Troubling Teacher Talk: The Challenge of Changing Classroom Discourse Patterns

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Abstract

The middle years are a crucial stage of schooling where the range in student achievement widens and progress for some students slows significantly (Cairney, Buchanan, Sproats & Lowe 1998, Hill & Russell 1999). Despite moves towards middle school reform and improved literacy standards, there remains a gap in literacy provision for young adolescent learners, particularly those defined as 'educationally disadvantaged' or 'at risk' (DEETYA 1998, Masters & Forster 1997). Many literacy intervention programs offered to underachieving adolescents fail to articulate to mainstream curriculum and assessment practices, or to scaffold students adequately in meeting the literacy demands of an increasingly abstract and specialised curriculum (Christie 1990, Unsworth 2001). These often lead to a differentiated and limited curriculum which may compound educational disadvantage and maintain stratified outcomes. This article investigates a mainstream and intervention literacy pedagogy designed to improve the outcomes of disadvantages learners while at the same time accelerating the progress of all students in the middle years.

Introduction

A number of middle years studies emphasise the need for literacy intervention programs to take account of the particular needs of the adolescent learner and to be firmly connected with mainstream curriculum and assessment practices. The *Successful Interventions* research initiative carried out in Victoria between 1997 and 2001 (ACER 2000, Deakin University 2001) identified these as priorities among its ten key principles for successful literacy intervention programs and strategies. More recently, the national report *Beyond the Middle* found that:

> . . . many schools have instituted various forms of withdrawal programs as interventions aimed at students at risk of poor literacy achievement in the middle years. Many of these remain focused on deficit or

> remedial approaches, drawing heavily from dated special education materials with an emphasis on individual worksheets, levelled texts and base-line decoding of printed text…Characteristic of these pullout programs was a mismatch with the practices and pedagogies of the mainstream classroom. (Luke, et al. 2003, p. 116)

Beyond the Middle calls for 'a new wave of research' into sustainable improvements through mainstream pedagogic reform of middle schooling and for investigation of approaches that seek to 'fix the mainstream pedagogy' rather than 'pull out and remediate', a practice which often leads to fragmentation of target group interventions for ESL students, Indigenous students, weaker readers, and students with disabilities or special needs (Luke, A., Elkins, J., Weir, R.L., Carrington, V., Dole, S., Pendergast, D., Kapitzke, C., van Kraayenoord, C., Moni, K., McIntosh, A., Mayer, D., Bahr, M., Hunter, L., Chadbourne, R., Bean, T., Alvermann, D., & Stevens, L. 2003).

This article, and the doctoral study on which it is based, reports on one approach to teaching middle years literacy called *Reading to Learn* (Martin & Rose 2005, Rose 2004, 2005a, Rose, Lui-Chivize, Knight & Smith 2004). Developed by David Rose from the University of Sydney, *Reading to Learn* builds on an earlier body of work carried out with Indigenous students in Central and South Australia and with underachieving readers at the University of Canberra (Gray, Rose & Cowey 1998, Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999).

Reading to Learn pays particular attention to the interactions that take place around written texts in classrooms and proposes a new pattern of classroom talk. In this article, I describe the theory and practice of *Reading to Learn* and the rationale for rewriting teacher-student interactions. I then briefly illustrate the pattern and analyse part of one lesson transcript to highlight the challenges for teachers in taking up new patterns of talk and the value of transcript analysis as a tool for supporting pedagogic change.

The Scaffolding Approach in Reading to Learn

Reading to Learn (hereafter referred to as *R2L*) builds on three major theoretical bases: first, on the model of learning as scaffolding developed by Bruner (1986), after Vygotsky (1978); second, on functional grammar (Halliday 1994) and genre theory (eg Christie 1999, Christie & Martin 1997, Martin 1985, 1999, Martin, Christie & Rothery 1987, Martin & Rose 2006, Cope & Kalantzis 1993); and third, on a theory of the structuring of pedagogic discourse (Bernstein 1990, 1996). Over a number of years, the approach has combined and refined a variety of literacy strategies, including genre-based approaches to writing and scaffolding approaches to reading with Indigenous students (Rose 1999, 2004, Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999, Rose, Lui-Chivize,

Knight & Smith 2004) using insights from educational linguistics (Martin & Rose 2005). *R2L* differs in several respects from other literacy interventions commonly offered to underachieving students in the middle years. It does not claim to address 'multiliteracies' or the broad repertoire of knowledges, skills and capabilities required for literacy competence in a mutimodal world (New London Group 1996, Lo Bianco & Freebody 1997). Rather, it focuses attention on developing print-based literacy and on supporting students in 'accessing the academic-literate discourses of schooling' (Gray 1998). 'Discourse' in this context is defined as the particular socio-cultural way of thinking, acting, interacting, talking, and valuing, connected with a particular social identity or role (Gee 1991) that give expressions to the meanings and value of social groups and institutions (Kress 1985).

The scaffolding approach in *R2L* has been the subject of a long-term action research project with education programs at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, across Australia and internationally (Rose 2005a). Previous research suggests that the approach accelerates the progress of underachieving students, and succeeds in helping all students access the academic-literate discourses of schooling (Carbines, Wyatt & Robb 2006, Culican 2005, Milburn & Culican 2003, Rose 2005a). The DETYA Strategic Results Project *Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Children in School* was independently evaluated with the finding that, in one year, 'the average improvement in reading and writing was 2.5 levels . . . [with] much higher levels of student participation' (McRae et al. 2000, pp. 24-6). Similarly, the Literacy Intervention Research Project carried out by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, in 2003-4 showed average literacy gains of more than a CSF level in improvement within approximately three school terms, or approximately double the expected rate of literacy development. A further 20% of students made gains of two or more CSF levels, or four times the expected rate of literacy development.' (Culican 2005, p. 57).

R2L proposes a particular pattern of spoken interaction between teacher and students. This can be described as an alternative pattern of discourse, where 'discourse' is interpreted according to Bernstein's model of teaching and learning as 'pedagogic discourse' (1990, 1996). A number of literacy intervention programs and pedagogies seek to impose a particular pattern or 'script' on teacher-student interactions around texts in the classroom. Some of these are commercially packaged and offer a series of staged texts, teaching resources and assessment activities. Others set out a pedagogic model, which teachers can implement using school materials and resources. What *R2L* does additionally is attempt to change, or rewrite, the basic pattern of traditional teacher-student interaction in order to scaffold students to read and write high level, age-appropriate texts that are curriculum-linked. Further, this pedagogy can be implemented in both mainstream and intervention contexts.

Educational disadvantage and literacy underachievement clearly derive from a complex web of factors. Nevertheless, a range of studies of classroom discourse carried out in culturally diverse and/or low socio-economic settings in Australia indicate that the structuring of classroom talk warrants closer attention by researchers. Results from studies of *R2L* suggest that developing more inclusive patterns of talk may be a significant means by which teachers can democratise literacy practice and improve literacy outcomes.

My doctoral research specifically investigates the best ways to support teachers in adopting new patterns of classroom talk, using teacher interviews and joint analysis of lesson transcripts. The teachers in the study were participants in a professional development project initiated by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) as a middle years literacy research initiative in 2003-4 (Culican 2005). Teachers involved in this initiative were trained by Rose and required to implement *R2L* with a number of 'target' students identified as disadvantaged or underachieving in the middle years (Years 5 to 9 in Victoria). Some teachers worked with students in a 'withdrawal' setting while most implemented *R2L* as part of mainstream classroom practice. Teachers collected quantitative and qualitative data on the progress and achievement of the target students and also of a representative sample of students from the same year level in order to compare results.

Key elements of the *R2L* teacher training program developed by Rose are building teacher knowledge about texts and language across curriculum learning areas and cultivating teacher awareness of patterns of pedagogic discourse. Teachers in the program typically attend a number of workshops where they receive written and audiovisual materials, including sample lesson plans and demonstration lessons. They also videotape themselves presenting a lesson to students using one of the two *R2L* lesson sequences – one for narrative and one for factual texts. Fundamental to effective practice of these lesson sequences is control of the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle (Rose 2004) and the discourse pattern through which the Cycle is enacted. However, previous research (eg Milburn & Culican 2003) indicates that changing habituated patterns of classroom talk is difficult, even where teachers accept the rationale underpinning *R2L*, as outlined below.

How Traditional Patterns of Classroom Discourse Exclude Some Learners

Learning to Read:Reading to Learn is firmly located in a view of literacy as social practice and a view of schooling as cultural learning. Within this framework, the teacher-student interactions that take place around texts in the classroom are seen as culturally acquired. For students from middle class, literate, school-oriented homes, there is close alignment between home/community literacy practices and the academic-literate discourses of schooling. For students from less advantaged

backgrounds, however, there is frequently a gap between home and school literacy practices (Rose 1999, 2004). Though students may bring diverse oral and literate knowledges, skills and capabilities to school, these do not necessarily match with those that schooling requires and rewards (Gee 1996). Thus, it is argued that success in schooling is likely to have more to do with the extent to which students have been inducted or 'acculturated' into the particular discourses that take place around written texts (Rose 1999, 2004) than with individual cognitive ability.

For many students identified as disadvantaged or at risk, the gap between home and school literacy practices poses a significant barrier to learning (Heath 1983, Rose 1999, 2004). A number of research studies indicate that the range in achievement widens as students approach adolescence and progress through the middle and secondary years of schooling (Cairney et al. 1998, Hill & Russell 1999). Further, as the school curriculum becomes increasingly abstract and specialised, the literacy demands and learning expectations become more complex and sophisticated (Christie 1990, Cumming et al. 1998).

Traditional patterns of classroom discourse that take place around written texts have evolved in ways that are claimed to be unsuccessful for disadvantaged students and which can remain a barrier to participation and learning (Rose 2004, Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999). Though this is arguably more visible for Indigenous students, the 'cultural gap' between what students bring to school and what success in schooling requires may be equally significant for other groups of students who are also identified as 'underperforming' in literacy in national literacy surveys (eg Masters & Forster 1997) and in the national literacy policy (DETYA 1998). Among these are students from language backgrounds other than English and students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Patterns of classroom talk in schooling have been the subject of extensive educational research (eg Wells 1999, Mercer 1995, Edwards & Westgate 1994). Though the epistemologies and pedagogies associated with particular subject disciplines may differ, these patterns appear to be a universal 'template' for talk in educational settings (Nassaji & Wells 2000, Rose 2004, Wells 1999). These patterns are historically and culturally located and have evolved over a period of time to become inextricably interwoven in the identities and subjectivities of teachers and students. They are habitual, intuitive and largely unconscious, hence Cazden's phrase 'the usually transparent medium' (1988). Thus, unless deliberately made an object of study, patterns of classroom discourse can remain invisible to teachers and unrecognised as a determinant of academic success or as a mechanism of exclusion.

The most common pattern is described by Lemke as 'triadic dialogue' (1985). According to Wells (1999), this ubiquitous three-part exchange structure, in its prototypical form, consists of three main moves:

> . . . an *initiation*, usually in the form of a teacher question, a response, in which a student attempts to answer the question, and a follow-up move, in which the teacher provides some sort of feedback to the student's response'. (Wells 1999, p. 167)

This pattern is variously referred to in the literature as the IRF pattern (Wells 1999); as the IRE pattern, where 'e' stands for 'evaluation' (Mehan 1979); or as the Q&A pattern – 'question and answer' pattern (Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995). It is said to account for a possible 70% of teacher-student classroom interactions (Wells 1999, Nassaji & Wells 2000). Much has been documented about the different ways this pattern works to construct learners differentially in classrooms and there is, as Wells claims, considerable debate about whether it limits and controls student participation (Wood 1992 & Lemke 1992 cited in Wells 1999); whether it is fundamentally effective (Mercer 1992 cited in Wells 1999); or whether it can be used flexibly to achieve a variety of productive goals including the co-construction of knowledge (Wells 1999). Further, there is a view that too narrow a research focus on the structuring of talk in the IRE pattern obscures a view of larger units or cycles of pedagogic and curriculum activity that may ultimately yield a more significant and telling analysis (Christie 2002).

An aspect of the IRE pattern frequently critiqued, however, is the use of questions as the 'driving machinery' of classroom interactions (Freebody et al. 1995, p. 312). Freebody's study found, much 'interactive trouble' in teacher-student interactions was due to several 'prevalent and apparently unquestioned routines of talk':

> The first is the constant use of questioning as the driving machinery of teaching and learning; the second is that these questioning sequences do not usually follow any prior explication of the task at hand, or the outcomes expected, or the level of language that is the focus, or the interactive routines that will be put in place . . . (Freebody et al. 1995, p. 312)

The Scaffolding Interaction Cycle is similar in many respects to the IRE pattern. Both patterns are 'triadic' in that they consist of three main moves: an initiating move by the teacher, a response by the student and an evaluating move by the teacher. Both patterns are highly teacher-directed in that the teacher controls the turn-taking and has ultimate jurisdiction over what will be accepted as an appropriate response.

However, there are differences in the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle which, though subtle, have significant consequences for the way the teacher-student interaction unfolds. These

differences lie chiefly in the structuring of the initiating move. In the IRE pattern, the initiating move is usually a question. This question can be described as 'unprepared' in the sense that it does not contain within it the knowledge resources needed to answer successfully. Prerequisite knowledge is expected to come from 'outside' the pattern – for example, from previous learning experiences in a topic or unit of work, or from students' own ideas and experiences. Indeed, the whole purpose of the question is usually to ascertain what students already know and what they have understood from previous learning. Therefore, where initiating questions identify gaps in students' knowledge (whether from no response or from an incorrect response), a teacher will use this to inform the next stage in the teaching/learning sequence. This pattern is so intuitive in teachers' practice that it is virtually invisible as the dominant pattern of classroom discourse.

It is the centrality of the question as the primary initiating move that the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle in *R2L* seeks to change:

> [Teachers] . . . report that a minority of learners are consistently able to engage in classroom activities, to respond successfully to teacher questions (the primary means by which we interact with our students), and to succeed in assessment tasks. Another group are sometimes able to actively engage, to respond to questions and achieve average success, while a third group are often unable to engage, rarely respond, and are frequently unsuccessful in tasks. Relations in other words, between learners in every classroom and school, are unequal. As a result the learner identities that are produced and maintained . . . are stratified as successful, average or unsuccessful. This inequality is universally construed . . . whether overtly or not, as differences in learning 'ability'. (Rose 2005a, p. 2)

Rose argues that the unprepared questions characteristic of the initiating move in IRE privilege experienced readers who continually recognise, predict and recall patterns they are familiar with and who have developed sophisticated skimming and scanning skills. Weaker readers, on the other hand, lack the experience, knowledge resources and skills required to participate successfully in these interactions (Rose 2005a). Asking questions that students are not equipped to answer adds to cognitive load and increases the stress experienced by the learner, often reinforcing negative learner identity and a sense of failure.

Democratising Literacy through the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle

The Scaffolding Interaction Cycle proposes an alternative way of structuring talk around texts in the classroom. This structure claims to democratise literacy practice by equipping all learners equally with the knowledge resources required to participate successfully in classroom discourse. The Cycle is made up of three main

'moves' – *prepare, identify* and *elaborate*. These moves keep the interaction going and are enacted verbally by the teacher through a series of sentence stems that make up the discourse pattern. They are summarised as follows:

> **Prepare:** teacher paraphrases the general meaning of the sentence and provides prompts for students to recognise and identify sentence wordings.
>
> **Identify:** using teacher prompts, students identify sentence wordings; teacher affirms the response; teacher directs students to highlight specified wordings.
>
> **Elaborate:** teacher leads students in a discussion of higher order meanings, defining terms, explaining key concepts and discussing ideas.
>
> (Adapted from Rose 2003a)

While the starting point of the IRE pattern is usually a question, the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle begins with a series of statements designed to give students information about the text. This move is called the *prepare* move because it 'prepares' all students in advance of the question. The teacher begins by giving students an orientation to the general meaning of a sentence, then provides preparation prompts or cues to help students correctly identify key wordings in the clauses of the sentence. Only after this does the teacher pose a question asking students to identify and highlight specified sentence wordings.

Changing the structure of the initiating move has implications, in turn, for the evaluate move. In the IRE pattern, a teacher's question may receive a variety of student responses. This is especially the case in the so-called 'mixed ability' classes typical of the middle years, where the range in student achievement has been shown to be wider than in other stages of schooling (Cairney et al. 1998, Hill & Russell 1999). Thus, in IRE the teacher gives different kinds of evaluations of student responses – positive, qualified or negative.

In contrast, the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle is designed to ensure that the teacher's evaluation is positive. This is made possible by the structuring of the *prepare* move which, by giving them the knowledge they need to be successful, ensures that all students are able to answer questions correctly. This leads to positive evaluation from the teacher in the *identify* move where the correct response is affirmed. This leads, in turn, to the *elaborate* move where the teacher guides the students in a joint discussion of text meanings. Depending on the text, this discussion may involve defining key terms or instances of literate language (such as metaphor), explaining concepts and/or discussing relevant ideas and experiences.

The three moves of the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle are enacted using particular sentence stems, which differ for each move. These sentence stems are the verbal or linguistic framework on which the discussion of a specified text 'hangs'. Though the content or substance of the dialogue changes according to the text being discussed, the sentence stems are used consistently. Developing control of – or habituating – these sentence stems is a crucial step for teachers embedding the new pattern of discourse in their practice. Figure 1 shows these sentence stems. The smaller components of the moves – or sub-moves – are shown in brackets.

Scaffolding Interaction Cycle	Sentence stems for the scaffolding prompts or cues
Prepare	'The first/next part of the sentence tells us…' (sentence preparation) 'It starts by saying (position cue) that…' (meaning cue)
Identify	'Can you see the words that tell us…?' 'That's right' (affirm). 'Let's highlight…' (highlight)
Elaborate	(discuss) 'That means…' 'Why do you think…?' 'Have you ever…?' etc

Figure 1

Figure 2 below gives an example of how the pattern looks when enacted on part of a narrative text. In order to illustrate it, I have selected the first sentence of a key passage in Paul Jennings' story 'Mousechap' (*Uncanny* 1994:9). In this example, the sentence stems are shown in italics. The text in the *elaborate* move is intended to be indicative only of what a teacher might say, as the discussion with students will always unfold in slightly different ways.

This discourse pattern is highly prescribed and can seem overly structured, even mechanistic. Further, it may appear that the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle imposes a structure on classroom interaction around texts where previously there was none. It is more accurate, however, to say that the Cycle applies a structure that is systematic, explicit and overt as distinct from one that is implicit and enacted by teachers intuitively.

The Challenge of Changing Classroom Discourse Patterns

The focus of my research is on the change in teachers' pedagogic discourse and the struggles and successes they experience in taking up the new discourse pattern in the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle. Transcripts of *R2L* lessons are the main source of data in the research. Joint discussion and analysis of lesson transcripts in interviews with teachers are both an analytic tool for advancing the research and also a pedagogic tool for engaging teachers in a conversation that supports them in making change.

The purpose of this joint analysis was not to highlight deficits in teacher talk but, rather, to talk to teachers about their talk and to make patterns visible using a collaborative process designed to give teachers voice and agency in their practice.

Scaffolding Interaction Cycle	An example of teacher dialogue in the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle
Prepare	*The first sentence tells us* what the boy telling the story heard (sentence preparation). *The sentence starts by saying* (position cue) that it was completely dark, and that the boy couldn't see anything at all (meaning cue). *Can you see the words that tell us* how dark it was?
Identify	**(students respond)** *That's exactly right.* It says 'In the blackness' (affirm). *Let's highlight* the words 'In the blackness' (highlight).
Elaborate	*Why do you think* the author tells us that the boy is surrounded by blackness? **(students and teacher discuss, for example…)** *Do you think* it's more frightening than if Jennings just said it was dark? *Remember how* he was lying in bed before and it was so dark that he felt really spooked? And that he didn't want to stay at his aunt's in the first place? *Have you ever* felt spooked staying over at someone else's house? *So how do you think* he would be feeling now?

Figure 2
Example sentence: 'In the blackness, the sounds of soft gobbling came from behind the locked door.'

My previous research into teachers' experiences of *R2L* indicates that the new pattern is difficult for teachers to take up, with some moves proving more challenging than others (Milburn & Culican 2003). This is not so much because the pattern is difficult but rather that a recurring problem for teachers lies in 'defaulting' to habitual patterns and, in particular, using questions to initiate classroom interactions. The following analysis briefly explores this problem in one part of a lesson transcript, selected because of the discussion it generated in interview with the teacher. This analysis is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to illuminate the struggles teachers experience in rewriting patterns of classroom talk.

The transcript shows Juliette (teacher pseudonym), one of four research participants in the study, enacting 'Detailed Reading', which is a core component of the lesson sequences where the discourse pattern is used most intensively. The transcript is taken from a videotape, which shows Juliette reading a narrative text with a small group of students described as 'low literacy'. The students are in the upper primary years in a school situated in a culturally diverse, low socio-economic area of Melbourne in Victoria. Among them are new and recent arrivals from language

backgrounds other than English. Juliette has over twenty years teaching experience. At the time of this lesson, she was a participant in the CEOM Literacy Intervention Research Project and in her first few months of learning about the scaffolding approach in *R2L*.

The text is the story 'Bart's Balloon' from *A Lot of Hot Air* by Australian author Terry Denton (2004). At the beginning of the lesson, Juliette prepared students with a brief summary of the content and the way the story unfolds, followed by reading it aloud. For Detailed Reading, students were given photocopies of the story, printed below, and highlighter pens to mark particular wordings.

> One day in 1709, the King and Queen of Portugal were sitting around in their palace, when a strange bloke knocked on their door. 'I am Bartholomeu de Gusmao of Brazil' he announced. 'And I have something earth-shatteringly brilliant to show you'.
> So the King and Queen called all their friends and relatives and hangers-on into the palace. Bartolomeu de Gusmao removed from his backpack a ball of paper. He opened it out into a sphere about half a metre in diameter. He attached a small bowl at the bottom. Then he crumpled up some paper into the bowl and set fire to it.
> A few seconds later, the paper sphere and bowl shot up into the air. Everyone gasped in amazement. As far as we know, they were the first people to ever see a hot-air balloon (Denton 2004, p. 18).

Because my focus is on teachers' practice of the discourse pattern, the lesson transcript in Figure 3 is set out to highlight the three moves in the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle (after Rose 2004). The transcript shown below does not differentiate between responses from different students as these are analysed in another part of the study. In the *prepare* move, the position cues (where to look) and the meaning cues (what to look for) are identified using 'pc' and 'mc' respectively. The 'affirm' sub-move of the *identify* move in the Cycle is coded as a separate move in order to make it visible for analysis.

In the early stages of contact with the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle, teachers exhibit varying degrees of control of the different moves. As they develop deeper understanding of the Cycle, however, they begin to manipulate the moves more effectively as a chain of interaction, where each move creates the foundation for the next. This growth in confidence and expertise can often be seen even in the course of one lesson, with teachers making changes and adjustments to the Cycle 'on their feet' to enhance student participation.

Prepare	T	1	The first part of the sentence tells us (**pc**) when this story took place
		2	(**mc**). When was it, Sam?
Identify	S	3	*1709.*
Affirm	T	4	Yeah, good boy. *1709*. Let's highlight that.
Prepare	T	5	Then it tells us (**pc**) about the people – the who – two people who were
		6	there (**mc**).
Identify	S	7	*The King and Queen*
Affirm	T	8	Yeah, good. Highlight that.
Prepare	T	9	<u>And</u> (**pc**) where they were (**mc**). Where were the King and Queen?
		10	Yes, Joe?
Identify	S	11	*In Portugal*?
Affirm	T	12	Yes. The King and Queen were *in Portugal*.
Prepare	T	13	Now it tells us (**pc**) what they were doing (**mc**). Andrew, what were
		14	they doing?
Identify	S	15	*Sitting around.*
Affirm	T	16	They were *sitting around*. Good boy. Let's highlight *sitting around.*
Prepare	T	17	Where were they sitting around (**mc**)?
Identify	S	18	In the palace.
Affirm	T	19	In the palace. Good boy. *In <u>their</u> palace*. Right.
Prepare	T	20	Ian, then it tells us (**pc**) <u>what</u> some-one did (**mc**).
Identify	S	21	(pause; another student answers) *A strange bloke knocked on their*
		22	*door.*
Prepare	T	23	(**mc**) So who was it, Ian?
Identify	S	24	*A strange bloke.*
Affirm	T	25	*A strange bloke.*
Elaborate	T	26	What's *bloke*? William?
	S	27	(pause; no response)
	T	28	You don't know?
	S	29	(another student answers) A man?
	T	30	Yeah. It's a man. *A strange bloke*.
Prepare	T	31	And what did that *strange bloke* do (**mc**)? Ian?
Identify	S	32	He *knocked on their door*?
Affirm	T	33	He *knocked on their door*. Good boy. Sure did. Let's highlight
		34	*knocked on their door.*
Prepare	T	35	Okay. Robert, now it tells us (**pc**) what that strange bloke said (**mc**).
		36	What <u>did</u> he say?
Identify	S	37	*I am Bartholomeu de Gusmao of Brazil.*
Affirm	T	38	Good boy. Let's highlight all of that, because that's what he said.
Prepare		39	What word do they use instead of said?
Identify	S	40	*Announced*?
Affirm	T	41	*Announced*. Good boy.
Prepare	T	42	Now *Bartholomeu de Gusmao* tells them something (**pc**). He tells
		43	them about something incredible that he wants to show them (**mc**).
		44	What does he say, William?

Identify	S	45	*And I…have something* (begins to sound out) in..cred..ible *to show*
		46	*you.*
Identify(2)	S	47	(a different student responds) *earth-shatteringly brilliant*?
Affirm	T	48	Good boy, William. *I have something earth-shatteringly brilliant to*
		49	*show you.*
Elaborate	T	50	*Earth-shatteringly brilliant.* What do you think that means?
	S	51	Something special?
	T	52	Yeah, special, outstanding, incredible, blow your mind, amazing.
Affirm	T	53	Very good. Let's highlight *earth-shatteringly brilliant.*
Prepare	T	54	Now the next…we're going to a new paragraph now, and it tells us
		55	what they did next (**sp**). So, first of all (**pc**), who (**mc**)?
Identify	S	56	*The King and Queen.*
Affirm	T	57	Good. Let's highlight the <u>who</u>*, The King and Queen.*
Prepare	T	58	What did they do (**mc**)? Gerard?
Identify	S	59	They *called all their friends.*
Prepare	T	60	Well, actually…go on… it tells us they called three
		61	groups, didn't they (**mc**)? Who'd they call, Gerard?
Identify	S	62	*Friends.*
Prepare	T	63	Sally, who was the second group (**mc**)?
Identify	S	64	*Relatives.*
Affirm	T	65	Good.
Prepare	T	66	And who was the third group (**mc**)? Ian?
Identify	S	67	*Hangers-on. Hangers-on.*
Elaborate	T	68	What do they mean by *hangers-on*?
	S	69	Neighbours?
	T	70	Could be.
	S	71	Friends?
	T	72	Could be. Okay, those people who were just around the place.
		73	Around the palace at the time. So let's highlight who they called –
		74	*friends and relatives and hangers-on…*

Figure 3

Juliette's transcript demonstrates several characteristics typical of teachers new to the Cycle. While she shows understanding of its structure, she is still in the early stages of exploiting the potential of each move and in using each move to set up the next. The transcript shows repeated use of the phrase 'good boy' and, less often, 'good girl' in affirming student responses. Though these affirmations are positive, the choice of wording is unfortunate in that they appear to affirm the person or to evaluate the behaviour rather than the response. Juliette identified this, independently of my analysis, as a concern in her habituated practice, suggesting that it stemmed from her attempt to boost the confidence of those students in the class who normally appear shy and reluctant to respond. Interestingly, the latter part of the transcript shows a progressive shift away from these phrases (eg Lines 53, 57 & 65). This suggests that

Juliette is auditing her practice and making adjustments in her discourse as she goes along.

Juliette also expressed concern about her tendency to frame teacher prompts in the *prepare* and *elaborate* moves in ways that failed to give students adequate support in identifying and discussing text meanings. Given the nature of her 'low literacy' group, establishing new patterns of classroom talk was seen by the school as a critical strategy in enhancing understanding of written texts. This aspect of Juliette's practice became a focus in joint analysis of her lesson transcript and frames the following discussion of *prepare* and *elaborate* moves.

Analysing Moves in the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle

The *prepare* move is made up of two main sub-moves: *sentence preparation*, which paraphrases the general meaning of the sentence, and *position* and *meaning cues*, which give students prompts to identify sentence wordings. Only at the end of the *prepare* move – after the teacher has given students information about the text in the sub-moves – does the teacher pose a question asking students to identify sentence wordings.

Teachers new to the pattern typically find the *prepare* move difficult because it represents a significant departure from the patterns they are used to. Initiating classroom interaction using statements rather than questions feels as though it reverses the 'natural order of things' by seeming to tell students the answer before asking the question. The degree of unfamiliarity and discomfort of this move can be measured by how often parts of it are overlooked or omitted. In this example, Juliette overlooks *sentence preparation* and moves straight into giving *position* and *meaning cues* (1-2) for the first part of the sentence:

Prepare	T	1	The first part of the sentence tells us (**pc**) when this story took place
		2	(**mc**) When was it, Sam?
Identify	S	3	*1709*
Affirm	T	4	Yeah, good boy. *1709*. Let's highlight that.

Figure 4

Critically important in selecting and framing *meaning* cues is the teacher's knowledge of students and the teacher's judgment of the difficulty of the text. Together, these factors determine the degree of scaffolding or support required. Rose (2004) identifies two main kinds of *meaning cues*: 'commonsense paraphrase' cues and 'wh' cues. 'Commonsense paraphrase' cues offer the most supported reading because they give alternative wordings or synonyms from 'everyday' language for words and phrases in the text. 'Wh'

cues are so named because they start with *who, what, when, where, why or how*. These are used where the teacher can be confident that students have sufficient knowledge to recognise the wordings to which the cues refer. An example of a 'wh' *meaning cue* beginning with 'when' can be seen above where Juliette says 'when this story took place' (1).

Analysis of lesson transcripts in the study shows that teachers new to the pattern tend to use many more 'wh' cues than 'commonsense paraphrase' cues. This suggests that they find it difficult to select and frame *meaning cues* that attend closely to the content of clauses in a sentence. Instead, they lean on 'wh' cues which, though perhaps not framed as questions, nevertheless resemble 'comprehension' style questions beginning *with who, what, when, where, why* or *how*. This over-reliance on 'wh' cues indicates the centrality of *what, when, where, why* and *how* questions in teachers' habituated practice and suggests a default to the traditional structure of the IRE pattern.

Juliette's transcript in Figure 3 shows that, of a total of 16 *meaning cues*, 14 are 'wh' cues. As in the example in Line 1 of Figure 4, many of these are entirely appropriate and used where she is confident that students can identify the wording. However, at other times, her selection of 'wh' cues over 'commonsense paraphrase' cues fails to provide sufficient support for the weak readers in her group. Her use of the 'what' cue in this example gives an illustration:

Prepare	T	20	Ian, then it tells us (**pc**) <u>what</u> some-one did (**mc**).
Identify	S	21	(pause; another student answers) *A strange bloke knocked on*
		22	*their door.*
Prepare	T	23	So who was it, Ian (**mc**)?
Identify	S	24	*A strange bloke.*
Affirm	T	25	*A strange bloke.*

Figure 5

Here, Juliette's selection of a 'what' *meaning cue* in 'what someone did' (20) shows that she is struggling to make her *meaning cues* specific. The cue is too general to give 'Ian' support in locating the particular wording she is after. In this instance, a more supportive use of 'wh' *meaning cues* would separate the 'who' from the 'what', giving a separate *meaning cue* for each. For example, instead of 'what some-one did', she could use 'who' to cue the wording *strange bloke* then 'what he did' to cue the wording knocked at the door. Even more supportive in this instance would be a 'commonsense paraphrase' cue as this would provide a synonym such as 'a man they didn't know' for the wording *strange bloke*. This would not only lessen the cognitive load and stress for the weaker reader but also prepare the ground for a rich discussion later in the *elaborate* move.

The default to questions that provide inadequate support is evident also in Juliette's enactment of the *elaborate* move. The *elaborate* move builds on understandings established in the preceding *prepare* and *identify* moves. These understandings support students to participate in a discussion of higher order meanings in the text. Whereas the *prepare* and *identify* moves are more tightly scripted, the teacher-student interaction in the *elaborate* move can unfold in slightly different ways, depending on the nature of the text and meanings being discussed. More than others, this move requires teachers to 'think on their feet' and to work with what students offer. It may be this open-endedness that sees teachers fail to exploit the potential of the move and commonly revert to more familiar questioning routines.

The transcript in Figure 3 reveals only three *elaborate* moves. Each of these focuses on the literal meanings of text wordings and each is initiated using a question. The example below shows Juliette's first *elaborate* move, which comes at the end of the sequence in Figure 5 discussed earlier.

Prepare	T	20	Ian, then it tells us (**pc**) what some-one did (**mc**).
Identify	S	21	(pause; another student answers) *A strange bloke knocked on*
		22	*their door.*
Prepare	T	23	So who was it, Ian (**mc**)?
Identify	S	24	*A strange bloke.*
Affirm	T	25	*A strange bloke.*
Elaborate	T	26	What's *bloke*? William?
	S	27	(pause; no response)
Elaborate (2)	T	28	You don't know?
	S	29	(another student answers) A man?
	T	30	Yeah. It's a man. *A strange bloke.*

Figure 6

Where the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle is working effectively, the *prepare* and *identify* moves deal with the literal meanings of sentence wordings and provide a foundation on which the *elaborate* move can build. Here, Juliette's enactment of the *prepare* and *identify* moves fails to equip 'William' to answer the question 'What's bloke?' (26) in the *elaborate* move. The low support meaning cues she selects in the prepare move mean that, instead of 'raising the bar' in the *elaborate* move, she has to 'backtrack' to check that students understand the literal meanings of the sentence wordings. This focus on the literal appears to restrict the discussion thus preventing Juliette from actualising the potential of the *elaborate* move for exploring other kinds

of meanings such as the possible double meanings in the word *strange* and/or the effect of Denton's use of colloquialisms such as *bloke* in the story.

Juliette's next two elaborations follow a similar pattern of focusing on literal meaning and initiating the move with a 'what does it mean'? type of unprepared question:

Elaborate	T	50	*Earth-shatteringly brilliant.* What do you think that means?
	S	51	Something special?
	T	52	Yeah, special, outstanding, incredible, blow your mind, amazing.
	T	53	Very good. Let's highlight *earth-shatteringly brilliant.*
Elaborate	T	68	What do they mean by *hangers-on*?
	S	69	Neighbours?
	T	70	Could be.
	S	71	Friends?
	T	72	Could be. Okay, those people who were just around the place.
		73	Around the palace at the time. So let's highlight who they called –
		74	*friends and relatives and hangers-on*.

Figure 7

Though the student Juliette selects in Line 51 draws on his or her own resources to answer the question successfully, students' responses in Lines 69 and 71 appear to be a process of elimination, or guesswork, each receiving the qualified affirmation 'could be' (70 & 72) before the teacher gives the answer herself (72).

These examples from the *prepare* and *elaborate* moves of Juliette's transcript give a glimpse of the challenges for teachers in rewriting habituated patterns of classroom talk. In the case of Juliette, the process of examining and discussing a written transcript of her lesson led her to identify particular trends and patterns in her practice and to evaluate aspects such as the use of unprepared questions and the underplaying of the *elaborate* move.

In sum, the detailed analysis of classroom discourse patterns offered in this article may seem somewhat distanced from key issues in middle schooling or even in middle years literacy. Nevertheless, it is my argument that, while the effort to take up new patterns of classroom talk requires intensive labour on the part of teachers and sustained professional support, the evidence to date suggests that the impact on student outcomes is worthwhile. Though clearly there are more elements in the middle years mix than the structuring of pedagogic discourse, any aspect of classroom

practice with potential to become more democratic and inclusive demands the attention of researchers.

A central question to ask is how sustainable the new pattern of discourse is once it is learned. Juliette is one of two research participants being tracked over time to investigate the extent to which the new pattern 'holds' in classroom talk and the long-term impact on teachers' work. My research methods may themselves hold some of the keys to this question. Preliminary analysis of Juliette's (and other research participants') lessons presented to students several months further into the study shows significant change and growth in teachers' structuring of the Scaffolding Interaction Cycle to maximise student participation and learning. A result of my study is that collaboration with teachers using detailed lesson transcripts as a basis is a powerful tool in facilitating pedagogic change. This creates a reflective space for looking closely at classroom interactions and for placing a lens on an aspect of professional practice that teachers rarely have an opportunity to analyse in detail. This research, therefore, holds promise for further professional development work with teachers in analysing the effects and outcomes of the structuring of classroom talk and supporting pedagogic change in middle years literacy.

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