DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 308 700 FL 018 049

AUTHOR Lesikin, Joan
TITLE The Social Consequences of Evaluating ESL Writing.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (23rd, San Antonio, TX, March 7-11, 1989).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Higher Education; *Outcomes of Education; Second Language Instruction; Socialization; Social Status; *Student Role; *Teacher Role; *Writing Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Hegemony Theory

ABSTRACT

The social implications of evaluating the writing of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students are discussed in the context of the Hegemony Theory, a radical critical view of schooling, which identifies schools as an agency of socialization. This theory, based on ethnographic research that suggests students receive different kinds of education depending on social class, suggests that the roles that teachers and students play in the classroom trains the students for later roles in society. ESL writing teachers must sensitize themselves to these social implications by looking into three areas: (1) who establishes the evaluation criteria, (2) what the evaluation criteria are, and (3) how the evaluation criteria are used, including when evalution is carried out and by whom. (DJD)

The Social Consequences of Evaluating ESL Writing

by

Joan Lesikin

American Language Program
Columbia University

Paper presented at the 23rd Annual TESOL Convention, San Antonio, Texas, March 7-11, 1989.

I suspect that through our evaluation practices, ESL students are being taught more than writing. I suspect that we are also teaching our students about their role in school and in the larger society; we are teaching them about relationships to their peers, their superiors and, yes, to their inferiors. The purpose of this paper is to examine this social view. I hope it will stimulate other ESL professionals to consider that evaluating writing may have social implications which need to be addressed.

My suspicions come from reading about Hegemony Theory, a radical critical view of schooling, which places schools as an agency of socialization. Bowles and Gintis, for example, say that its central function is to be found "in the social relations of the educational encounter." (qtd. in Giroux & Penna, 1983, p. 108). The theory suggests that what we as teachers do in the classroom and the activities that ESL students do train them for later roles in society. Jean Anyon's ethnographic study of fifth grade classes at five elementary schools may help to make this clear.

Anyon found that students receive four different types of education depending on social class. Rote learning is the hallmark of the working class school; right answers is the mark of the middle class school; right answers based on thinking is the goal in the affluent professional school; while analytical problem-solving is typical of the executive elite school.

Anyon makes several theortetical and social implications. In the working class school, students are developing a potential conflict relationship with capital. In the middle class school,

students are learning to do tasks and relate in ways that are appropriate for a beauracratic relationship with capital. In the affluent schools, students are developing a relationship to capital that is instrumental and expressive. They are learning symbolic (cultural) capital. In the executive elite school, students receive knowledge of and practice in manipulating tools to analyze systems (symbolic capital) and in planning. They are developing abilities necessary for ownership and control of physical capital and the means of production in society. Therefore, she concludes that the activities students do in the classroom train them for later roles in society (1983, pp. 149-165).

The research of ninth and eleventh grade writing classes conducted by Arthur Applebee raises similar issues (1984). He found that "[T]he writing often served merely as a vehicle to test knowledge of specific content, with the teacher functioning primarily as an examiner." (p. 2). [E]ssays were treated as tests of previous learning. The task for the students was one of repeating information that had already been organized by the teacher or textbook, rather than of extending and integrating new learning for themselves. [R]eactions to completed work focussed on'accuracy' and 'correctness,' rather than on the development of ideas." (p. 5). Using Anyon's criteria, the American students in Applebee's study are not learning how to use symbolic or cultural capital. They are developing, at most, a bureaucratic relationship.

To my knowledge no research exists concerning the social

implications of evaluating ESL writing. We do not know whether ESL students of different nationalities, of different educational backgrounds, in different institutions are evaluated in similar or dissimilar ways. We do not know what social messages are being taught through evaluating writing in the ESL classroom. But we can assume, from the research of Anyon and Applebee and others, that the ESL classroom, as in every classroom, is not free of social messages. If research is to be conducted in ESL writing and if as teachers of ESL writing we begin to look through this social lens, I propose three areas for consideration: an examination of who establishes the criteria, of what the criteria is, and of the evaluation methods that are used, including when evaluation is carried out and by whom.

Evaluation criteria is often established by the institution, for instance, the holistic scale used to evaluate writing examinations for entrance into freshman college writing classes. Often within the classroom the teacher establishes that which is expected. Less often, I suspect, teachers and students mediate criteria through dialogue. And there is the possibility, however slight, for students to develop criteria amongst themselves -- given their awareness of their own goals. An evaluation of social consequences of writing could begin at this level.

Another level to examine is the evaluation criteria itself. We could ask: What consequences underlie judging writing when the criteria is factual knowledge, reasoning ability, or, for that matter, taking risks with structures or ideas? Is it possible that evaluating students' work on the basis of risk taking might

teach students that a creative approach to problem solving is rewarded or not rewarded? If, as Anyon points out, we evaluate student writing on the basis of factual knowledge per se, are we conditioning these students for a life, a mentality, of a clerk? Someone who follows orders? Do the criteria supply our students with tools or with impediments for mastering English? Are we teaching them to use symbolic and cultural capital as part of their language learning experience?

The last area of consideration is the methods used to evaluate ESL students' writing which encompass degrees of teacher-student-centeredness. Evaluation can be carried out solely by the teacher, by the class, by student peers, or by exchanges between the teacher and individual students. Each mode may inform students about their social power. A peer editing study conducted by Karegianes, Pascarella, and Pflåum in 1980 found "that peer editing groups developed significantly higher writing proficiency than did students whose essays were edited by teachers." (Graner, 1987, p. 40). We can interpret this in light of social theory: symbolic and cultural capital is at work. Writing students are learning to think, to evaluate, and to problem solve. They are in control of their own learning.

However, as a result of further studies, problems have since surfaced. (See Graner.) They include: (1) "student writers lack the skill to make effective evaluations"; (2) "students often feel uncomfortable making negative criticisms of peers' work"; (3) "editing sessions can denegrate into recitations of mutual compliments, unsupported by content"; (4) "students may come to

class unprepared or uncommitted"; and (5) "allowing students to operate in peer groups requires teachers to give up a large measure of classroom control." (p. 41).

Underlying each problem is control of knowledge and power: reflections of students' lack of training in the use of cultural and symbolic capital, and teachers' unwillingness to share classroom control -- a threat to her social role in the classroom. As Applebee points out, student writing activities are often restricted to "mechanically 'slotting in' missing information" while teachers function as examiners and providers of information (p. 3).

From research with nonnative speakers, Michael Long and Patricia Porter suggest that ESL students gain linguistically through peer work. Porter's research (rpt. in Long and Porter, 1985, p. 216) found that learners miscorrected only .3% of the errors their partner made. In addition, it is interesting to note that learners make the same number of appeals for assistance from nonnative speakers as to native speakers. Although learners cannot provide accurate grammatical and sociolinguistic input, they can offer genuine communication practice and negotiation for meaning. In fact, greater negotiations take place between nonnative speakers. The social possibilities of evaluating ESL writing might be rooted in this strength of the ESL student.

If research like that of Long and Porter in linguistics with that of the work of researchers such as Anyon investigating the hidden curriculum were joined, we might reach a greater understanding of the social consequences of evaluating ESL

writing. But, in the meantime, understanding the social consequences, both positive and negative, of evaluating ESL writing may come only from our examination of our own writing classroom practices. We might begin by taking a look at our own practices, at alternatives to these practices, and to the ways our students and ourselves respond to them.

Works Cited

Anyon, J. Social class and the hidden curriculum of work. (1983). In H. Giroux & D. Purpel (Ed.), The hidden curriculum and moral education. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing.

Applebee, A. N. Chapter 1: Background to the study. (1984) In A. N. Applebee (Ed.), Contexts for learning to write. Norwood: ABLEX Publishing Corp.

Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1976). Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life. New York: Basic Books. Rpt. in Giroux, H. & Penna, A. Social education in the classroom: The dynamics of the hidden curriculum. (1983). In H. Giroux & D. Purpel (Ed.), The hidden curriculum and moral education. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing.

Graner, M. H. (1987, March). Revision workshops: An alternative to peer editing groups. English Journal, 40-45.

Long, M. H. & P. A. Porter. (1985). Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. TESOL Quarterly, 19 (2), 207- 227.

C H E C K L I S T for E V A L U A T I N G E S L W R I T I N G

used		SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES positive	negative
I. WHO ESTABLISHES THE CRITERIA			
A.	___ The institution		
B.	___ The teacher		
C.	___ Teacher and students		
D.	___ Students		
II. THE CRITERIA			
A.	___ Language mastery		
B.	___ Writing convention use		
C.	___ Expression & illustration of ideas		
D.	___ Reasoning ability		
E.	___ Factual knowledge		
F.	___ Improvement		
G.	___ Taking risks w/structures		
H.	___ Taking risks w/ideas		
I.	___ _____		
J.	___ _____		

	used	SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES positive	negative
III.	**THE METHODS USED**		
A.	___ By the teacher:		
1.	___ Supply Ss w/criteria		
a.	___ - at beginning of term		
b.	___ - for each assignment		
2.	___ Error correction		
3.	___ Signalling errors		
4.	___ Comments & explanations		
5.	___ Praise and/or reproof		
6.	___ Suggestions		
7.	___ Questions		
8.	___ _____		
9.	___ _____		

used	SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES positive	negative
THE METHODS USED (Cont'd)		
B. ___ **By the class:**		
1. ___ Correction: anonymous S'		
a. ___ - individual sentence extracted from Ss' papers		
b. ___ - paragraph (in context) extracted from Ss' papers		
c. ___ - total paper		
2. ___ Correction: known S'		
a. ___ - individual sentence		
b. ___ - paragraph (in context)		
c. ___ - total paper		
3. ___ Correction: stranger's		
a. ___ - individual sentence		
b. ___ - paragraph (in context)		
c. ___ - total paper		
4. ___		
5. ___		

14

used	SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES positive	negative
THE METHODS USED (Cont'd)		
C. ___ By student to student:		
1. ___ Response journals		
2. ___ Response writing		
3. ___ Peer revising/editing		
4. ___ Correction: anonymous S		
5. ___ Correction: known S		
6. ___ Correction: stranger's		
7. ___		
D. ___ By teacher/student:		
1. ___ Conferences		
a. ___ - S asks questions/ T answers aurally		
b. ___ - T asks questions/ S answers aurally		
2. ___ Letters		
a. ___ - S writes questions/ T writes responses		
b. ___ - T writes questions/ S writes responses		
3. ___		