. This making of links, and showing of essential references, allows Kate and Sue to see themselves as the experts they desire to be. The work they do on planning with teachers also positions them, in teachers' eyes, as the experts, as those who will show them how to perform this regulatory work.

**Transforming teachers' practices**

It could be taken-for-granted that part of the official interpreters' work would be to ensure that teachers' practices are transformed, altered, adapted, to suit the practices suggested in the syllabus. That this part of their work is complex, difficult, and not always achievable is made visible by Sue in separate parts of her talk. Here, for instance, she discusses the 'gaps' in teachers' knowledge, despite years of inservice:

Sue: It's a long way to go, um, we've been cleaning out that filing cabinet in there, and all the things from about three or four years ago, the consultants then and the workshops they were running, and the handouts they had, that sort of thing. And there haven't been that many areas of change in terms of our beliefs or you know what the the content that they were trying to teach but thinking where are the teachers who went to these workshops? What's happening with their practice now? And um, these are the teachers who are still coming to me with big gaps.

It seems that there hasn't been, yeah, the transfer of knowledge just hasn't seemed to be terribly effective over the years.
It is important to note here that Sue does not seem to be blaming teachers for the 'big gaps' in their knowledge, but rather considers that there is a problem with the 'transfer of knowledge'. Sue seems to be suggesting here that the inservice offered to teachers has not resulted in changes to practice.

In the following extract, Sue talks about the ways in which she works with teachers, trying to match their existing practices, with those supported in the syllabus. When I began my study, I asked Sue to help me identify teachers in the region who were using the syllabus and would be interested in talking to me about their use. Here, Sue explains how she began this identification process:

*Sue: I guess I tried to find some people who I felt were teaching from that sort of philosophy and had actually used the syllabus in some way um. Whether it may be a more forced, guided, the fact that someone like myself has taken them and said well this is, this is what you're doing and this is where, you know, this was it from the syllabus so I'm not sure how you picked it up but here it is. You know great you're doing a good job, here it is written in here*

This seems to be a strange comment, ('I'm not sure how you picked it up'), from an interpreter whose major task would appear to be changing teachers' practices to match those suggested in the syllabus. Rather than helping teachers to make these changes, Sue here seems to be indicating that she looks for existing matches, and then validates the practices by saying, 'you're doing a good job, here it is written in here'. She describes her work as forcing or guiding teachers to see what they currently do as part of the syllabus approach. In the next extract, Sue also acknowledges that the work she does is only one source of possible changes to teaching practices:

*Sue: Um and it would be really interesting to see how teachers who have got those strategies developed them. Is it just they picked them up through the initial inservice bits and pieces, or have they seen practice from other people, or um yeah, have little bits that education advisers or various other support people like curriculum coordinators or teaching partners have given them. While they mightn't be able to find the parts of the syllabus and they mightn't say that they've read them cover to cover or anything like that. Their teaching practice seems to reflect what I believe the syllabus is trying to present as the way to go.*

Here Sue de-emphasises her position as expert, through her description of the 'little bits' that teachers may have 'picked up' from experts such as herself, and through her description of such advisers as 'support people'. She also equates these experts with 'teaching partners', so her own power(full) status as expert is denied. I believe Sue is making visible the impossibility of her achieving a power(full) status as holder of official knowledge. If the power in this position is only made possible through the success of the work she does while in this position, then she cannot ever 'hold' power.
While it would seem, then, that it could be taken-for-granted that official interpreters work to transform teachers' practices, the interpreters themselves have an ambivalent attitude to this part of their work. In Sue's talk, she expresses this ambivalence through an acknowledgement of the lack of success in this work, a lack of success that affects her status as power(full) holder of official knowledge. One of the ways in which she can restore power to her position is through making certain that there are some forms of success in other parts of her work.

For example, the emphasis on planning is inextricably linked to the interpreters' ambivalence about their success in changing teachers' practices. The interpreters know that changing practices is not easy, and they are also aware that the tagging process they offer in their inservice is a complex and difficult task that is not always successful. One way of sidestepping such difficulties is to offer something that is easy to achieve. In this case, following the formulaic and prescriptive guidelines to planning suggested in the syllabus documents allows the interpreters to achieve some success in their work. And, while achieving this success, while positioning themselves as experts in the official knowledge they hold, they are also positioning themselves as regulated by this knowledge. They comply with the formulaic planning process, indeed, they uphold its narrow and regimented approach. Through this attention to planning, they shine torchlights of guidance for teachers along particular lines of meaning within the syllabus, and the paths they select have already been selected for them, just as the tags they select in their tagging sessions have, in fact, already been selected for them.

Transforming the interpreting role

In this paper, I have attempted to illustrate my understanding of the complexity of the positions taken up and lived by two women acting as official interpreters within the process of implementing the Queensland English Syllabus. Parts of the complexity that I have attempted to make visible here include the interpreters' desires to be seen at one and the same time as experts and colleagues to the teachers they work with. While their positions as experts allow them to display their official knowledge, there is often a blurring of the lines between this body of expert knowledge and their own beliefs about teaching of English. As official interpreters they must guide teachers along regulated paths through the syllabus but this work of regulation must be seen within the context of their membership in a pastoral bureaucracy. In this context such regulatory work is displaying the official interpreters' ethical competence.

If education departments and schools could recognise some of the complexities of the interpreters' positions, then the ways in which syllabus and curriculum documents are implemented within schools could be transformed. Such recognition would necessarily include an understanding of the interpreters' status and positions as holders of expert knowledge, and such understanding should lead to a celebration and valuing of the work of these advisers. Such a celebration and valuing is not currently evident in Queensland at least. For example, in the late 1990s the official positions that these women held were abolished and most of the advisers went into schools again as classroom teachers. I am by no means denigrating the work that classroom teachers do, but I do think a better use could have been made of the incredible depth and complexity of official expert knowledge that the interpreters held.

There are at least three practical, efficient strategies that departments could adopt that would make better use of this knowledge. First, in the development of new policy documents, the official interpreters could act as conduits of knowledge between schools and departments. I would envisage working parties established within clusters of schools where interpreters led discussions and developed frameworks of knowledge that could then be sent
to departmental syllabus development groups to incorporate in new documents. While something of this nature was used in the development of the new English syllabus that is currently being trialled in Queensland schools (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2000), the official interpreters were not, generally speaking, used as holders of official expert knowledge within this process.

Second, professional development opportunities for teachers that focused on developing their theoretical understandings of new approaches to language and literacy teaching and learning could be provided. A diversity of formats could be used, including mentoring, personal interactions between teachers as professional colleagues, and teacher involvement in postgraduate and collaborative research. The official interpreters could be involved in all of these formats as teachers, schools and systems draw on the depth and diversity of knowledge they hold to support such professional development.

Third, the interpreters could be used as 'critical friends' within research projects that link the work of academics and that of teachers in schools. One project that is currently operating in Queensland, The New Basics Project, (Education Queensland, 2000) uses the concept of 'critical friends' as a method of assisting teachers and schools to develop new teaching and assessment strategies. These 'critical friends' are drawn from both university and departmental fields, and their role is to help teachers make theoretical links between the rationale and philosophy of the New Basics, and their classroom practices. Interpreters, like Sue and Kate, could be placed in schools, in non-teaching positions, as critical friends, and funding could be provided for them to supervise research projects involving individuals or small groups of teachers who were interested in mapping their current teaching practices within a theoretical framework.

All of these strategies would not only recognise the expert and official knowledge that the official interpreters hold, but would also celebrate and value the work they do to be both official experts and good teachers who are professional colleagues. They would not only be seen as members of a bureaucracy that impels them to be involved in the regulation of teachers. They would be made visible as valuable and expert members of our educational community.

References


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