DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 835 FL 027 171

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TITLE Home to School/Kindergarten to Grade 1: Incommensurable Practises?
SPONS AGENCY Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council, Ottawa (Ontario).
PUB DATE 2001-02-00
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (St. Louis, MO, February 24-27, 2001).
CONTRACT 410-96-0684
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Students; Classroom Environment; Classroom Observation Techniques; *English (Second Language); Family Influence; Foreign Countries; Grade 1; Interviews; Kindergarten; Primary Education; Pronunciation; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Canada

ABSTRACT

Researchers followed 2 language minority children through their first 2 years of school, examining the influence of their parents and of school practices. Two cohorts of minority language students were followed from the beginning of kindergarten to the end of first grade. Students were observed once a week in their classrooms. Researchers kept field notes of conversations, audiotaped, and videotaped children monthly. The children's teachers were interviewed at least yearly. Bilingual research assistants conducted family and child interviews at least twice a year. This study focused on one child from each of the two cohorts. Results indicated that the children had rough transitions from home to school and from grade to grade, with teachers believing that they had fewer cognitive, social, and linguistic resources than their parents perceived. In both children's cases, the school's sorting practices negatively impacted their children's experiences. In the first child's case, his poor pronunciation of English and his chronic illness were two of many factors that negatively influenced his education. In the second child's case, the school environment and teachers' preconceived notions negatively influenced his experiences. (Contains 20 references.) (SM)

Home to school/Kindergarten to Grade 1: Incommensurable practises?[1]

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[1] The project upon which this study is based was supported by Social Sciences and Hamanities Research Council of Canada Standard Research Grant 410-96-0684 (1996-1999) to the first author.

Home to school/Kindergarten to Grade 1: Incommensurable practises?

In a paper published twenty years ago, Margaret LeCompte (1981) observed that young children entering kindergarten have to learn a "bundle of tasks. . . the attitudes and values which surround being a student" (p. 105). Calling this process "civilizing" children, she observed:

> For elementary children, part of learning the student role involves altering their relationship with adults. No longer are adults primarily parents who provide nurture; rather, they include teachers and others who impose more uniform and objective standards for behavior. (p. 125)

LeCompte here sees children becoming students as a benign and required transition, as children learn how to manage and be managed by teachers and others, who will deal with them in a "more uniform and objective" way than they experience before school. In this presentation about two children observed over the course of their first two years of school, we argue that while LeCompte's description of parents providing nurture to their children seems an apt description of the family experiences of the children in our study, application of benign "uniform and objective standards of behaviour" was not particularly descriptive of the school practices we observed. Rather, it seems to us that school practices increasingly over these early primary years work to rank children individually and to "normalize" (Foucault, 1979) them. Like many sociocultural theorists and researchers, we believe that school practices create particular identities or ranks for children, identities that become seen as "social facts", which are "constructed in the practical work of educators in their person-to-person and person-to-text interaction" (Mehan, 1993, p. 245). We believe that these school practices interact with the social relationships children are able to establish in their classrooms and the social relationships that are offered to them. As well, we argue that parents and their social relationships with the school are also involved in what kind of students children become. We also argue that parents are encouraged to accept school-created identities for their children, and that as well as "civilizing" children, school entry imposes certain practises and "knowledge" on the parents and families of such children.

Borrowing Dunn and Lantolf's (1998) and Pennycook's (1994) use of the term "incommensurable", we wish to argue that the practices and the meanings made of those practices in the three contexts (home, kindergarten and Grade 1) construct children, learning and what is learned, in fundamentally different ways. We support these arguments with examination of illustrative data concerning two children, from a longitudinal study of two cohorts of English language learners attending a suburban Canadian school. The descriptions and analyses of these two children are presented as "telling cases" (Mitchell, 1984; Putney, Green, Dixon, Durán & Yeager, 2000), that is, cases that are not intended to be taken as representative, "but [ones] that allow in-depth exploration of theoretical issues not previously visible" (Putney et al., ibid., p. 87).

Methodology

The data from which this study draws were collected in an ethnographic study of two cohorts of English language learners from minority language backgrounds (six children in the first cohort and five in the second). The study was conducted over four years (from the beginning of kindergarten to the end of Grade 2 for the first cohort and to the end of Grade 1 for the second) in a school in a working class neighbourhood of a suburb of a large Canadian metropolitan area (Toohey, 2000; Day, 1999, in press). The focal children were observed in their classrooms at Suburban School[2] once a week through the study, usually for a morning, and fieldnotes were kept of their conversations. The children were frequently audiotaped and were videotaped at least once a month by a trained and experienced video technician, who was asked to videotape each of the focal children for roughly equal amounts of time on every occasion. This resulted in approximately 80 hours of videotapes, which were transcribed by trained research assistants.

The teachers of the children were interviewed formally at least twice each year, and the researchers had informal conversations with them throughout the study. In addition, bilingual research assistants conducted family interviews at least twice each year, and made tape recordings and transcriptions of these tapes. Children were also interviewed in their homes by the bilingual research

[2] All names of places and children are changed here to protect the confidentiality of participants.

assistants, who attempted to document children's use of their home languages as the study progressed. In this presentation, we focus upon one focal child from each of the two cohorts, Harvey from Cohort 1 and Hari from Cohort 2.

The procedures just outlined allowed close description and analysis of practices in the children's classrooms, but they did not allow such fineness of observation in the children's homes prior or during school attendance. For this reason, remarks made here about home practises are tentative, and based primarily on interviews with parents.

The Children

Harvey

Harvey began kindergarten as a 5 year old, who lived with his mother and father and two younger brothers. Harvey's parents' first language was Teochew, but they also had used Mandarin, Cantonese, Malay and English in their daily lives in Singapore before they came to Canada. Harvey's mother cared for him and his brothers during the day, while his father worked outside the home; his mother, in turn, worked a night shift and his father cared for the children while she was at work. Both parents had decided to have conversations with their children in English, so as to ease their way in Canadian schools. They continued to speak Teochew to one another, but all interaction with the children occurred in English. As a result, Harvey did not know Teochew even passively, and he spoke only English when he started school..

In separate interviews with the teacher and me at the beginning of kindergarten, Harvey's mother expressed relief that Harvey was "finally" going to school. She expressed the opinion that Harvey was a "very bright boy" and that with a newborn, she was too busy to provide him the stimulation he needed at home. As evidence of his brightness, she cited the elaborate "Lego" (interlocking blocks) structures he constructed, his interest in and expertise with toy trains, his attention to stories, the "interesting" questions he asked, and the efforts he was making to read. She and her husband expected that Harvey would have a good time at school and that he would be a good student. As she put it:

> Harvey is really fast, unbelievable actually. He was speaking in full sentences at a year and a half and knew his alphabet by two. He loves school and I find he is calmer now, his brain is being occupied. With the baby, I have less time to spend with him... His absorbing power is greater than what we can teach him.

In the opinion of his parents, then, Harvey was an intelligent child who was interested in many things, curious about the world and eager to start learning what the school could offer. His mother reported that he and his father spent a good deal of time doing projects together, and he was seen by both his parents as ready, indeed over-ready, to start school.

What happened to Harvey at school? I have discussed my observations of Harvey's experiences in school elsewhere (Toohey 1996; 2000), and I will summarize as well as add to those observations here. Harvey's kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Clark told me in my initial interview with her that Harvey was a learner of English as a second language (ESL) and that "Chinese" was his first language. In her intake interview with him before he began school, she had assessed him as needing assistance with learning English. On this basis, she had offered his parents the option of enrolling Harvey in a full-day kindergarten program--which was what the school provided for ESL students--a morning "regular" kindergarten and an afternoon kindergarten entitled "Language Development" in which all children diagnosed as ESL in intake interviews could be served. Harvey's parents elected to send him to the full day program, not because they believed he was in need of English language development, but because they believed he was so eager to learn that he would thrive in a full day program.

There were times in Harvey's kindergarten day in which he was able to extend his home experience playing with Lego and toy trains, and he was noticeably attentive to, and an enthusiastic participant in, the teacher-led songs, choral chants, rhymes and stories read to the children. However, many kindergarten activities seemingly were not activities in which he was experienced. This kindergarten program required the children daily to complete individually some kind of craft, drawing, or (usually) paper product of some kind, based on changing classroom themes. These activities required children to use pencils, crayons, scissors, glue, paints, paper and so on, and to

work with only occasional interactions with their teacher. Harvey was obviously inexperienced in the use of these tools, and his craft productions were often completed fairly messily. He appeared uninterested in their production, and he often solicited interaction with Mrs. Clark (and other adults in the classroom) as he worked on these projects, in frequencies that Mrs. Clark saw as inappropriate (too frequent). Also apparently problematic for him was his inexperience in caring for materials in the way valued by school. For example, he seldom picked up his "scrap paper" and put it into the garbage can after he completed an activity, or replaced materials to their storage locations, and he was reminded gently by Mrs. Clark, or forcefully by other children to do so, more than once. In addition, Harvey was inexperienced in writing his name, and that inexperience contributed as well to Mrs. Clark's evaluation of his abilities in the October interview as an "average" or maybe slightly "below average" student.

In fact, Mrs. Clark expressed some uncertainty about Harvey in our interviews with her throughout the year. She noted his enthusiastic participation in the teacher-led Circle Time activities, his efforts to engage adults in conversations, his interest in the early literacy activities in which she engaged the class, and his relatively large ("for an ESL student") vocabulary. However, she thought that Harvey may have been taught specific "party pieces" by his parents that were not truly indicative of his "real abilities." She also said in an interview that she felt his parents put a "lot of pressure on him to be perfect." She believed also that Harvey was socially somewhat inept, that he wanted "too much teacher attention" and that he was inexperienced in sharing materials; in her view, these "personality difficulties" accounted for the difficult social circumstances with other children in which he sometimes found himself.

After observing many of Harvey's interactions with his classmates, I was unconvinced that Harvey's difficulties in this respect had to do solely with problems internal to him. Consider the following excerpts from video transcripts:

In a class in January, Julie, Harvey, Jimmy and Oscar were colouring at a table discussing the television program "Power Rangers".

Julie: (*re Power Rangers*) I love the fight.

Harvey: ****

Julie: I like the red Power Rangers.

Harvey: Excuse me, I like the whole picture of Power Rangers.

Julie: (*mocking*) Excuse me, I'm not "excuse me", I'm Julie. I like the red one still.

In a class in February, the following interaction took place:

Harvey with a small group of other pupils, colouring. Alexander approaches.

Alexander: That looks nice *(gesturing to Julie's picture).*

Wesley: *(gesturing to Julie's picture)* That's supposed to be gold.

Edward and Julie purposely fall off their chairs. Both laugh.

Edward: Mine is beautifuller than Harvey. I don't scribble but Harvey scribbles.

Harvey leaves.

Harvey was often refused access to play with other children and they frequently appeared to ignore his verbal initiations. Once, for example, Harvey carried around a Bingo game and wanted playmates. He approached two other boys in the class (one anglophone, one Cantonese-speaking).

Harvey: Bingo, guys! *(enthusiastic)*

Earl: Ah, stupid Bingo.

He then asked another boy who did not respond and it was unclear whether the boy had not heard him, had not understood him or had just chosen not to respond. A few minutes later, Harvey said to me: "Mrs. Toohey, nobody's playing with me Bingo. Nobody ever plays with me." Indeed, he spent a great deal of time playing alone, and in an earlier paper (Toohey, 1996), I suggested that by the end of the year, Harvey's strategy for recruiting play partners was to position himself as a "helper" to other children.

Harvey's pronunciation of English was influenced by Teochew and he also made some syntactic errors in English typically made by speakers of Chinese. In addition, he spoke very quickly and at length and Mrs. Clark and the other children frequently claimed that they couldn't understand him (with a parent-helper once saying to him after he had asked a question, "You're not speaking

English, are you?"). Accustomed, perhaps, to his parents' ready comprehension of his English and to engagement in activities with his father, Harvey was an enthusiastic participant in Circle Time "sharing" of stories and home events at the beginning of the year. Both Mrs. Clark and the other children often found his lengthy contributions to sharing difficult to understand, and while Mrs. Clark attempted often to check meanings with him, she sometimes responded to his stories rather perfunctorily. Believing him to be an ESL student, she was surprised by his many initiations of conversations with her and by the long turns he frequently took, and she sometimes encouraged him to speak more slowly. She was also surprised by his enthusiastic participation in the choral songs, chants and rhymes of the kindergarten circle. By the end of the kindergarten year, Mrs. Clark and the other children still found Harvey's sharing time contributions somewhat difficult to understand, but the turns Harvey took were noticeably shorter than they had been at the beginning of the year. One of the "rules" Harvey obviously learned over the course of his participation in kindergarten was to limit his contributions to classroom discourse.

I have elsewhere argued that children's physical presentation is involved in the construction of the identities they are assigned at school, that their physicality is seen as another information source used by others to decide what kind of student this child is and will be (Toohey, 2000). Harvey's physical presentation in his classroom was somewhat problematic for him on several levels. First, I have already mentioned his inexperience and disinterest with respect to many school tools and projects: pencils, crayons, paint, and even balls and bats. Second, Harvey had colds and a stuffed and runny nose for much of the winter during his kindergarten year. He coughed, sneezed and needed to blow his nose often. In a family, a child's illness might be an occasion to treat the child more indulgently than what is "normal", and a stuffed and runny nose might be regarded as a nuisance or cause to seek medical attention. However, in other settings, with people who are not related to you, sneezing, coughing or a runny nose can be seen as "polluting." In Harvey's classroom, children used his stuffed nose as an occasion to shame him. Children told him to blow his nose, and they wrinkled their faces in disgust when he sniffed loudly. On several occasions over

the course of the year, Harvey was physically shunned by other children, who remonstrated loudly if he inadvertently touched them or even came close to them.

After about six months of observation in Harvey's classroom, I became concerned about what was happening to him there. Assessing that his difficulties were at least partly attributable to his pronunciation of English, I contacted colleagues in my university's Linguistics department to ask their expert opinion about a recording of Harvey's speech. They agreed with my opinion that Harvey's English syntax and pronunciation were affected by his learning to speak in interaction with Teochew-speaking adults, and they believed that he would benefit from a short course of tutorials with a native English speaker who could encourage him to practice particular sounds. After talking with his teacher, who had been surprised some months earlier by my report that Harvey was not a learner of ESL, I contacted his parents to tell them that the linguists and I thought that Harvey would benefit from attention to his English pronunciation. I offered the voluntary services of one of my graduate students who was interested in teaching pronunciation. Harvey's mother was surprised by my phone call, and our later conversation indicated that she and her husband had been somewhat offended by what they saw as my analysis of their son's capabilities. Harvey's mother reiterated their belief that Harvey was a bright boy and told me she and her husband were not interested in seeking aid from my graduate student. In addition, they asked that at the end of his kindergarten year, Harvey be removed from the study cohort.

Mrs. Clark told me in March and then again in June that she was concerned that Harvey's academic skills seemed to be at a bit of a standstill. In assessing him for the spring report card in March, she had noticed that Harvey was unable or unwilling to give information he had been able to relate some weeks before. He was also participating less and less in the large group literacy activities and in other Circle Time activities. She had also noticed that he had become less vocal and powerful in peer activities. While Mrs. Clark interpreted this as an improvement in Harvey's social skills and she saw him becoming a more accepted member of his peer community, she was worried about his readiness for Grade 1.

Harvey thus was a child whose transition from home to kindergarten might be seen as rather rocky. Constructed at home as clever, his expertise in school matters (including pronunciation of English) was seen as deficient, and his teacher and even I, attempted to construct him as a student with special needs. Despite the power/knowledge of the teacher and the university professor, his parents resisted this construction of him and refused to see him as requiring remediation. Parents with fewer means for resistance might have been more compliant with the definitional efforts of the school personnel.

The other child whose "telling case" we examine here was Hari's. A focal child in Cohort 2, Hari also had interesting experiences during a transition, in this case, from kindergarten to Grade 1.

Hari

Hari, also aged five on kindergarten entry, lived in an extended family, including his parents, younger sister, grandparents, and a great-grandfather. His parents were from a village in the Punjab and had been in Canada for 8 years. Speaking Punjabi in their home, both parents also spoke English in their work and daily life outside the home. Hari's grandparents cared for him while his parents were at work. His grandmother took him to and from school, and as she spoke little English, he sometimes served as interpreter between her and his kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Clark. Hari's grandfather, described by the home interviewer as "quite well educated," reported that he read Hari the English library books he brought home from school. He also taught Hari about religion and Punjabi culture and tradition. Before entering public school, Hari had attended an English pre-school for three to four months, an experience which his parents felt was beneficial to his English and equipped him with some vocabulary. Despite this, Hari's mother reported that he was shy and nervous about going to school at the beginning of the year.

Hari's kindergarten experiences are described in detail in Day (1999, in press) and will be briefly summarized here. Hari was observably quiet in kindergarten at the beginning of the year and participated somewhat tentatively in interaction with Mrs. Clark and peers. He made initial halting attempts at sharing at Circle Time, attempts that were welcomed, supported and extended through

Mrs. Clark's scaffolding practises. We have elsewhere described how Mrs. Clark made the linguistic resources of the classroom available to all the children by encouraging choral response and repetition (Toohey & Day, 1999). We have also observed how repetition served as a productive strategy for Hari, enabling him to use language and participate in the discourse of the classroom (Day, 1998).

Hari's interactions with his classroom peers were variable. In some situations, he was positioned as not strong and lower in status, particularly by the more powerful males in his class. Perhaps because of this positioning, Hari rarely participated in conversational talk or joined in the narratives children told while working on crafts. In other situations, Hari successfully gained an audience, in particular with one of his male classmates, Casey, an English-speaking newcomer to the class in late January. Hari and Casey developed a friendship, and in these two boys' interactions, Hari was voluble, playful and experimental with English.. The boys engaged in playful, repetitive conversations that appeared mutually enjoyable. Frequently using the material resources of the classroom as scaffolds of a sort, Hari engaged in verbal play with Casey even when his linguistic resources were limited. Casey also scaffolded Hari's verbal contributions frequently and their conversations showed Hari as having a desirable identity and as able to appropriate linguistic and other resources on an ongoing basis in a relationship of care, trust and reciprocity. With Casey and his teacher alike, then, Hari was supported in his efforts to take on a voice, and to find a place from which to speak.

By the end of the year, Mrs. Clark had very positive expectations for Hari's school achievement:

> He is really amazing. I think he is really quite a smart little guy. His mom and dad are very interested. His mom is forever checking to see how he is doing, which is a lot more than some of the other parents do. They are anxious for him to do well. ...I really think he is the one subject of yours, who. . . in my eyes, has shown the most growth of everybody. Talk about having a child turned on to school, he is a classic example.

She described Hari as clever and quick-minded, and gave detailed evidence of this in the ensuing conversation. As an example, she mentioned his telling the steps in the life cycle of a butterfly, marveling at his short- and long-term recall of a difficult English word, "chrysalis".

Mrs. Clark attributed Hari's progress at least partly to his parents' interest in his school work and their desire for him to do well, expecting that they would be able to help him. On her report cards, she made specific suggestions of ways in which parents could help their children retain their English over the summer, mentioning the importance of play and story reading and having a positive expectation that Hari's parents would support his learning.

In sum, Mrs. Clark considered Hari to have had a successful kindergarten year and she praised him for some of the difficulties he had overcome as an English language learner. She had great expectations for him as a school student. We now go on to describe some of Hari's experiences in his Grade 1 classroom.

Hari in Grade 1

In the first Grade 1 teacher interview, Mrs. Reynolds characterized Hari as "low key" and as "very friendly and very thoughtful and very polite." She did not know Hari's family, except that she had noticed that his grandmother came to get him every day. She reported that he was "making good progress" and "meeting learning expectations." She thought that Hari "(like all ESL students") had problems with vocabulary, but on being questioned as to the contexts for Hari's specific vocabulary difficulties, she reconsidered, saying she felt that his problems were "not too bad".

We noticed an interesting ambiguity in Mrs. Reynolds' evaluative comments with respect to Hari. She very frequently turned from talking about the particulars of him and his experiences to talking about English language learners as a general group. For example, in an early interview, she said:

> And he knew all of his letters, so, you know, I think he's fine. And I tried to dig up, because I used to have an ESL test that would give, like, the primary and I can't find it . . . but it goes over their concepts. When I do those listening activities on Friday, I've noticed the ESL kids

> don't know those concepts, you know, those basic concepts in English. . . . first, second, third, middle, you know. . . in their language they probably don't think in that way, you know.

and

> In the home reading, the ESL kids. . . you know, I write it in the report cards, but I know sometimes the parents can't read or there's no siblings to read to them or anything, and that's the big... If they could somehow get that help after school, it would really help.

As can be seen, Mrs. Reynolds was concerned about what she saw as the problems of "ESL kids" and their homes. She also speculated that all the English language learners (of a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds) might have a common linguistic/cognitive structure that would interfere with their learning of ordinal numbers and other terms. While Hari was evaluated individually on the assessments used in this classroom, his identity as a representative of the collective "ESL students" was apparent.

In Toohey (1998, 2000), I discussed practices in Mrs. Reynolds' Grade 1 classroom with respect to the first cohort, observing that these practices worked together to create a notion of the classroom community as a collection of individual learners who, on their own, internalized classroom knowledge. For both groups of children, the classroom was characterized by a focus on individual development of literacy skills, an increasing use of a common school practice, the IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) script (Gutierrez & Larson, 1994; Mehan, 1979; Wertsch, 1999 and many others), and increasing emphasis on individual assessment. All of these practices worked, we suggest, to organize the classroom as a competitive arena in which children were assigned identities of success and failure.

With respect to the individual development of literacy skills, a common practice in Hari's Grade 1 classroom was daily journal writing. Wanting to provide opportunities for the children to rehearse orally what they were to write before they actually put pen to paper, Mrs. Reynolds would ask each child individually to recount their experiences to her before journal writing. Commonly, children might recount fairly lengthy and complex stories to her, and Mrs. Reynolds would amend

these stories to short sentences that she felt the children might be able to write. The following shows one of those interactions with Hari:

Hari: Uh, uh, I saw a haunted house and it, it, it goes like red lights on it, when you put the switch on

Mrs. Reynolds: ...

Hari: And it, and I saw a haunted house and it goes red light and a man put a mask over, a man was scary and it, it when, when he puts the piano switch on, then the piano goes on by itself. He, he , nobody touches it.

Mrs. Reynolds: So you heard some scary music.

Hari: Yeah.

Mrs. Reynolds: And you saw a haunted house.

Hari: Yeah. And it was very night and it, my sister was scared, I was not.

Mrs.,. Reynolds: So, may-, you were not scared

Hari: It was my sister. He shut off the red, red lights and I went in, right into where the stairs.

Mrs. Reynolds: Okay, so maybe you want to write a sentence that starts with "I felt". Maybe you felt scared, or maybe you didn't. Maybe you felt excited, or happy, right? So you can start, "I saw", "I ate", "I went", "I heard" or "I felt". So you know how to start your sentence.

By the end of the year, Hari's (and many of the other children's) stories both orally and in writing, had taken on the relatively reduced format suggested by the teacher.

When talking to the researchers about Hari's progress in literacy skills, Mrs. Reynolds mentioned his improvement in oral rehearsal for journal writing, casting this in terms of speaking more slowly and not blurting things out. She contrasted this with earlier in the year when she reported that he spoke in "overlapping sentences" and she had trouble understanding him. However, she did still see his lengthy contributions as somewhat of a problem:

Mrs. Reynolds: . . . it's really hard because I don't want to say, "Stop talking", but sometimes he'll just go on and on, I don't say, "Stop talking", but, you know, kind of wind it up. (*laughs*)

But, yeah, he still does do that. He is the only one, too, out of all those ESL kids who seems to do that.

Kelleen: Real strategy for him.

Mrs. Reynolds: It is, yeah, it's just like a repetition and rewording...

Kelleen: Yeah.

Mrs. Reynolds: And he's just working it all out.

In kindergarten, Hari's lengthy sharing contributions were seen by his teacher as evidence of his interest and progress in learning English, while in this case, Mrs. Reynolds acknowledged that Hari's lengthy sharing contributions were a strategy he used for communication, but at the same time she felt them to be inappropriate and needing termination.

The teaching practice of using the IRE script was much more common in the Grade 1 classroom than it had been in the kindergarten. The following example shows, we think, how the IRE practice established each child as an individual competitor for classroom resources:

Mrs. Reynolds: Okay, what food group are nuts from? ... Let's let Hari try. If he doesn't know, then you can put your hand up.

Hari: Uh, meat and alternates.

Mrs. Reynolds: Meat and alternates. Good and what's corn from?

Hari: Ah, um, (*pause*)

Mrs. Reynolds: Take a guess. What do you think corn is from? Do you think it's a dairy product?

Hari: Ahh, (*lifts his finger up, Mrs. Reynolds nods to him*) Fruits and vegetables.

Mrs. Reynolds: Very good. Fruit and vegetable. And tomato? (*pointing to the next picture*)

Hari: Fruit and vegetable.

Mrs. Reynolds: Fruit and vegetable. And these are?

(*Mrs. Reynolds goes through several other pictures of food, eliciting from Hari what food group they belong to*)

Mrs. Reynolds: Okay, so Hari, which one doesn't belong?

He stands up and points to the nuts, no hesitation.

Mrs. Reynolds: You can take it off. (*He takes it off the board and hands it to her*) Nuts, are from meat and alternates, right?

Rita: Oh, I never get picked.

Hari: (*Looking very pleased*) I beat you (*to Linda*)

Linda: Beat?

Hari: (*nods his head*) Yeah.

Earlier in the transcript, another child had suggested that Mrs. Reynolds should "do it so everyone gets a turn", but Mrs. Reynolds felt this would take too much time. It is clear that Hari and the other children regard a turn in answering as a privilege and they compete for this privilege. Hari's competent answering of these questions (especially since most of the instruction of the Food Groups unit had occurred while he and his classmates were out of the classroom for ESL instruction) and others, made his subsequent placement in Learning Assistance somewhat unexpected to the researchers.

In March of Grade 1, Mrs. Reynolds referred Hari for placement in Learning Assistance classes and reduced his (and all the other English language learners') attendance in ESL classes to twice a week instead of daily. She said that she felt that he needed to be in her classroom so as to participate in the classroom's phonics and spelling exercises, more than he needed to be in the ESL class. In any case, she mentioned, the children did not want to go for ESL instruction, the ESL teacher was very busy, and Mrs. Reynolds herself felt that only "really serious, serious beginners should be pulled out" for ESL.

As to Hari's placement in special education classes, Mrs. Reynolds stated that there was "no big problem" but she felt that individualized instruction would assist him.

> **Kelleen**: What was the problem that you were seeing that led to learning assistance in the first place, what. . .
>
> **Mrs. Reynolds**: Oh, no big problem, I just thought he could benefit from that extra one on one help, him and Daljinder, Daljinder's slower, he's like borderline almost, and I thought, you know, I thought if he [Hari] gets this intensive, because she [the learning assistance teacher] takes them 3 times a week, small group, there's 4 or 5, and a half hour, and they do the phonics and they learn the letter sounds and, and so he's reading much better.

The learning assistance Hari received consisted of instruction in phonics and letter sounds. In an interview, Mrs. Reynolds told us that Hari's progress in this regard was "good:" "...He's not confident, but he's sounding out now, he's trying to use the code and he's trying to predict". While she felt Hari was "reading fine", she continued to send him to learning assistance for "just extra reading practice" and for help with vowel sounds. Speaking of Hari, she broadened her comments to apply to all English language learners:

> Just to get that one on one and, because he [Hari] wasn't getting. We were doing vowel sounds and he wasn't getting, like he, and they all [English language learners] seem to have that trouble, even if they're reading well. . . to write a word with a short vowel sound, they'll get them all mixed up.

Mrs. Reynolds reported that Hari and the other English language learners would continue in Learning Assistance in the following year, even though he (and some of the others) had been measured at a higher level in reading comprehension. Thus, despite the variation in the reading comprehension of the English language learners, with some like Hari faring well and others not so well, all English language learners were deemed to need Learning Assistance to "be on the safe side" and ward off anticipated difficulties.

At the end of the year in June, Hari's teacher said that she was "seeing a whole new Hari these last two months", characterizing him as "real social", whereas he was "a little shyer" at the

beginning of the year. Thinking that this transformation might have been because he had been associating with some of the more aggressive, assertive boys in the class, she spoke of some difficulties she was having with his behaviour.

> Mrs. Reynolds: I've had to calm him a few, I don't know if he's not listening deliberately like if I say something it's almost like he's deaf sometimes like or he's deliberately not, you know, choosing not to do it until I've asked him the 3rd or 4th time

With regard to his academic progress by the end of the year, Mrs. Reynolds described him as "an intelligent, smart boy" and mentioned that "he's a good observer."

In sum, Mrs. Reynolds seemed to view Hari as falling within a category of children called ESL, and in some ways, as a student requiring Learning Assistance. Clearly, part of her job in this Grade 1 classroom was to shape her students as "school" students and to assess the capabilities and performances of all the children, including the ESL children.

Discussion

We have presented here data concerning two boys, focussing on a transition year for each, in Harvey's case, from home to kindergarten and in Hari's case, from kindergarten to Grade 1. In the case of Harvey, his kindergarten teacher saw him as having fewer cognitive, social and linguistic resources than his parents felt he had. In the case of Hari, his Grade 1 teacher saw him as having fewer cognitive, social and linguistic resources than his kindergarten teacher thought he had. In these cases, as well as in Harklau (2000), the trend downward is disturbing.

One of our students, Suzanne Rowbotham, in examining school practices of assigning identities of deficiency to children, writes in a paper she calls "What Child is This?":

> When Tim first walked up the stairs of the school to kindergarten, holding his mother's hand, he was just a little boy, a brother, a son, a tree climber, an animal lover, a story teller, an expert in many things. As he entered the classroom door, he became something different; he became a student. Within a short time, this child would be transformed from a child of multiple talents, skills, interests and challenges to a kind of student who must be ranked,

> tested and identified. This new identity, historically and culturally prepared for him, would forever change him from being just a little boy. He would now be carefully studied and watched so that any deviance from the expectations of the normal five year old could be documented and analyzed. (p. 1)

Using Foucault's notions of surveillance and norm, Suzanne examines how it is that schools recognize the talents, skills, interests and challenges of some students, but they seem unable to recognize others, making the point that teachers, children and parents need formidable support if they are to resist the formation of children as meeting or not meeting community norms.

The children in our study described earlier have also been subject to surveillance and school identity construction. In the case of Harvey, for example, at home, with the provision of materials in which he was interested, the presence of an adult interested in joint activity with him, no stigma attaching to illness, interlocutors who did not find his pronunciation any barrier to comprehending him, and practices of nurture and appreciation, Harvey had an identity as a bright boy, a boy interested in learning to read, interested in telling stories, in creating fantasy play about trains. In school, in which Harvey needed to work with materials with which he had little experience, little exclusive access to an adult interested in doing projects with him, personal stigma attaching to his illness, and practises of ranking and testing him on activities in which he was inexperienced, Harvey presents as only "averagely" capable, with "social skills" and pronunciation needing remediation. It is, I think, difficult to see Harvey himself as solely responsible for the school's valuation of him.

Similarly, in kindergarten, with a teacher who arranges classroom practices so as to make classroom resources available to him, and a peer who also scaffolds his participation, Hari is able to present an identity of power and possibility. In Grade 1, with a teacher and a program more focussed on identification of deficiencies and provision of remediation, Hari's identity becomes less powerful. In this situation in which assessment of children's individual achievements was paramount, Hari became seen as an ESL student who required special assistance and whose parents were unable to support his learning. With the move to a different environment with different practices and players, both these children "become" different people.

Varenne and McDermott (1999) argue cogently that practices of identification of "successful" and "failing" students in school discourse parallel other Western practices for differential distribution of resources. I am convinced that school "sorting" practices are in some ways contradictory to parental, and to a perhaps lesser extent, kindergarten, practices of nurturing children, and that these contradictions present points of tension for children, parents and teachers alike.

Kindergarten entry is pivotal in the lives of many North American children and families. Many such children commonly participate in communities of practice larger than their families before they begin school (neighbourhood groups, religious organizations, daycare, playschools, "lessons"). In these situations, children's individual psychological characteristics, their physical presentations and maturities and so on, are compared to those of other children, with norms being more or less explicitly articulated or defined by caregivers, "teachers" or others. Physicians and other health care providers, for example, officially norm children's development at regular intervals, from birth on. Nevertheless, kindergarten attendance marks a substantial shift in how children's behaviour, growth and development are assessed and compared with others. Varenne and McDermott (1999) see "the measurement of individuals in competition with other individuals [as] an essential part of life in American culture" (p. xi), and the school as the primary institution for accomplishing such ranking. For them,

> [Measurement of individuals] is a source of entertainment on television quiz shows and sporting events, but mostly it is a source of worry, particularly around everything that has to do with schooling, most particularly at times of major transition from entry into preschool to the search for a "top" graduate or professional school sixteen years later. (p. xi)

Not only are children subject to normative ranking upon entry to school, parents and families are also subject to such procedures. In an analysis of a study of how North American families and especially mothers labour to enable their children to go to school every day, Smith (1999) notes: "School . . . discourse lays the primary responsibility for the individual child's school achievement and even his/her success as an adult upon the family" (p. 163). Observing that some families are defined as deficient by schooling discourse (the textbooks, the exercises, the assumptions), Smith

argues that schooling practices provide a method for "reading back from a child's behaviour in school to its cause in the family; and from a knowledge of family problems to an interpretation of the child's behaviour in school"(p. 163). As can be seen in the two cases above, parents' and families' contributions to their children's school lives are regarded somewhat ambiguously by school personnel. Harvey's parents, for example, resisted the construction of him at school as needing remediation. My well-meaning efforts to "help Harvey", were made on the basis of a diagnosis of pronunciation difficulties. I supported my diagnosis with specialists' (the linguistics professors') opinion. I communicated my "knowledge" to Harvey's teacher and to his parents. Harvey's teacher accepted my diagnosis and later recommended that Harvey be tested to see if he were eligible for speech pathology servicing. Harvey's parents, on the other hand, rejected each of our constructions of the identity of their son. On the basis of their historical knowledge of him in their family, and their confidence that no pathology was involved, they reasserted their opinion that he was clever and able, and that he needed no special services. Our attempt to construct Harvey as a student with special needs was rejected by them. This resistance to school "identification" is, I believe, relatively rare.

Harklau (2000) shows how the "best" kids become the "worst" students in the transition from secondary school to first year college. We have argued in this paper that school practices have a great deal of power in creating identities for children, and that those practices are relatively dynamic over the early primary grades. We also recognize that the relationships established between teachers and individual children and children and their peers are important in how they come to be seen in school. Far from imposing "uniform and objective standards for behaviour", school attendance implies particular practices and relationships that structure what kinds of students little boys with multiple interests, skills, talents, capabilities and challenges, can become.

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