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Lessons of the local: primary English and the relay of curriculum knowledge

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Abstract

This paper reflects upon the implementation of the current NSW English primary Syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW, 1998); in particular those aspects to do with oral interaction. It demonstrates how official curriculum is read varyingly in classroom settings with the result that learners are positioned differently in respect of the communicative resources necessary for schooling success. Such readings are shaped by teachers' beliefs about language and learning and features of the local context including its 'distance'from the site of syllabus development. It is argued that closer attention to syllabus implementation in local settings and to relationships between local and official sites is important in understanding the distribution of curriculum knowledge.

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This paper reflects upon the implementation of the current NSW English primary Syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW, 1998); in particular those aspects to do with oral interaction. It demonstrates how official curriculum is read varyingly in classroom settings with the result that learners are positioned differently in respect of the communicative resources necessary for schooling success. Such readings are shaped by teachers' beliefs about language and learning and features of the local context including its 'distance' from the site of syllabus development. It is argued that closer attention to syllabus implementation in local settings and to relationships between local and official sites is important in understanding the distribution of curriculum knowledge.

Despite an intense public struggle over pedagogic models, the current NSW primary English Syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW, 1998) emerged as a strongly sociocultural document. That is, its social view of language is based on Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistic theory (hereafter SFL) and it acknowledges the importance of oral interaction in learning. However, the various ways in which teachers across the state have understood and implemented the Syllabus, particularly aspects such as talking and listening, are not well documented. This paper provides some insights into how such official curriculum operates in local pedagogic sites. It draws on case study research into the communicative practices of two primary classrooms in socially disadvantaged schools in very different geographical settings. The larger study is underpinned by sociocultural approaches to language, learning and pedagogy, drawing its analytic and interpretive framework from systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994a, 1994b; Christie, 2002; Martin & Rose, 2003), social psychology **(**Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/86) and educational sociology (Bernstein, 1990, 1996, 2000). Treating pedagogy as discourse, complete curriculum units from each classroom were recorded and analysed using functional linguistic tools. In order to understand teachers' interactive choices, their perspectives on talk and learning were sought and their readings of the oral language aspects of the Syllabus were explored. This paper reports on one issue arising from the larger study, namely the complexity and diversity of curriculum implementation in dis-

persed sites. It refers to selected extracts from teacher interviews, as well as from the analyses of Syllabus extracts and of key instances of classroom interaction. Firstly however, Basil Bernstein's theory of pedagogic relations will be introduced as a means of understanding syllabus implementation.

Curriculum relay and pedagogic relations

Bernstein (2000) offers an explanation of how social relations, particularly those to do with class, are reproduced through curriculum. The *pedagogic device* is a model for understanding the complex relations between higher education, federal and state departments of education and classrooms.[1] It is, Bernstein argues, via these relations that discipline-based knowledge is converted into educational knowledge as consultants and advisers write the syllabus and teachers work to implement its requirements – often under intense community scrutiny. A key contribution of this work on pedagogic discourse is that it enables those of us interested in language education and social justice to consider classroom texts and practices within the broader social context of education in a principled manner.

According to Bernstein, the pedagogic device operates via three interrelated sets of rules to produce pedagogic discourse which in turn shapes different pedagogic identities or forms of consciousness among learners. These three sets of rules are the *distributive*, the *recontextualising* and the *evaluative*. Each set of rules is said to operate on a particular arena which is occupied by human agents who employ particular texts and practices (2000, p. 203).
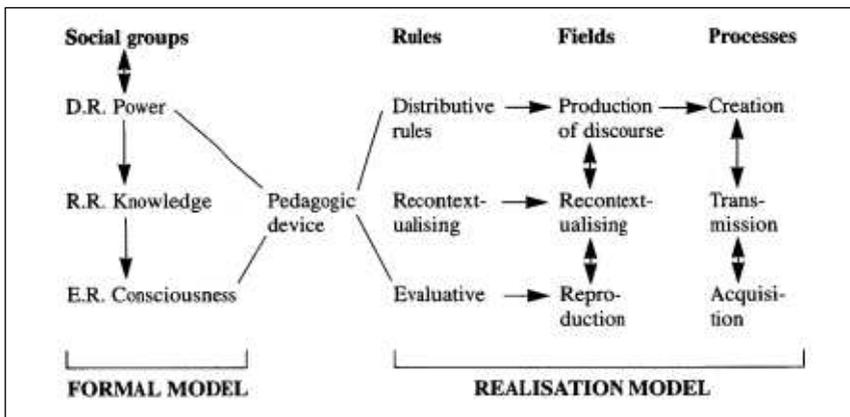

Figure 1. The Pedagogic Device (Bernstein, 2000, p. 37)

[1] Bernstein's notion of pedagogic discourse extended beyond school based discourses to include the media and medical discourses as key sites in the relay of social relations.

The distributive rules govern the arena of knowledge production which encompasses sites such as research, literary or artistic communities. Bernstein argues that power relations are deeply implicated here because such rules regulate relationships between social groups by controlling access to differing forms of knowledge. That is, the economic disadvantage experienced by the learners and their families in this study is closely related to the uneven distribution of socially powerful forms of knowledge.

The recontextualising rules work across an arena of two sites which Bernstein (1990) calls the official pedagogic field (OPF) and the pedagogic recontextualising arena (PRF). The OPF comprises teacher education settings, publishers, educational media and curriculum support documents. The PRF comprises state and federal departments of education and curriculum authorities, and curriculum documents and policies deriving from these. These two fields form shifting yet often productive alliances such as the Language and Social Power projects of the 1980s (see Martin, 1999), and the more recent Quality Teaching initiatives (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003). It may be argued that the ascendancy of OPF in Australia in recent years is evident in the return to centralised curriculum and basic skills testing. Christie (1999) has indicated how the recontextualising arena is frequently the site for considerable ideological struggle over which kinds of discipline knowledge are selected, and how these are represented in school curriculum. This is particularly evident in the development of English curriculum across Australia, including the Syllabus under focus in this paper.

The recontextualising rules are the means by which the specialist knowledges or discourses are relocated to another arena to produce official texts such as the Syllabus. This shift is realised as what Bernstein (1990) terms *pedagogic discourse*, the principle by which specialised competencies or skills (the *instructional* discourse) are relocated via a moral or *regulative* discourse, which regulates the selection, pacing and ordering of the instructional. The operation of pedagogic discourse – the relationship between the instructional and regulative discourses – is most visible in the communicative practices of the classroom. Christie has analysed pedagogic discourse in a number of different classroom settings, arguing that through its operation

> a particular kind of consciousness is constructed, involving the building of a willingness and capacity, ideally at least, to accept methods of defining what counts as knowledge, and what counts as acceptable performance in demonstrating a capacity to use such knowledge. (2002, p. 29)

The third set of rules is the evaluative rules which regulate specific pedagogic practices in the third arena, that of reproduction. Through participation in pedagogic discourse realised in local classrooms sites as *specialised interactive practices* (Bernstein, 1996, p. 32), learners acquire forms of consciousness; ways of working with knowledge, texts and meanings. These

ways of working position learners variously with respect to valued educational discourses, and thus they are constituted as more or less successful at schooling. This paper is concerned with the nature of the communicative practices arising from the implementation of the oral interaction strands of the NSW primary English Syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW, 1998) in two classroom sites within the arena of reproduction.

To Bernstein (2000), the relations between categories of arenas, agents, practices and texts rather than the categories themselves are of interest. Because teachers operate between the official and local pedagogic sites, understanding their positioning by texts such as the English Syllabus is important for understanding the forms of local interactive practices they foster. The teachers in this research discussed their practices and beliefs with regard to talk and learning. However, before turning to these accounts, it is useful to consider how variant readings of curriculum materials such as the Syllabus might be produced.

The curriculum context

Bernstein has suggested that in the construction of pedagogic discourse, when the discipline specific knowledge is recontextualised from its original site to the pedagogic site as instructional discourse, it is ideologically transformed (2000, p. 31). As a key text from the official pedagogic field, the Syllabus represents a recontextualisation of SFL and social interactionism. Table 1 presents an extract from the Syllabus document, namely those outcomes related to oral language development (bold text is added for emphasis).

Halliday (1980) has described child language development as a process of simultaneously *learning language*, *learning through language* and *learning about language.* Accordingly, the outcomes of the Syllabus, like those to do with written modes of language, are broadly grouped into those to do with 'learning to talk and listen' and 'learning about talking and listening'. There is, it can be argued, an assumption that students will be 'learning through talking and listening'.

Context is a key concept in this Syllabus. Development from the early to upper primary years is indicated by increasing competence in ever-widening contexts. The early years tend to minimise differences between everyday and school contexts (*in informal situations*, *with familiar topics).* In contrast, accomplishment in the upper years is measured in terms of the student's capacity to deal with increasingly specialised contexts as subject specific discourses unfold in readiness for secondary schooling. This capacity is described in evaluative terms (*effective*, *well-developed*, *well-organised*, *variety*, *more challenging*), terms which are difficult to interpret outside particular ideologies.

In the SFL framework, the relationship between context and text is elaborated through the notion of *register*. Register, a concept that is implied rather

Table 1. *Talking and Listening Outcomes* (Board of Studies, NSW, 1998, p. 17)

Substrands	Early stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Learning to talk and listen				
Talking & Listening	Communicates with peers and **known** adults in **informal** situations and **structured** activities dealing **briefly** with **familiar** topics.	Communicates with an **increasing range** of people for **a variety** of purposes on both **familiar** and **introduced** topics in **spontaneous** and **structured** classroom activities.	Communicates in **informal** and **formal** classroom activities in **school** and **social** situations for an **increasing range** of purposes on **a variety** of topics across the curriculum.	Communicates **effectively** for **a range** of purposes and with **a variety** of audiences to express **well-developed, well-organised** deals dealing with **more challenging** topics.
Skills & strategies	Demonstrates **basic** skills of classroom and group interaction, makes **brief** oral presentations and listens with **reasonable attentiveness.**	Interacts in **more extended** ways with **less teacher intervention**, makes **increasingly confident** oral presentations and **generally listens effectively**.	Interacts **effectively** in **groups** and **pairs**, adopting **a range** of roles, uses **a variety** of media and uses **various** listening strategies for **different** situations.	Interacts **productively** and with **autonomy** in **pairs** and **groups** of **various** sizes and composition, uses **effective** oral presentation skills and strategies and listens **attentively**.
Learning about talking and listening				
Context & text	Recognises that there are **different** kinds of spoken texts and shows **emerging** awareness of school purposes and expectations for using spoken language.	Recognises a **range of** purposes and audiences for spoken language and considers how **own** talking and listening are adjusted in **different** situations.	Identifies the effect of purpose and audience on spoken texts and distinguishes between **different varieties** of English.	Discusses ways in which spoken language **differs** from written language and how spoken language varies according to **different** contexts.
Language structures & features	**With teacher guidance**, identifies some **basic** language features of **familiar** spoken texts.	Recognises that **different** types of **predictable** spoken texts have **different** organisational patterns and features.	Identifies **common** organisational patterns and **some** characteristics language features of **a few** types of **predictable** spoken texts.	Evaluates the organisation patterns of **some more challenging** spoken texts and **some characteristic** language features.

than overt in this Syllabus, refers to those aspects of the immediate environment of a text which are to do with the social activity taking place (often represented simply as 'topic'), the social relations between or among participants and the form/s of communication involved (spoken, written, and/or combination thereof, etc.). Topics become more diverse, ranging from *familiar* to *introduced* and treated *briefly* in the early years, becoming *increasingly more challenging* and treated more extensively. Interactants are increasingly unfamiliar; from *peers* in the early years to *an increasing range of people* and *a variety of audiences* in the upper years. Forms of communication for learners of varying ages are also signalled in terms of complexity (*spontaneous* to *structured*). The trajectory of development for the ideal student in the Syllabus is one which shifts from teacher dependence to relative autonomy, negotiating increasingly specialised meanings with considerable fluency. In addition to managing the register demands of a number of curriculum areas, this student has a consciousness about language, a capacity to recognise the relationship between context and text and to describe that relationship in terms of language structures and features.

Just as an ideal student is suggested in the Syllabus, so too is an ideal teacher. This imaginary teacher is committed to knowing about language as well as its place in the construction of educational knowledge. She is assumed to possess considerable language expertise. She has substantive knowledge of register (especially how meanings are specialised according to curriculum contexts) and text (as instances of meaning choices) to bring to pedagogic decisions. She understands the distinction between register (language variation according to use) and dialect (variation according to user) sufficiently to support students' investigations of both (*different varieties of English, different contexts*). She recognises that specialist repertoires of meanings are built upon the everyday. The ideal teacher is also one who understands the role of the adult in learning as one involving gradually diminishing assistance while learners appropriate curriculum discourses and practices with increasing confidence.

The context for the research

Thus are the assumptions of the primary English Syllabus being implemented by the two teachers who took part in the research. Their classrooms situations are highly contrastive yet typical of many serving socially disadvantaged communities in Australia. Tisha teaches Year 4 in a large urban multilingual school; she works frequently with an ESL teacher as well as with community language and learning support teachers. Kate teaches in a small rural monolingual school, and she is the school principal and teacher of the 20 students enrolled. The larger case study focuses on students in the middle to upper primary years of both schools with a view to exploring how dialogic choices might position learners in respect of the subject specific dis-

courses such as those registers described in the Syllabus outcomes. In the interviews from which the following extracts are drawn, both teachers were asked to comment on a range of issues relating to talking and learning and the teaching of oral language. Differences emerged with respect of their alignment with the ideal teacher assumed by the curriculum, most obviously in their appropriation of socio-cultural concepts such as the importance of dialogue in learning, the role of the adult or expert other, and their knowledge about language. These differences were frequently able to be located in the patterning of interactive choices in the classroom.

Teachers' beliefs about interaction and learning

With respect to the place of dialogue in learning, both teachers argued that oral language is very important but drew on different ideas about language and learning to do so. Tisha, in her urban classroom, assigns a particular place to talk in learning when she offered this opinion:

> I think that oral language in the classroom is very important because it's a tool for communication, just exchanging pleasantries and just talking. And also they use it in a formal way to ask questions for clarification, not just from me, from each other too.
> When they are working in small groups, they do oral work.

Later in the interview, she describes how her beliefs about language and learning have changed as a result of participation in school-based professional development programs:

> Ten years ago I thought that learning had to be an acquired activity but since I have been involved with all these new strategies it has changed actually it really has … the key ingredient in effective learning is interaction, interaction with the people around you.

Tisha's responses suggest she is drawing on sociocultural ideas about language and learning. In her school context – approximately 90 per cent of the students are from language backgrounds other than English – language teaching methodology informs mainstream teaching, and with such emphasis on learning through (English) language comes a 'strong' position on language and recognition of the role of social interaction in cognitive development. Her recent access to professional development opportunities, often led by individuals engaged in the development of curriculum to support the Syllabus, has shaped her current ideas. As a result of these features of the 'local' pedagogic arena, she is positioned sympathetically in respect to the ideal teacher represented in the Syllabus outcomes.

Kate describes oral language in her rural classroom in a different way:

> I see it as extremely important, providing activities to make it happen or to allow it to happen, encourage it to happen. It is a challenge to do that at times as it suits such a broad range of children.

She is committed to the place of some kind of interaction in learning:

> There has to be personal interaction, personal interaction in that language – whether it be verbal, whether it be body language. I mean let's face it, I can look at a group of children and get that same message across with a look as I can say with probably ten words and it might not be verbal interaction, but it's an interaction.

However, she professes mixed feelings about the importance of talk in learning:

> I really believe strongly that language is really important, but I also have this other side of me that some of us aren't created as talkers … we are listeners ….

When asked how she thinks learners come to know, Kate responds:

> If we go back again to the early stages of development, it's by, it's a sensory learning and I don't think that really changes that much — maybe a dependency on different senses changes over time into adulthood. This is just my personal view of course, nothing founded on anybody's studies or anything. It is through experiencing things; it is through the immediate feedback mostly.

Kate's responses recruit what she terms 'personal' ideas about learning yet are suggestive of a *liberal/progressivist philosophical orientation to curriculum* (Kemmis, Cole, & Suggett, 1983) in currency in teacher education in Australia during the 1970s. This orientation to learning that places learners' experience at the centre of curriculum has a relatively weak position on language and takes an interior or 'intramental' view of development. Such is the system of ideas underpinning Kate's approach to oral language in her classroom although her teacher preparation was completed considerably more recently than was Tisha's. Such ideas do not align closely with the more dialogic view of learning represented in the Syllabus; nevertheless, they inform the local interactive practices of her classroom.

The role of the teacher or 'expert other' in learning

Both teachers referred to themselves as *facilitators*. However, when they discussed terms from the Syllabus such as 'modelling' and 'field building', their responses once more revealed quite different sets of ideas about the nature of this role.

Tisha talks about modelling language: 'There is always also a pattern of starting a report and then if they are comfortable in saying that or using that particular pattern or guide, then they can use their own.' In similar fashion, she describes the role of the teacher in field building as 'expert other': 'Not an idle talk so everything has to be structured … I had to facilitate that there is an interaction, that something is going on there, like a learning, a learning activity going on.' Indeed, in Tisha's classroom very little is left to chance. The following extract from classroom talk during a pre-reading task[2] reveals how the students are prepared for the work:

> Now, our first task this morning is aimed at getting you ready to read your book …at pointing your thoughts in the right direction for the words and the ideas that you're going to come across in the book. Now what I've done is, I've put together a collage of some of the pictures from the book and it looks a little bit like this [showing montage]. I'm going to ask you to move into small groups that we've selected in a little while and we'll give each group one of these sheets, one of these collages. Now in your group we want you to look carefully at the pictures, *first of all look at the pictures carefully* [reading from montage] they're from the text. Then we want you to *describe what you see*. For example, this is my picture and that's Pilawuk there [pointing to cover of a large format book]. What can we see there? Describe that picture for me please Surayah?

Such strong framing of the task through clear instructions, rehearsal and written prompts means that students are supported to complete their work even in the absence of the teacher. This is an example of 'message abundancy', identified by Gibbons (2003) as an important type of scaffolding in English language teaching repertoires. It also requires careful forward planning. In Tisha's class, such planning at the level of task, and more broadly at the level of unit, results in a very regular patterning of activity; a patterning featuring a range of predicable participation structures from strongly framed teacher fronted tasks, to less interventionist small group and pair tasks and individual tasks.

In contrast, for Kate these scaffolding strategies are read differently. Modelling revolves around error correction of the individual:

> well, lots of modelling with immediate feedback I guess. If I don't point out that somebody has made an error without making them feel inferior they don't know it's the wrong way.

Field building requires less teacher intervention:

> it's sort of like a pretty much relaxed conversation type way that I deal with this building of the field…you can plan it and so on. Often times I believe it is the informality that achieves more language than what formal things do.

In the following extract from a lesson in which the class is reconstructing an excursion to a museum, we see how Kate opens up a lesson with a more loosely framed, 'conversational' start than that observed in Tisha's classroom:

Teacher:	where did we go?
Mark:	Museum of Fire
Teacher:	Museum of Fire, now what did we see and do there?
Mark:	fire engines
Teacher:	pardon

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2 The text selected for the lesson is *Pilawuk*, a biographical account of a young woman's experiences of a one of the Stolen Generations (Brian, 1996).

Mark:	fire engines
Teacher:	what about the fire engines?
Mark:	they showed us all the different ones and the old ones
Teacher:	anybody else want to add to that?
Michael:	we seen how pictures and lounges burn so quickly
Teacher:	we did too didn't we? how did that make you feel?
Mark:	good
Ss:	[laughing]
Julie:	sad
Teacher:	sad why were we sad?
Julie:	cause people have been killed in fires.

Sometimes though, this tacit, low intervention approach can lead to interactive trouble such as that evident between Kate and one of the students, Mark. A conversation usually features a good many shared assumptions, and therefore brief responses as elliptical declaratives such as 'fire engines' are usual. However, Kate is anxious for the learners to use full declaratives such as 'we saw fire engines.' But when Mark's contributions are indirectly rejected, the nature of his contribution to the dialogue changes. Inadvertently, the blurring between informal conversation and more formal displays of linguistic competence causes a measure of confusion for learners trying to recognise the interactive requirements of the context.

Kate's concern with providing opportunities for learners to talk results in frequent opportunities for children to 'take the floor'; there is much more latitude in the turns and topics of talk in her classroom. In another extract from the same lesson, Matty needs little encouragement to contribute a story of his own experiences at *home* with fire:

Matty:	Ms Lee
Teacher:	mmm? Matthew?
Matty:	we had a fire we forgot to turn the stove off and it burnt burnt all the plastic and burned all of the um lunch stuff

This is one of a number of such student-initiated anecdotes observed throughout the lesson. Sometimes they were about other children:

Mel:	guess what! Ritchie lit a fire once up in the back lane on this big hill, Ritchie did and went it shoosh, it just went all over the hill, Ritchie did
Greg:	it was close to people's houses
Mel:	yeah people came up the back lane, and the...there was big fire
Greg:	oh Ritchie don't smile!

At other times during subsequent lessons, they were about family members:

Mel:	she she didn't ... only her dad was working first off. But now her mum's a got a job
PJ:	it feels nice when you get a new job, when you're a grown up

Jenny: she was sick of lying around the house
PJ: aaah
Mel: so she got up and went and got a job

Such spontaneity in discussion and activity topics means a degree of unpredictability about Kate's classroom; tasks observed tended to be shorter, more discrete and numerous as children's interests dictated the focus and length of engagement. Anecdotes gave the children many opportunities to initiate and control language use although the topics for talk frequently centred on everyday experiences in home and community. The loose boundaries between home/community and school contexts served the younger students well. However, the more structured and sustained apprenticeships required by the upper primary curriculum present some challenge in the multigrade setting where the differences between stages of schooling are also blurred.

Language diversity and metalinguistic knowledge

There were variations, too, in the teachers' knowledge about language, which arise from differences in their contexts. For Tisha, language development is strongly associated with English language development. A bilingual language user herself, she makes only brief mention of her pupils as English language learners in the interview data when she describes the class as *multicultural*, suggesting that language teaching methodologies are part of normalised teaching practices. Tisha expresses concern for her students' competencies in using stretches of language: 'They still need work on that … yes, more elaborated response, detailed response, description, descriptive.' Her response, as we have seen in earlier classroom extracts, focuses on instructional tools, the need to design materials and tasks so that students are supported to acquire fluency: 'Having a specific proforma that when
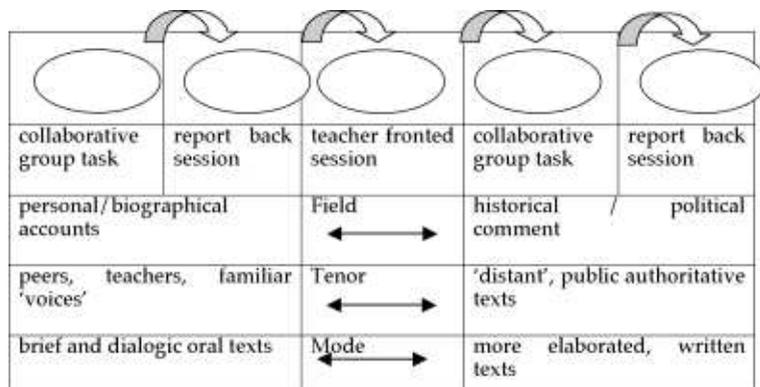

collaborative group task	report back session	teacher fronted session	collaborative group task	report back session
personal/biographical accounts		Field	historical / political comment	
peers, teachers, familiar 'voices'		Tenor	'distant', public authoritative texts	
brief and dialogic oral texts		Mode	more elaborated, written texts	

Figure 2. Relationship between Classroom Tasks and Register Shift.

they have a task that they are expected to do talking and therefore they follow a guideline …' Two very commonly occurring consecutive tasks in Tisha's classroom were a small group task framed by a worksheet (such as that already described) and a task in which one member of each small group 'reported' back on the group work to the whole class (this content was usually publicly mediated and recorded by the teacher).

The common knowledge built up in the reporting back session in turn becomes the basis for further work in the curriculum unit; often a point for explicit instruction by the teacher as 'the expert other' in the discourse. In this instance, the teacher explained the broader significance of the biographical account, generalising from this specific textual incidence to the social phenomenon of the 'White Australia Policy'. In subsequent tasks students continued to explore current race issues. Throughout the curriculum unit in Tisha's classroom, students had opportunity to recycle language and to generalise to broader social events. The recursive staging of tasks in order for this to happen requires substantial teacher knowledge about language, most particularly movements in register. These include shifts in field (from personal/biographical account to historical accounts and political comment), in tenor (engaged with peers, teachers, to increasingly distant public and authoritative voices) and in mode (from brief and dialogic oral to more elaborated written-like text, in recursive patterns). Tisha's knowledge about language is in no small way due to her experiences in settings where language difference (and thus the students' reliance on school for their access to the language of the curriculum areas) is most obvious.

Language is an important consideration for Kate, too, although her professional learning has focussed on strategies for teaching literacy (particularly reading) in monolingual settings where linguistic difference is less visible. Unlike Tisha, she has less access to specialist knowledge about language such as that associated with English language teaching. She worries about the difficulties facing her students in acquiring facility with school discourses. The following extract is an example of the way she frequently uses tracking moves (indicated thus*) in classroom dialogue to encourage her students to produce the valued decontextualised language:

Rob:	Christopher was standing um uh um standing up leaning against the wall and a big flame came through ... went through the wall right next to him
Teacher:	*where did it come from?
Rob:	we ... we don't know
Teacher:	*well where did it go to?

Kate describes such interactive practices as: 'Like drawing that extra language; it's like pulling teeth at times and trying to get the point across without again, downgrading them [telling them] that you need to make it more explicit.' To her, these are issues of dialect ('It's the dialect, like lots of

words are not part of their dialect, it is a very restrictive language'), and in an effort to validate students' experience and accomplishments as well as give them practice in using language, she seeks out activities and topics that are of interest. If, however, these issues were to be approached from a more overtly functional perspective on language, they could be seen as differences of register, and thus sensitive to shifts in field, tenor and mode. Hence a more useful array of tools becomes available for pedagogic design as well as for developing common understandings with the students.

Conclusion

In summary then, the two teachers are positioned quite differently in respect of the curriculum implementation. Classroom locations can be powerful influences on teachers' interactive practices. Tisha's proximity and access to professional learning, because of a relatively close relationship between the local pedagogic setting and recontextualising arena in her urban school (in Bernstein's terms (1996), a weak boundary between categories), together with some visible language differences, shape a pedagogy that aligns closely with that anticipated by the official curriculum. On the other hand, Kate is more distanced from the recontextualising arena. She is isolated geographically and professionally from the official pedagogic field, with fewer colleagues on hand. Professional learning is organised at central points and getting away to attend is difficult because of the number of roles she has in the school community (this is, interestingly, also a feature of weak boundary strength – this time between school and community). She speaks of relying on 'unofficial' photocopied and commercial resources, which circulate throughout her schooling district, often at a distance from their origins. In the absence of a close relationship with the official pedagogic field, she draws on ideologies developed in preservice experiences which do not always align with that of the Syllabus (itself indicative of the uneven terrain of the pedagogic recontextualising field). Despite their differences, both teachers remain committed to principles of social justice and the possibilities for transformative practice. They are key human agents in a social system in which disadvantage is increasingly intergenerational, concentrated by geographical location and in government schools (R. Martin, 2002). Nevertheless, the result of the differences is that the learners are positioned varyingly in respect of the forms of student consciousness valued by the Syllabus. This positioning has profound individual and social consequences. There is little doubt that learners in Tisha's class will be better prepared for the register demands of the secondary curriculum.

I suggest that unevenness in curriculum implementation such as described in this paper is not unusual and that case studies provide important lessons for the recontextualising field (for departmental leaders, consultants and policy staff as well as for academics and teacher educators).

Bernstein's theory of pedagogic relations is a valuable lens for understanding the processes, diversity and nuances of curriculum implementation. It offers a way of paying close attention to the nature of the local and to the relations between the official and local pedagogic contexts, particularly the kinds of consciousness and identities construed by curriculum and enacted by teachers and students. Such attention is necessary for successful curriculum renewal and for social sustainability.

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