Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogue: A Construct for Pedagogy, Methodology and Analysis

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Abstract

This article describes the application of Bakhtin's (1981, 1986a,b) theorisation of language as dialogue to the study of young students' struggle with discourses of ethnicity within the context of a Studies of Asia curriculum project (Hamston 2003). Bakhtin's rich conceptualisation of the productive and ethical nature of dialogue has operated at all levels in this study as a theoretical, pedagogical, methodological and analytic research construct.

It is hoped that the description of the research provided here contributes to the field of discourse-based research in several key ways. First and foremost, the model of dialogic pedagogy central to the research was informed by Bakhtin's (1981, 1986a,b) belief in the moral responsibility of language and thus resonated with the need in complex and changing global and local conditions for education as 'good work' (Carlson 1997a,b, 2002, Gardner et al. 1999, Luke & Carpenter 2003, Willinsky, 1998). As researcher/teacher in this study, I situated at the centre of the research the kinds of questions that relate to what Weis and Fine (2003) define as issues of power, privilege, standpoint, knowledge and difference. Secondly, the dialogic nature of the data collected over time allowed for a nuanced and complex portrait of the key research participants' 'ideological becoming' (Bakhtin 1981) and brought to the fore the different social 'voices' that they chose to speak through. Finally, the location of discourses in the students' spoken and embodied language through a fine-grained linguistic analysis resonated with Bakhtin's (1986a) call for a profound understanding of language.

Introduction

The study outlined here took place with 26 students in one Year 5 classroom at Parkview Grammar – a private Anglican girls' school in Melbourne. The students

participated in a ten-week Studies of Asia curriculum project that exposed them to multiple representations of colonial Australia; to competing discourses of 'Australia', 'Asia' and the 'Asian presence' in Australia; and to enduring practices of racial superiority in Australia (see Singh 1995a). Studies of Asia is a field of curriculum studies designed to develop students' understanding of the peoples and cultures of Asia, the significance of Asia-Australia relations, and the contributions of Asian peoples to Australian culture and society.[1] As a national curriculum initiative, Studies of Asia has aimed to problematise both Australia's colonial past and its recent history as a nation-state in the Asian region and has encouraged the development of a language with which to counter Orientalist perspectives on 'Asia' and 'Australia' (Singh 1995a, after Said 1995). The framing of Studies of Asia as a postcolonial project (Singh 1995a,b) is similar to the postcolonial pedagogy advocated by Carlson (1997a,b) in the United States and Willinsky (1998) in Canada.

Studies of Asia curriculum has presented Australian educators and students with an important context within which to examine the anti-Asia legacy of colonial Australia and to develop a language constitutive of the new ethnicities that characterise Australia as a postcolonial nation state. This process of 're-imagining' Australia, however, is not new. Australian education has long developed rich and productive multicultural curriculum that has advocated inclusiveness and the valuing of cultural diversity [for example, Kalantzis et al. 1990]. However, in recent decades, governments and educators have aimed to redress the relative absence of an Asian perspective in the curriculum as a means of acknowledging the significant role that Asia has and will play in Australia's past, present and future (Asia Education Foundation 1999, FitzGerald 1990, 1994, Keating 2000, Rizvi 1996, Singh 1995a, Williamson-Fien 1994).

Such an education initiative in the context of Australia's geo-political history is significant. In the past, language in Australia was used to construct powerful, authoritative (see Bakhtin 1981, 1986a) discourses of 'nation' and 'race' (see Bhabha 1994, Hall 1996a, Hall, Held & McGrew 1992, Said 1995). This essentialising language conflated 'whiteness' with 'Australianness' (Broinowski 1992, 2003). Practices of racism and exclusion in Australia arose from this view of racial superiority, and peoples from the Asian region were constructed as irrevocably different and essentially unequal (Broinowski 1992). Australia was thus 'imagined' (Bourdieu 1997, p. 221) through the hegemonic, linguistic construction of deficit and division.

The use of language in postcolonial times, however, is complex, in that a more inclusive and creative use of language is required to describe the cultural hybridity of nation states such Australia, and to answer deceptively simple questions such as: Who is an Australian? This move towards a more comprehensive naming of Australian

identity is reflective of the struggle that ensues between authoritative discourses and other discourses that might be more persuasive to an individual (Bakhtin 1981). The contest for language has been evident on one hand in the establishment of anti-discrimination and multicultural policies that have offered alternative 'official' discourses of culture and ethnicity to those of 'White Australia' that circulated within Australian society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Keating 2000). Yet, the global rise in fundamentalism, xenophobia and 'new racisms' that mark out current times (Bauman 1998, Castles 1996) and the threads of discourses from the past that remain in the present (Bakhtin 1981) complicate this dialogic process even further. The language of the One Nation Party in Australia in the mid 1990s, for example, focused attention once more on essentialist categories of 'nation' and 'race' as a means of defining Australian identity and highlighted the discursive legacy of 'White Australia' (Ang 2002, Singh 2002). Through this language, Asian-Australians were (re) constructed as a threat, and Indigenous Australians were portrayed as undeserving of special treatment and compensation for the inequities of the past. The policies and language of the current conservative Coalition government in Australia have been seen to contribute to these perceptions (Broinowski 2003). Under the leadership of Prime Minister John Howard, language used in respect to Australia's history and its cultural values appears to have been rearticulated to Britain and the United States and disassociated from Asia (Broinowski 2003). Furthermore, and significantly, the language of multiculturalism and indigenous rights in Australia has been effectively silenced by the discursive authority of this government (see Lo Bianco 2004).

Classrooms are intertextual sites where such discourses from outside and from other times and places 'meet and clash' (Bakhtin 1981) with those discourses embodied in curriculum projects such as Studies of Asia. According to Bakhtin (1981, 1986a), discourses as social viewpoints, or 'voices,' circulate across time and space, some of which become internalised in an individual's consciousness. The multiplicity of social voices – heteroglossia – arises because different discourses are available for an individual to appropriate, to internalise, and to speak through and, thus, permeate the language exchanged between individuals when they engage in dialogue. Discursive tensions arise because of the different social voices that individuals appropriate. Nevertheless, discourse-change is a possible outcome of this tension because dialogue is a process of building and consciousness-raising that increases the individual's awareness of the varied discourses available in society and, ultimately through self-reflection, the discourses she chooses to speak through.

To Bakhtin, such a conceptualisation of dialogue acknowledges the mutuality of the individual and society; the language an individual speaks, and larger social discourses; and the ongoing dialogic process and discourse-change. Language as

dialogue therefore encourages an ethical agency which foregrounds the linguistic basis of 'becoming' and of discursive change. This ongoing process of struggle and building is central to the contest for language in Australia: the contested views of 'Australianness'; the racial, cultural and linguistic dominance of 'White Australia' (Ang 2002, Singh 2002); the rise of ultra-conservatism; and the rich potential of Australia's future as a culturally pluralist postcolonial nation-state (Crowley 1998, Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet 1999).

The role of the educator, I argue, is to bring to the fore different discourses and to make transparent the potentially enabling and limiting effects of these discourses. In this way young students are afforded opportunities to examine and critique hegemonic versions of 'nation', and 'race' that reside in the 'collective memory' (Bakhtin 1981). To complement this critique, students participate in the productive process of learning to value what Hall (1992) describes as the New Ethnicities that characterise postcolonial times. They learn that everyone is ethnically located; that everyone comes from some place; that everyone has a particular history, a particular experience, increasingly marked by hybridity and complexity (Hall 1992). In so doing, they learn that cultural difference is dialogic, interconnected and complex (Denzin 2003, after Hall 1996). More importantly, through participation in dialogue, students develop an awareness of the intricate relationship between the words they speak, the words they internalise as 'inner dialogue' and the words they hear from others – a tripartite relationship that Bakhtin (1981) refers to as Addressivity.

Classrooms are therefore potential sites for the cultural change that resides within language. This perspective on language as a cultural tool and the belief in the power of dialogue to assist individuals to 'become' and grow as ethical human beings and ultimately to effect discourse-change (Bakhtin 1981, Gurevitch 2000, Nealon 1997, Wertsch 1998), framed the curriculum project at the centre of the study highlighted here. At the heart of this kind of dialogic pedagogy is what Weis and Fine (2003, p. 123) define as extraordinary conversations; that is, those conversations of 'intellect… [which] educate for critical inquiry and civic participation across lines of 'difference.''

A dialogic pedagogy

Bakhtin's perspective on discourse and 'becoming', and in particular his focus on Addressivity, accounted for the pedagogic role of ongoing dialogue in this study. To facilitate dialogic struggle with 'content', all students in the study were engaged in a curriculum conversation that focused on the history of the Chinese in Australia; issues of national/multicultural identities and the language of 'new ethnicities'; Australia's relationship with countries in the Asian region; and contemporary issues of racism.

Various forms of dialogue were built into the curriculum project so that different social voices could be shared. These dialogues as conversation, as debate, as inquiry, and as instruction (Burbules 1993) were designed so that students could discuss issues raised by the curriculum project, share their values and viewpoints, and hear and critically evaluate what others had to say. The intertextual dimension of the dialogue ensured that the discourses students carried from and into the classroom generated a struggle that was at different times oppositional and consensual. Furthermore, the students were exposed to the teacher's modelling of the continuous and unfinished nature of dialogue and were therefore able to re-visit previous utterances and reflect upon these. Consequently, students adopted the language of reflection and developed an appreciation that even though something had been said, it could be re-said.

In highlighting the role of the individual in discourse-change, and students' relationships with others as individual and relational selves (see also Wells' (1999) concept of the 'community of inquiry'), this form of dialogic pedagogy contrasts with other postcolonial approaches that foreground counter-discursive (Willinsky 1998), counter-hegemonic (Carlson 1997a,b) and counter-Orientalist (Singh 1995a,b) pedagogies and which advocate wholesale transformation of discourses through the intentional use of language to direct desired outcomes (Fennimore 2000).

An example of the enduring impact of ongoing dialogue for individual students is revealed here in the reflection shared by Eve, who spoke of the value of the dialogic process (see Sidorkin 1999).

Data Sample 1

Eve: for example um, we'll be having a conversation in class or something, and we will like um, someone'll say a point about something and, then everyone else, they'll sort of say "oh but think about it this way" and all that and sort of, and "what about this happened as well?" And all this stuff, sort of. They'll [store] it more

Julie: yes, was that happening before we did our work together?

Eve: No

Julie: it wasn't?

Eve: definitely not

Julie: well I'm interested in that...

Eve: we'd sort of just go one side or the other, sort of go "yes I agree with her" or "no I don't"... and also they, they used to tend to sort of um,

> go, to the person that ( ). They say and go "oh yeah I agree with her" because that person ( ) they sort of didn't think for themselves. They sort of just went on with the person that said it, but some people would stick up for themselves, and say "no no". But after you came, you know it was like really different. Like we all explored the situation that we were sort of talking about in more depth and saying "well hang on, what about this?" and all this stuff

Such backwards and forwards movement around challenging issues provided students with the opportunity to revisit issues and to make sense of these issues over time. This dialogic movement encouraged an ongoing conversation rather than the enactment of curriculum as a series of episodes or discrete events.

In addition to the design and co-implementation of the curriculum project, I established the dialogic forum – to facilitate and study a continuous dialogue about the issues raised in the curriculum project and to support students in revealing their 'inner dialogues' within an intimate context. The establishment of the dialogic forum was an important acknowledgement of the significance of consciousness-raising, or the development of a meta-discursive awareness (Gee 1999), in learning about issues of identity and difference.

The composition of the dialogic forum was mixed with participants identifying themselves as having: an Anglo-Australian background (3 members), a Middle Eastern background (1 member), an Eastern European and British background (1 member) and an Asian and Anglo-Australian background (1 member). Three students – Grace, Tessie and Beth – emerged as key members of the dialogic forum through their contrastive struggles with the curriculum content, with each other and with their 'selves'. The particular analytic focus of the study was on the language exchanged between three students – Grace, Tessie and Beth – whose markedly different struggle with content, with each other and with 'self' proved both interesting and informative.

To gain further insight into the 'becoming' of Grace, Tessie and Beth and to obtain some sense of their discernment between discourses across time and place, and the potential for discourse-change that exists through self-reflection (Bakhtin 1981), I established two additional 'continuing the dialogue' research contexts. The first was through the application of a stimulated recall session (Kagan 1984) five months after the completion of the curriculum project. In this context, Grace, Tessie and Beth viewed videotaped data from one dialogic forum to comment on whether their values and viewpoints about Australia's place in the Asian region had changed or remained the same. The second involved focused interviews (Kvale 1996) with Grace, Tessie and Beth about the discourses they had cued in their dialogic interactions with others.

These interviews took place at an important juncture in Australia's contemporary history: the election of John Howard as Prime Minister and Pauline Hanson's controversial maiden speech in the Federal parliament. Both events lauded the demise of political correctness and thus gave voice to discourses of racism that targeted indigenous and Asian Australians.

Dialogic data were collected in the form of videotaped interactions with the whole class and exchanges between the members of the dialogic forum; interviews with the class teacher and a peer de-briefer; audio-taped interactions with the members of the dialogic forum, facilitated through the application of stimulated recall and focused interviews with Grace, Tessie and Beth. Three interrelated research questions were directed towards these data:

How does a group of primary female students engage in struggle around discourses of 'Asia', 'Australia' and the 'Asian presence in Australia' within the context of a Studies of Asia curriculum project?

What discourses appear to be cued in each student's language?

What does the manner and content of each student's struggle reveal about Studies of Asia as a dialogic pedagogy?

Analysing the language of dialogic struggle

To provide the deep understanding of language that Bakhtin (1986a) calls for, it was necessary to develop a process of analysis that would reveal the richness of the students' dialogic interactions. The four aspects of this process are outlined here.

Adapting a model of CDA

A model of critical discourse analysis was designed for the purpose of presenting a multi-layered description, interpretation and explanation of the students' dialogic utterances. This analytic method selectively synthesised Bakhtin's theory of dialogue with the dimensions, methods and tools of analysis that form Fairclough's earlier model of Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA) (1992, cf. Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, Fairclough 2000, 2001). Fairclough's tripartite model enables the researcher to build up a discursive analysis through a description of the text, an interpretation of the intertextual relationship between the text and other texts, and an explanation of the social context within which the text is located. Consequently, this model could be attuned to the framing of the research in several ways. First, Bakhtin argues that ideology resides in Addressivity: in the content of the utterance, in how

the utterance is conveyed to others, and in how an individual reveals her 'inner self'. Therefore, discursive traces can be found in what an individual says and how she conveys this through intonation, body language and gesture (see Fairclough 1992, pp. 166-167).

In adapting Fairclough's model, I presented a micro-linguistic description of each student's Utterance-Addressivity. This description was foundational to the interpretation of the intertextuality of each student's struggle with discourses, and the explanation of the heteroglossic discourses framing the Studies of Asia curriculum project. This revised model provided a systematic linguistic analysis of the discourses of 'Australia' and 'Asia' that were cued in the spoken and embodied language exchanged between Grace, Tessie and Beth primarily in three key dialogic forums:

Forum 1: *Who is an Australian? – a conversation about the 'Asian presence' in Australia*

Forum 2: *The Great Debate – a debate about Australia's location in the Asian region*

Forum 3: *Asians Out!! – a conversation about racism in contemporary Australia*

In keeping with the focus in this study on the individual nature of struggle and 'becoming', the Bakhtinian analysis enabled a shift away from ideology critique of institutionalised power to an exploration of the situated struggle occurring at the micro-level of the primary classroom and its potential to shed light on larger social discourses.

Preparing the data for analysis

The preparation of the data for linguistic description involved the exacting process of transcribing and coding a significantly large corpus of spoken data,[2] and for this reason, the description of each student's Utterance-Addressivity holds central place in the analysis. Samples of the preparation of the data for analysis are included below. As seen in these data samples, the content of each student's utterance was recorded using conventional transcription and turn-taking conventions. To signal other aspects of Addressivity, I added to these conventions bolded text to indicate stressed intonation and underlined text to reveal a lowered tone, and included information that described the body language and gestures of each speaker.

To refine this linguistic description, the content of each utterance was categorised in terms of modal choices. According to Hodge and Kress (1993), modal choices operate as 'linguistic indicators' of larger social discourses (Fairclough 1992). Hodge and Kress provide a comprehensive overview of different types of modal choices and what these suggest about the value orientations of the speaker. All the dialogic exchanges

in the three key forums between Grace, Tessie and Beth were coded for each student's use of adjective modality; modal auxiliaries; transactive verbs; temporality; negatives; possessives; evaluative nouns and adverbs. These modal choices and each student's body language, gestures and intonation were categorised, classified and quantified.

The process of data analysis involved movement between the linguistic description and the interpretation of the intertextual nature of the dialogic struggle Grace, Tessie and Beth enacted across contexts. As such, the content and form of their utterances in the forums could be checked with data from the whole class sessions, the recall session, the final interviews and document samples such as journal entries. Importantly, the systematic linguistic description at the heart of the analysis, worked against any "loose" discursive analysis that disregarded "inconvenient features" of language (cf. Widdowson 1998, p. 145).

Data Analysis

Space does not permit a sample of the multi-dimensional data analysis (for a more comprehensive treatment of this linguistic analysis, see Hamston 2003, 2005). Further, it is not the intention of this paper to highlight the data analysis per se, but rather to provide the reader with some sense of how Bakhtin's theory of dialogue was fundamental to the analysis. Thus, samples of data from the three key dialogic forums are presented only, to illustrate the nature of the spoken and embodied language exchanged by Grace, Tessie and Beth and the discursive traces revealed in these exchanges.[3]

Data Sample 2: Key Forum 1 – Who is an Australian?

1 Tessie: I just wanted to say, (SHIFTS IN CHAIR/LOOKS DOWNWARDS) **well** you know the Aborigines? I'm just using our country as an **example**. Well, when they came **here**, they, **would they say** (SHIFTS IN CHAIR/LOOKS AT JULIE) "**This is our land**, we're the **only** Australians?" Like my parents came here to **live**, well, and I was **born** and that. Doesn't mean because I've got **white skin**, (STRETCHES BOTH LEGS OUT IN FRONT) does that mean I'm **not** an **Australian**, **sort of thing**? (SCREWS UP FACE) So I think, the, they just have to be a **pure** Australian (LOOKS AT JULIE/BRINGS LEFT HAND TO CHEST). Like I'm a **pure** Australian, (SHIFTS IN CHAIR/LOOKS AROUND THE CIRCLE/LOOKS STRAIGHT AHEAD) ah, I think everyone in this room is a pure Australian, but um, I was **born here**, so why can't I be called Australian? Some people say to me **"Oh, but Aborigines are more Australian than us"**

2 Grace: **[who said that?**

3 Julie: you had a problem with] that last week, didn't you?

4 Tessie: yeah (SMILES/SHIFTS IN CHAIR)

5 Grace: who said that only people with **white skin** are Australian anyway? (LOOKS AT TESSIE)

6 Clare: we **call** ourselves Australian, we **are** Australian

7 Tessie: yeah, but we were **born** [( ) (here)

This excerpt highlights an exchange between Tessie and Grace and is illustrative of the continued struggle between Tessie's essentialisation of identity and what comes to be seen over time as Grace's sophisticated understanding of the ethnic location of all people. It is possible to see this understanding reflected in Grace's language such as "who said that only people with white skin are Australian anyway?" In all her dialogic interactions with others, but most particularly with Tessie and Beth, Grace questioned, listened, probed, challenged, sought answers and evidence, and requested rational and logical explanations when their viewpoints differed markedly from her own. Her frequent strong claim for justification ("**who said that?**") was one way of doing so. Grace's use of body language, gestures and intonation in this exchange are representative of the direct, yet usually moderate interactions she had with Tessie.

Data Sample 3: Key Forum 2 – Is Australia Part of Asia?

1 Beth: Um, well, **no I don't think** (EYES DIRECTED AT CEILING) that **Asia** belongs to Australia [sic] because **I** like it how it is. **Australia** is, it's on its **own** little, sort of little, **world** cause it's so far away from everything else (WAVES RIGHT HAND)

2 Julie: mmh-mmh

3 Beth: and like, **um, I like it** (LOOKS UPWARDS) **just as a little country**, <u>not a big and you know</u>, so I don't, **I wouldn't feel comfortable, not** the **people** or anything it's just that I wouldn't feel **comfortable**, (GAZES OUT THE WINDOW/FEELS HER NECK) with um, you know (SHAKES HEAD) **so** <u>many people</u>,(LOOKS AT JULIE/ RUBS NECK)[<u>but</u>

4 Grace: but it's **not**] **like it's** going to **become**, (SHAKES HEAD SIDEWAYS/EYES DIRECTED AT BETH/MOVES BOTH HANDS TO EACH SIDE OF BODY AND MOVES THEM UP AND DOWN) well, it will **become** part of, <u>well if it did become a part of Asia, it will</u>

become part of **Asia, which** is a big group, but like it's not like (MOVES BOTH HANDS TOGETHER, THEN APART) we're just **going** to become a **big**, a **bigger** country [than

5 Beth: **yeah] yeah yeah, I know that** Grace, (EYES DIRECTED UPWARDS; HOLDS NECK) it's just **like, I wouldn't feel comfortable**, (NODS HEAD DOWNWARDS) [because…

This excerpt reflects the heated exchanges that took place between Beth and Grace, and Tessie and Grace, around the question: Is Australia part of Asia? In the debate that ensued, Beth reconstrued the question ("**no I don't think** that **Asia** belongs to Australia"). This signals a consistent theme in Beth's utterances throughout Key Forum 2 and in the whole class sessions that also addressed the issue of Australia's location in the Asian region. She expressed fear that Asia, as an homegenised and singular identity, would threaten Australia in that they are "**going to take over, they are, they really are**" and "**they'll say 'right' … this is our country ( ) and they'll change all ( )**". Beth's continued use of stressed intonations show the strength of her viewpoints, but her body language and gestures suggest some discomfort in disclosing these to others. The language of defense here ("**yeah] yeah yeah, I know that** Grace") clearly contrasts with previous exchanges in the dialogic forums where Beth had taken on a more philosophical, considered and open stance on the complex issue of identity. The strength of this change is noted throughout this particular forum, where Beth emphasised her viewpoints (and her fears?) through frequent gesturing with clawed hands, her hand on her heart, a screwed up face and direct and penetrating looks at Grace.

Data Sample 4: Key Forum 3: Asians Out!!!

Tessie: and the **other** question (FLIPS THROUGH BOOK/LOOKS DOWN TO READ) how do I feel about it? **Um, I myself do not like Chinese**, but I would **not** do graffiti, most people, (GESTURES WITH RIGHT HAND) most people think Australia is an English country (LOOKS AT JULIE/WAVES RIGHT HAND/PLACES TONGUE IN RIGHT CHEEK)

Grace: what do you **mean** by an **English** country?

Tessie: **oh,** (SHAKES RIGHT HAND/LOOKS UPWARDS) **oh, like** ()

Grace: because we're, because **England** used to **rule** Australia

Tessie: yeah (PLACES RIGHT INDEX FINGER ON LIPS/LOOKS AWAY FROM GRACE)

Grace: [well they took over

Tessie: like] an **English** country, like there's white people and all that stuff (2) **just** white people (SMILES/SHAKES RIGHT HAND)

This exchange from Key Forum 3 again shows traces of Tessie's essentialisation of identity. Throughout the forums and the whole class sessions, Tessie frequently categorised "pure Australian(s)" as those who were born in Australia, who have white skin and who speak English. In also describing herself as "white" and "English", Tessie seemed desperate to establish her 'territorial belongingness' (Rizvi 1993, p. 133). In staking such a strong claim, it appeared that Tessie did not value her own position as an Australian who was not white and not British, or that she was afraid of being constructed by others as not Australian.

This excerpt also shows how Tessie constructed the 'Asian presence' in Australia as alien and 'other'. She appears confident in stressing: "**I myself do not like Chinese**" a claim she made in other forums, the recall session, but, interestingly, never in the context of the whole class. Her seemingly coy body language, her frequent smiles and relatively unstressed utterances, suggest that Tessie has assumed the language models of a performance. To augment and support her own viewpoints, Tessie, like Beth, often relied on the words of others, or 'double voiced' utterances (Bakhtin 1981, 1986a). In another exchange in this forum, Tessie claimed that she was not alone in disliking Chinese people and this, too, was described as being an "English thing":

> because **I asked** a girl in another grade, Yvette in the other grade (LOOKS AT JULIE) and **she** thought that they were **Chinese as well and ah, I don't see** what's wrong with them, but (PLACES RIGHT HAND ON CHEST/LOOKS AT JULIE) I still don't like them (SMILES) **and so** I think it's just an English thing…

Profiles of 'becoming'

As a means of synthesising the multi-dimensional analysis, three distinct discursive profiles were created for Grace, Tessie and Beth. In acknowledgement of Bakhtin's concept of 'becoming', these profiles were developed from a comprehensive mapping of the patterns and inconsistencies in each student's dialogic struggle across the different data contexts and over time. The profiles of 'becoming' point to the complexity of the students' dialogic interactions, the contrastive discourses of 'Australia' and 'Asia' revealed in their spoken and embodied language and the various ways they appropriated and resisted the postcolonial discourses of race, nation and ethnicity that underpinned the curriculum project. Importantly, the profiles also suggest that Grace, Tessie and Beth differentially struggled with each other, and within themselves.

Ongoing dialogue

Data from the recall session and the final interviews, however, show something of each student's ongoing dialogue with those discourses they had found to be persuasive (Bakhtin 1981). Although the voices of the girls, revealed over time, suggest the complex and dynamic process of consciousness-raising and the struggle to mean, one of the most important themes in their reflections is the opportunity to share their inner dialogues. For example, Grace reflected on her time as member of the forum:

Data Sample 5

Grace: … this must be the most open discussion I've had in a classroom in my whole life … you got to express your feelings openly … what's right, what's wrong is confusing … I like open discussions because you can give other people your point of view, but they also give you their point of view and you can think about that and consider that … You can't just say "Stop, stop, everyone stop thinking"

This exchange suggests something of Grace's impressive capacity for self-reflection and her meta-awareness of the dynamic nature of discursive struggle. Grace used this capacity to consistently work against the construction of difference from a deficit or divisive viewpoint, whereby she chose always to speak in 'contextual harmony' (Bakhtin 1986a, p. 57) with postcolonial discourses of pluralism and multiculturalism valued by Studies of Asia curriculum. In spite of this, or because of this, time and again Grace downplayed the 'Asianness' of her own identity, as seen here in an excerpt from her final interview with me:

Data Sample 6

1 Julie: you don't want to be seen as different?

2 Grace: no I don't want to be seen as different. It's sorta funny because when I went to (new school) 'cause everyone knows my Mum everyone goes "Oh your Dad is he Chinese? I said "No he's not Chinese (pardon me) "is he Japanese then? I said "No he's not Japanese. So they kept on naming these actually they kept on saying "Oh he's Australian" because he is and someone thought he was Aboriginal (giggle). Like one time because they got really puzzled but yeah

3 Julie: yeah and you weren't making it easy for them either

4 Grace: no! (laughs)

5 Julie: can you tell me why?

6 Grace: um because it's like it's they thought like if someone was of a different background not exactly an Anglo-Saxon from Australia or something they couldn't be Australian or something [like that…

7 Julie: and you really wanted to make them work at their own narrow [definitions

8 Grace: yeah of who was Australian and who wasn't

Like Grace, Tessie spoke of the benefits of sharing her voice with others in an open community of inquiry:

Data Sample 7

Tessie: I rarely ever get heard…but in class you forget [because your hand has been up so long]…Like your point of view is not wrong…I only think what my opinion is. If I really did care I would be crying all the time.

Here Tessie suggests that she enjoyed the opportunity to say what she believed and was unafraid of the consequences of her candour. This belief is also reflected in the recall session where Tessie speaks yet again of having a 'tick' in her head whenever she sees a Chinese person:

Data Sample 8

Tessie: and something else that came through was when, my tick got stronger a little

Julie: mmh

Tessie: then it went down, and now it's got back up a little, than before, so I think it, it would be sorted out and things, that Australia would be part of Asia, really ticks me in the head, really makes me think, all my me- all my thoughts came out of my mouth, that's what I think, about, if you talk about something as strong as that, my identity starts to comes out alive

Julie: mmh mmh, is that usually the case, when you're talking about something strong?

Tessie: yep, it is

Tessie softened this stance in her final interview, claiming to have found a tolerance of Asian people in Australia and showing some awareness that the language she used might have caused hurt to others. Tessie's appropriation of essentialist and racist discourses of 'nation' and 'race' points to the complexity of children's discourses of racism found in other research and the significance of context to discourse (Crawford 1996, Hatcher & Troyna 1993, Maybin 1994, Rizvi 1993, Roman & Stanley 1997). The power of the dialogic process is diminished, however, if it is assumed that Tessie would always appropriate such discourses in other places and times.

For Beth, membership in the dialogic forum was not always comfortable, in that she found herself moving between extreme discursive positions. She presented as someone whose sense of self was de-stabalised through the process of dialogic struggle, however, she also appeared to be open to the possibility of being persuaded by the alternative and more postcolonial discourses of ethnicity she encountered through the dialogic process. The complexity of Beth's participation in this process can be seen in the following reflection:

Data Sample 9

Beth: Last year I never used to put my hand up … now I am more confident and I speak out to people … I would be afraid if I was wrong. Now I don't really care if I'm wrong or not … I'm just like Tessie. I speak out when I changed my mind, other people changed, but I still kept what I said … like Grace saying 'but, but, but", I don't think it should make it into a fight

Later in the recall session, Beth said that she regretted the harmful things she had said about Asian people in previous utterances and how her participation in dialogue did result in some discourse-change:

Data Sample 10

Julie: you said, you've just been thinking about it a lot

Beth: yeah um, … not recently but like, in the last few months, when you left, you sort of changed, not, it's not bad, it's not bad, it's good, it sort of changed my life … not my life, I didn't mean that, not my life I didn't mean that, like, you sort of, that might be the part…it sort of um, how can I put it, you sort of changed um, my personality towards Asia, cause um I sort of did a really, I didn't really think about them that much, but um, I sort of didn't really um, I don't know how to put it, I sort of isn't um, ah, um

Julie: maybe since you talked about it, some of the thoughts and feelings you, had came up

Beth: yeah, came out of me, … cause I expressed my feelings, I sort of um, made a change toward, towards them … yeah, and I've sort of, changed, like cause I was watching it I was sort of, and listening to what I was really saying, I was, sort of, getting another chance to say what you know, um, I was sort of um, thinking about what I said, and then, I don't know

The differential self-other relationships that emerged through the process of dialogic struggle support Hall's (1996) contention that a powerful correlation exists between an individual's sense of subjectivity and the perspective she develops on the ethnic location of her self and of others. Grace appeared to have a strong sense of her own identity, whilst Tessie and Beth seemed less secure within a particular cultural space. Grace seemed to struggle with the discourses that Tessie and Beth cued in their utterances, whilst Tessie and Beth also seemed to struggle with her as a confident and quietly assertive individual.

Implications for research

It is clear from the description above how significant Bakhtin's (1981, 1986a,b) theory of language as dialogue was to the study of students' discursive struggle. Bakhtin (1986a) talks of the mutual relationship between the human sciences and linguistics in a way that is similar to Hyme's (1974) ethnography of speaking. He (1986a, p. 114) calls for concrete studies of language in context because life situations are structured in verbal discourse and inquiry becomes conversation, or dialogue. Hopefully, the approaches, methods and tools used in this research may motivate other studies that foreground students' struggle to understand the world around them.

In addition, it is hoped that the study motivates other educators to consider the importance of extraordinary conversations in the education of students in primary schools. The 'curriculum project as dialogue' brought voices to the fore: voices to be heard and voices to be listened to (see Weis & Fine 2003). In this way, the project was productive and disruptive, rather than merely reproductive (Weis & Fine 2003). Through participation in intellectually and emotionally challenging conversations, the students in this study came into contact with language about 'Australia' and 'Asia' that has been socially and historically shaped. However, their active involvement in dialogue ensures that threads of their discursive struggle will appear in the future conversations in which they will participate (Bakhtin 1981).

In conclusion, Bakhtin gives educators much to think about when we contemplate the significance of 'good work' in the classroom. He helps us to appreciate the power of language to shape and re-shape our lived cultural experience.

Endnotes

[1] Funding for Studies of Asia as a national curriculum innovation was initiated by the Federal Labor government in 1992 and ceased under the Federal Coalition government in 2002.

[2] The pronouns she/her are used throughout this article, as all the students in the study were female.

[3] In the data extracts, the numbers in the first column refer to the Exchanges. The following symbols, as compiled from various conventions and modified for the purpose of the study, are used:

[	overlapping utterances
bold	stressed intonation or emphasis
<u>is an English country</u>	indication of an utterance that is lower than usual tone
?	interrogative or upward intonation
(talk)	uncertain transcription
( )	untranscribable
…	beginning or continuation of talk omitted
Julie	interviewer
((China))	clarification inserted by researcher
(3)	pause in seconds
(SMILES)	description of body language, gestures, posture etc.

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