

**Understanding and exercising one's own grammar:
Four applications of linguistic and discourse knowledge**

LESLEY REX

School of Education, University of Michigan

DAVID WEST BROWN

School of Education, University of Michigan

LINDA DENSTAEDT

Independent educational consultant

LAURA HANIFORD

College of Education, California State University, Fullerton

LAURA SCHILLER¹

Oakland Schools, Michigan

School of Education, University of Michigan

ABSTRACT: In this essay, five researchers, who are also English educators, describe the research they have crafted to improve the quality of classroom literacy education. They begin by describing their common perspective afforded by linguistics, discourse analysis and related social theory. Their framework and studies describe their action-oriented epistemology for studying key issues in novice English teacher education, experienced English teacher continuing education, writing textbook production, and Standard English teaching. The authors argue for teaching teachers and students the linguistic and discursive tools through which they can create and exercise their own grammars to generate productive social practices.

KEYWORDS: Discourse analysis, critical, literacy education, language, grammar.

INTRODUCTION: A PERSPECTIVE FOR IMPROVING ENGLISH TEACHING

At the end of their article "The English Patient: English Grammar and Teaching in the Twentieth Century," Dick Hudson and John Walmsley write the following:

In the education system, the quality of government documents, the quality of teaching about language, and specifically the training of future teachers of English are all areas where standards could be raised by improving the quality of input from linguists (2005, p. 619).

¹ Other than the first author who served as organiser of the project, the order of author names is alphabetical and should not be read as reflecting a difference in amount or quality of contribution.

We wholeheartedly agree with Hudson and Walmsley's position and have been working to bring linguistics and discourse analysis to English education in the United States in our professional roles as researchers and teacher educators. This essay reflects our collective rumination about what we have done. In it we report the empirical studies we have designed to address issues central to improving the classroom teaching of English. Writing this essay involved explaining to each other our particular applications of linguistic theories and observing our commonalities. We discovered that we rely on similar constructs of language and of social theory such as the critical discourse theories of Norman Fairclough and colleagues (1992; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) to explain educational life as discursive social worlds wherein social practices are the basis of social action. Most particularly, we depend upon the idea that social practice and discursive practice are mutually constitutive. That is, as defined by Ron Scollon (2001) in explicating his theory of mediated discourse, we take discourse to always be mediated by social practice while simultaneously taking all social practice to be mediated by discourse. One is accomplished to a great extent through the other, and within this dynamic, individuals are socialised as social actors. Language is, for us, the utilitarian medium for constructing and reconstructing educational worlds such as classrooms and the knowledge and identities of the teachers and students who populate them.

Consequently, the five of us study language-in-use, rather than language as an abstract system. We are interested in what happens when students and teachers make use of their knowledge of language and language practices, or ways of using language, to do things, unknowingly as well as intentionally. Sociolinguists illustrate how those practices occur interactionally (for example, Gumperz, 1986, 1992; Tannen, 1993). They have demonstrated how a speaker can express similar meaning through different language and language practices for different social and cultural reasons. This understanding of language underlies key issues in literacy education regarding what students should know about and do with spoken and written English, as well as how teachers should teach literacy subject matter.

For content to be meaningful for different situations and learners requires discursive skill to achieve social footing (Goffman, 1981). Teachers who are aware of the relevance of footing—or, the importance of shifting their “projections of self” to align with their students expectations—build social relationships that complement the relationships with knowledge they are also building together. For successful teaching and learning, we assume students and teachers should understand how the language they use “means” or is seen as sensible and relevant or not in different social circumstances. How one sounds, the phraseology one uses, in addition to the content one communicates have repercussions within and beyond the classroom in defining the power one can exercise within economic and political as well as social relationships. If mobility and access are key goals of literacy education, then knowing how one positions oneself and others through ones' use of language is important knowledge.

Nevertheless, discourse studies have also shown us that those who grow up with language(s) that carry social and economic capital have an advantage over those

language-users who encounter socially dominant language forms only in school (Heath, 1983). We consider it unrealistic to expect that everyone will be able to (or seek to) fully augment established language practices with what educators present as forms that are in their best interest. It is unreasonable and unfair to expect that all of those who do seek to become fluent in different language genres, even with the most meaningful of curricula and pedagogies, will learn at a level of proficiency and ease of application enjoyed by lifetime speakers. Contextualisation cues, vocabularies, and syntax structures that are tacit knowledge and second nature for students (and teachers) present more onerous choices for those new to the language, requiring conscious, focal, strategic decisions. Questions of what constitutes equity of access and fair assessment raised by this situation drive our inquiries and applications of linguistics and discourse analysis.

The distinction between language as intentional strategic performance and as unconscious enactment of pre-learned language practices is also key in our efforts to improve teaching. Observing retrospectively when speakers-writers appear to drive language and when they occupy the passenger seat and seem to be driven by language is central to understanding the power of discourse, and therefore the reason to study and teach it. By taking an interactional approach, we view discourse as both strategic and adaptive and linked to individual efforts to be, and be recognised, as a particular person (Gee, 1999). We assume that over the course of their interactions, speakers and writers both respond to and initiate language practices to react to and negotiate the exercise of power and the enactment and construction of identity. Power, an individual's desired state, based on Max Weber's classic definition (1947), is the probability that a person will be in a position to carry out her own will though there may be resistance. This experiential state of "freedom of action" (Watts, 1991) – to sense one can freely achieve one's goals – is for us a useful way of construing what motivates students' discursive engagement in literacy learning. To protect and exercise their freedom of action, teachers and students speak so as to powerfully position themselves in relation to others. Their acts of speech and writing are acts of identity as well as means for building worlds in which those identities prosper (Gee, 1999). In classrooms where literacy is learned and practised, understanding these relationships between language, identity, and world-making helps teachers improve their pedagogy as well as learn with and from their students and other teachers.

We are guided in our view of subject matter content, such as grammar, by perspectives amenable to Johnstone's: "Understanding language means understanding the process of discourse through which people constantly figure out what to say, how to say things, and how to understand what others say, in the process of interacting with others" (Johnstone, 2002, p. 235). Consequently, we hold that language study should not consist entirely of conventional rules for using language. Many routinely used sentence structures are considered incomplete, incorrect, or even nonexistent in conventional grammars used for curriculum instruction. The conventional study of language as static forms and structures leaves out what people actually do when they talk, sign or write. The way language is used as interactional discourse involving contextual and paralinguistic cues is not dealt with. Neither do conventional language studies consider discourses as interpretative repertoires or value-laden ideologies for evoking and creating worlds and the positions of

people in them (Edley, 2001). We posit that language study is more usefully thought of as a process inseparable from human social practices through which people create their own “grammars” to operate successfully in the world. These grammars are successful because they are fluid, responsive and adaptive to the social and discursive conditions in which they are created. Language study curriculum for teachers and students should make use of this knowledge.

In applying these constructs, our choices of research projects are predicated on the view that the centrality of language in the world has yet to become operational knowledge for the American general public, for policy setters, and for too many educators. As a result, we exist in a world of education in which many of the creators and managers, as well as recipients, of the policies and procedures that direct the conditions and purposes of our work often do not acknowledge, take into account, or take responsibility for the power of their own language practices in constructing and maintaining social practices. This situation has led us to seek out and apply all manner of linguistic knowledge to inform, manage and mediate the effects of this condition in various US sites vis-à-vis issues of literacy education.

Our challenge is to teach educators (who can then teach their students), that in the language they and others use, they keep inequitable, insensible, unproductive and oppressive, as well as fair, just, responsive and productive social practices and world views in place. In keeping with our perspective that social actions and the practices and conditions they constitute are visible as everyday discursive language-in-use, we also assume that linguistic knowledge can assist in transforming local conditions educators prefer not to reinforce. By following this principle to its logical expression, we assume that transformation of social practices, as a measured and deliberate re-articulation of educational language, can be accomplished by teaching people methods for explicating their own and others' language practices in their everyday lives and workplaces. Educational history has taught us that this goal is complicated by fraught issues of race and national policy, and by the socioeconomic-historical conditions in which we work.

Currently in the United States, no school district, classroom or teacher is untouched by policies initiated by the Standards Movement and *No Child Left Behind* legislation (2001). While an argument could be made for the nobility of its intentions – to change schooling conditions so that all children receive a good education – this vision of NCLB, perhaps inevitably since initial funding was \$39 billion under what was promised, has run into trouble in its execution (Dodd, 2005; Sternberg, 2004). The results of top-down demands for change, even from the most positive perspective, are mixed and troubling. Implementing a program of educational change – one that reaches into classroom lesson plans, is fueled by threats of school closure and dismissal, decided by standardised test scores, and deficient in professional development funding – has propelled some moribund teachers to change, many hardworking teachers to leave the profession, and those who stay to teach in ways they object to. A number of teachers report reluctantly narrowing the curriculum to fit high stakes tests. In some states, they have no choice; scripted curriculum is mandatory. A national survey of teachers reports that NCLB, along with conditions preceding its implementation, has profoundly affected who comes into and

who stays in teaching; the kind of professional development experience teachers want and how they take it up; the educational resources sanctioned, available, and sought after by practicing teachers; and what teachers teach and how to their students (Pedulla, Abrams, Madaus, Russell, Ramos, & Miao, 2003).

These trends are related to other equally troubling conditions, such as students who are least school congruent and “test able” – students with disabilities and for whom Standard English is a second language or language variety – dropping out of school (Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas, 2000). Citing disturbing events, including educators altering test answers and scores, leading educational scholars are arguing that high stakes testing for educational accountability will inevitably corrupt learning indicators and educators (Nichols and Berliner, 2005).

The five of us share a common view of the current conditions in which we are working as teachers, educational researchers and teacher educators, and which critically mould our roles as mediators of discourse analysis. We concur, through Foucault’s vision (1980), that the language and social practices of a historical time period shape what counts as socially, culturally and materially valued educational knowledge, and that those practices are a complex web of power relations. Taking these issues into account, we see our challenge as creating contexts in which awareness-raising and change-producing linguistic tools can be productively discussed, taught, learned and applied – preferably all four. However, convincing others of the value and power of linguistic knowledge is no small part of our challenge as we go about our daily work of applying discourse analysis in educating future and practising literacy teachers.

From this theoretical and historic perspective, we have approached key issues that effect classroom English teaching. Laura Haniford seeks to improve the education of pre-service and in-service English teachers. Laura Schiller and Lesley Rex grapple with building effective practising English teacher learning communities. Linda Denstaedt competes with commercial interests as she publishes guides for teaching writing, and David West Brown tackles the problem of teaching Standard English.

HOW STUDENT TEACHERS USE LANGUAGE TO REPRESENT AND CONSTRUCT DIFFERENCE (LAURA HANIFORD)

Introduction

An expanded notion of grammar – one that more broadly recognises language as an instrument in the negotiation between the self and social worlds – can be a powerful tool not just in conceptualising curricula, but also in understanding how identities and social relationships in educational communities are developed and enacted through language. The emerging identities of pre-service teachers are of particular interest because they ultimately affect teachers’ social orientations toward their students and colleagues as well as the content of teachers’ instruction. These identities can, in part, be understood by

analysing some of the discursive actions that pre-service teachers perform as they experience their teacher education. This understanding can then be used to inform possible interventions if potential problems are evidenced. Thus, by recognising a “grammar” of pre-service teaching, the social and instructional practices of education might be improved.

The study I describe begins with the premise that learning to teach English is a complex endeavour involving more than simply learning content and methods. Learning to teach English also involves adopting and enacting a new identity through language, and negotiating the relationship between this new identity and previous identities. Studying teacher identity is not merely an academic exercise. The choices (conscious and otherwise) English teachers make about who they are as a teacher impacts the decisions they make in planning and in the classroom. And yet, very little is known about the process of identity construction and/or productive ways for teacher educators to intervene.

Context

In the US, traditional undergraduate teacher education is generally a two-year course of study. Prospective English teachers enter the teacher education program at the beginning of their third year, when they are expected to complete their general education requirements while at the same time taking a sequence of professional courses. Many of the courses have a field experience component where prospective teachers are placed in local English classrooms for varying amounts of time. The culminating experience of most teacher education programs is the student teaching experience where prospective teachers are placed in a school for a semester and assume responsibility for designing and delivering instruction. A common requirement of many teacher preparation courses (including student teaching) is for prospective English teachers to design and sometimes teach unit plans for the classes they are working with.

I began this study with the premise that during teacher preparation, one of the ways pre-service English teachers begin to adopt new teaching identities is through the discursive practice of writing instructional plans. The discourses about pedagogy evident in these plans serve to position pre-service teachers in relation to their students. Or to put it more simply, the pedagogical and curricular decisions visible within a teacher's written plans indicate something about the kind of teacher this person is, the kind of students they think they have, and what kind of instruction this relationship (between a certain kind of teacher and certain kinds of students) dictates. This study (conducted in the teacher education program of a large, comprehensive university in the US) focused on the ways two pre-service English teachers discursively positioned themselves and their students within unit plans written at two points in their teacher education program and the ways these positionings translated (or did not) into the lessons and goals within those plans. I collected portfolios and unit plans from the student teachers at two points – prior to and during student teaching.

Unit plans are productive places to view the processes described above. These documents contain text which pre-service teachers have written specifically about their students,

themselves as teachers and the lessons they have planned based on how they have positioned their students and themselves. Since unit plans (and the lesson plans within them) are activities expected of teachers and a common aspect of a teaching identity, asking beginning English teachers to write and teach unit plans invites them to take part in the profession of teaching. The sort of analysis conducted for the study can be useful in better understanding how pre-service teachers construct teaching identities for themselves. This kind of analysis can be a useful tool for teacher educators to engage in fruitful work with beginning teachers.

Theoretical frame

To further my understanding of how discourse works to construct identities and position individuals, I relied on different domains of inquiry. Each of the following domains shares the understanding of discourse outlined in the introduction.

For an understanding of the constitutive nature of discourse, I relied heavily on feminist theory concerning the discursive construction of gender. Feminist theorists such as Bronwyn Davies (1989), Chris Weedon (1997), Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1995, 2003) and Judith Butler (1999), among many others, have contributed much to our understanding of the ways individuals are constituted as boys or girls through the discourses available to them.

Researchers working within the field of critical discursive social psychology have also contributed to our understanding of the discursive production of selves; at times drawing specifically on feminist theorists. Social psychologists take the individual and “the identification of broad patterns in human behaviour” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) as the units of study. Critical discursive social psychologists have worked to develop a new theory of selfhood within social psychology – one that foregrounds language and discourse. Jonathon Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987) argue that researchers working within critical discursive social psychology are interested in shifting the focus from “self-as-entity” toward methods of constructing the self in and through discourse.

Both feminist theory and critical discursive social psychology contribute to my understanding of the ways the student teachers constructed a new identity as an English teacher. This identity is discursively constructed by the student teacher in relation to who they believe their students to be, how they read the expectations of the teacher education program and their cooperating teacher, and the ways they position themselves against the normative role of teacher. Since this multiple positioning is evident in their written plans, I focus predominantly on the analysis of text. For tools to assist with the analysis of constructions of identity in written text, I rely on critical discourse analysis (for example, Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1999; Luke, 1995).

While critical discourse analysis provides the general framework for viewing language, how it functions in specific situations as well as how it is related to society at large; critical discursive social psychology adds a closer focus on individuals. Feminist theory provides concrete, grounded examples of the ways discourse constitutes individuals.

Combining these theoretical frameworks is essential for uncovering the positioning and identity work done by the student teachers and its implications for teacher education.

Analytic tools

Based on the theoretical perspectives outlined above, analytic tools are needed that will surface common constructions and discourses about teaching, students, and learning that the student teachers have available to them. The first tool – identifying interpretative repertoires – illuminates common lexicons drawn upon to understand and evaluate situations or events. Interpretative repertoires are defined by Potter and Wetherell as, “basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events” (1987, p. 138). Interpretative repertoires reflect a “common sense” way of understanding shared by a given community.

Researchers interested in analysing interpretative repertoires look for “patterns across different people’s talk, particular images, metaphors or figures of speech” (Edley, 2001, p. 199). Understanding interpretative repertoires enables us to understand the different ways available to talk about a given subject (for example, teaching), and “we begin to understand the kinds of limitations that exist for the construction of self and other” (Edley, 2001, p. 201). Student teachers have ideas about teaching, lesson planning and students that they bring with them into the English classroom. These ideas are an accumulation of their experiences and exposure to different discourses over the course of their lives. When student teachers enter classrooms and are confronted with a range of individuals and situations, they draw on interpretative repertoires to categorise and simplify the chaos they experience. In addition, the student teachers position *themselves*. In relation to these different interpretative repertoires influencing the decisions made about lessons and activities, and which in turn position students in particular ways.

During analysis, I attended to patterns in and across the student teachers’ talk (both within and across cases) to give me a glimpse of the interpretative repertoires they drew upon. Of course, different interpretative repertoires are available in teacher education programs. However, since the interpretative repertoires in teacher education don’t necessarily match the ones pre-service teachers bring with them, pre-service teachers can often discount the teacher education repertoires as false or “not practical.” In addition, the interpretative repertoires available to students in their placements often match their preexisting repertoires. How student teachers navigate and position themselves in relation to the multiple interpretative repertoires available to them is a useful focus for analysis.

One way to study the intersection of interpretative repertoires is to look for “ideological dilemmas” (Billig et al., 1988; Edley, 2001). This concept makes a distinction between classical Marxist interpretations of ideology as coherent, integrated sets of ideas and “lived ideologies.” Lived ideologies are inconsistent, fragmented and contradictory. As mentioned earlier, discourse analysts are not troubled by the inconsistencies in people’s lives and discourse. Ideological dilemmas illuminate the fact that there are conflicting, common sense notions about the same social object, highlighting that these notions are socially constructed and not natural truths.

For the student teachers, these moments of ideological dilemma are occasions of great potential for the teacher educator and the student teachers. I approached the data in this study using these concepts by looking for where and when the student teachers drew on different and conflicting repertoires, the dilemmas that ensued, and whether and how the student teachers resolved them. Ideological dilemmas require teacher educators to pay attention to inconsistencies in student teachers' interpretative repertoires as well as conflicts between the interpretative repertoires of teacher education and those used by the student teachers. The ways that the student teachers resolved (or did not) ideological dilemmas for themselves further illuminated the ways they positioned themselves within larger social and cultural understandings of teaching and learning.

Most relevant for the purposes of this essay is the fact that through the tools outlined here it was possible to see the student teachers using particular language in their unit plans to construct teaching identities for themselves. It was also possible to see places where teacher educators could have more powerfully intervened.

The two English student teachers described in my study drew on different interpretative repertoires that constructed their teaching identities very differently. While one of them constructed herself as a teacher concerned with the social and emotional well-being of her students and made pedagogic decisions based on her perceived social closeness to different students, the second one constructed herself as a teacher primarily concerned with academic matters. Although they each constructed different teaching identities, through the linguistic tools used in this study it was possible to see that they were each struggling with a similar ideological dilemma – how to be a caring teacher concerned with students and their individualities and still be academically rigorous and demanding. This ideological dilemma impacted the ways they constructed their teaching identities and also impacted the curricular and pedagogical decisions they made in their unit plans.

These ideological dilemmas are constructed throughout the text in multiple constructions of interpretative repertoires. As such, it is difficult to provide thorough textual examples in the space allotted here. However, in the interest of illustrating the sort of language used in this study and the ways it helped construct teaching identities for student teachers, I provide two small samples of text to illustrate the ideological dilemma as evidenced in one of the student-teacher's written instructional plans.

Grace Ann (a pseudonym) wrote extensively about the importance of holding high expectations for students. In defining what that meant to her she wrote:

Having high expectations of my students, means that when a student enters my classroom, they are not able to meet my expectations. This is because I have a whole term to assess their knowledge, build on it, and expand it so that they have something to be working for throughout the entire year. Working together, we can build the skills required across time so that they can work up to their expectations.

Holding high expectations for students was constructed throughout Grace Ann's written plans as a generalized concept. This definition of holding high expectations constructed a

process for both Grace Ann and her students with most of the work done by Grace Ann. What is interesting to notice is the process described and what was left out. The excerpt states that Grace Ann would hold high expectations for students when they first enter her classroom. Given that she did not know the students yet, it is unclear from the text what these expectations would be based on. What knowledge of students was necessary for Grace Ann to form appropriately high expectations for students? The high expectations – as framed above – seem to exist separate from the students in her classroom. These high expectations are not described anywhere in her plans in relation to knowledge of student's academic needs and/or abilities.

Given the way holding high expectations was framed, what pedagogical implications arise from the available positionings? To understand this, it is useful to look both at possible implications as well as Grace Ann's descriptions of actual events and students in her classroom. How will Grace Ann assist students in expanding on their knowledge and in adopting her expectations?

High expectations in practice

Given the questions raised above, how were high expectations constructed in Grace Ann's descriptions of students? What did holding high expectations look like and what happened as a result? The following is a description of one of her students, written at the end of her student teaching semester:

Mrs. Butler bet me a Mocha he wouldn't turn in anything for Writer's Workshop.² I worked my tail off encouraging Daniel and working with him and he turned in a good Writer's Workshop. He didn't turn in a script for the *Diary of Anne Frank*. Then again, he did great at the acting, even bringing in props. Every day of Reader's Theatre³ he was eager to participate and would volunteer to take an extra part when another student was absent.

This description of how hard Grace Ann worked to get Daniel to succeed is in line with Grace Ann's construction of holding high expectations for students, which required her to "push" them. Given the ways Grace Ann described what it means to hold high expectations and, given the ways she described her work with Daniel, Grace Ann constructed the results as undoubtedly mixed. Although Grace Ann took on a great amount of responsibility for this student ("working her tail off"), Daniel did not turn in one of the major assignments for the semester. However, he did participate in ways Grace Ann and her cooperating teacher did not expect (and Grace Ann won her mocha). Given that in Grace Ann's writing student success is dependent on how hard she works, and given that the results with Daniel were decidedly mixed, what learning did or could

² Writer's Workshop is an approach to teaching writing that encourages students to choose their own topics, produce multiple drafts of their papers, and write for specific audiences. The approach is intended to create a more authentic engagement in the writing process (see, for example, Atwell, 1998).

³ Reader's Theater (or "theatre," both spellings are commonly used and Grace Ann uses both in her text) is minimal theater in support of literature and reading. Students take parts in reading but there are no full stage sets, no full costumes, and no full memorization. Reader's Theater is seen as a way to increase student interest and engagement in a text.

Grace Ann take from this? Clear answers are not available in Grace Ann's unit plan. There were other responses Grace Ann could have taken, especially given her description of Daniel as "eager." How could Grace Ann have capitalized on his eagerness to participate in certain kinds of activities? What information did she need to transfer that attitude to other academic activities?

Evident throughout her writing (and hinted at in the excerpt about Daniel above), is a concern regarding her relationships with students and her knowledge of them socially and emotionally. The most significant ideological dilemma faced by Grace Ann in this unit plan and portfolio concerns the type of teacher she seemed to want to be. On the one hand, through the interpretative repertoire regarding holding high expectations for students, a picture is constructed of a teacher who is strict, expects a lot from her students and has sufficient information about them in order to help them meet those expectations. On the other hand, the language used to describe students did not provide the information needed to be that kind of teacher. Instead, that interpretative repertoire positioned Grace Ann as a teacher concerned with the social aspects of students' lives. Knowing that her students had long-term friendships, dressed in particular ways or participated in certain extracurricular activities (the main focus of her writing about students) did not provide Grace Ann with the knowledge needed to plan meaningful English Language Arts activities for them. There is a disconnect between the knowledge of students required to hold the high expectations constructed in her text and the knowledge of students provided.

TEACHER LEARNING IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (LESLEY REX AND LAURA SCHILLER)

As Laura Haniford uses discourse analysis to elucidate the emerging identities of new English teachers, complementary tools can be used to shed light on the social functioning of practising English teachers in learning groups. The insights gained by examining the role of group members' language-in-use in the exercising of power and politeness, particularly as participants engage in or avoid conflict, suggest the importance of managing disagreement as part of group learning. Understanding the dynamics of teachers' social learning has gained saliency in light of policy demands for accelerated student achievement measured and mandated by high stakes tests. Within this macro political conversation, a view of teachers as technicians and implementers of pre-packaged curricula exists side by side with calls for teachers to become highly qualified (NCLB, 2001) in order to improve student learning. This apparent contradiction depicts teachers as deskilled while simultaneously placing a premium on teacher learning. The good news in this scenario is that calls for highly qualified teachers have helped to foreground the importance of professional learning communities as powerful sites for teacher learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; McLaughlin, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001). Yet, creating and sustaining communities of professional learning that stakeholders value has only recently become the focus of intense study (e.g., Achinstein, 2002, Little, 2003). Much more needs to be known about how teachers learn in community, particularly in light of

research that suggests teacher communities are fraught with conflict (Achinstein, 2002, Lima, 2001; Little, 2003).

Our study of an early session of a teacher community with the potential for overt conflict describes how and why the teachers and their facilitator maintained civil cooperation (Rex & Schiller, 2005). This high school English teacher learning community experienced success and longevity, despite continual clashes of interests, agendas and roles based on differences in race, philosophy, affiliation and political history. Lesley, the facilitator, and Laura, a teacher member of the group, recognised a rich opportunity to explore teacher learning as a social practice in order to understand how teachers with fractious social histories can work together. We wanted to understand how, through the ways they talked with each other, the group collaborated for efficacious learning, and what sort of learning community they formed?

Context

“Literacy in Action” (LIA), as the teacher learning community became known, began as a series of workshops Lesley facilitated at the invitation of English teacher leaders concerned about reconciling student learning with the administration’s calls for higher test scores. The urban/suburban district in this study was over 90% African American comprised mostly of middle and lower middle-class students. Over 85% of the students graduated and attended higher education after high school. Despite such successes, numerous pressures made for a stressful teaching context.

At the political level, the push for higher test scores was linked to competition for students, property values and community support for the local schools that were compared to adjacent, more affluent, predominantly white school districts. Locally, administrative upheavals destabilised the district, teachers worked without a contract, and morale was low as district reforms embraced by previous administrations were halted. Moving from the district to the building level, the two high school English departments invited to participate in the workshop series had a long history of competition for resources, administrative favour, public perception (which branded one school “white” and the other “black”), and dissension over teaching approaches (one “traditional,” the other, “progressive”). On individual levels, tensions revolved around issues of status, race, teaching beliefs, social ties in and out of school, and perceptions of who was and was not an effective English teacher.

Given the politically, historically and socially charged context of LIA, both of us wanted to understand why the group was so intent on sustaining social equilibrium and how they managed to do so. It became apparent from our ethnographic analyses that for the teachers, LIA, even with its disagreements, was a calm center for exercising their professional learning within their district’s political storm. As tricky as negotiating old grievances and unresolved tensions might be, losing this opportunity would be worse. Disagreements would be inevitable, but the teachers were willing to make the effort to manage them productively.

Community, conflict, and disagreement

We take as a starting point that building community is social relational work. Teacher community is constituted and re-constituted in moment-to-moment interactions through dialogue. We use the term community to refer to “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it” (Bellah et al., 1985, as cited in Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth, 2001, p. 946). Further, we recognise that the formation of community is complicated by issues of status and disagreement (Rogoff, 1994, p. 214), and that disagreement is moderated by norms for productive argument built through power and politeness.

Teacher community involves risk-taking necessary to challenge beliefs and practices thus presenting a continuous threat to individual and group sustainability (Grossman et al., 2001). Overt conflict over time is likely to result in teachers opting out of the community or, as Betty Achinstein (2002) noted in her study of two contentious learning communities, those who choose to stay and avoid conflict completely also avoid learning. In the case of LIA, cycles of disagreement dominated the discourse; however, overt conflict was finessed through power and politeness moves in order to save face for the speaker at risk and maintain civil cooperation for the benefit of the group.

Method

We came to this realisation after performing a thematic analysis of all the video and field note data for the first year's five sessions to surface patterns of participation; disagreement emerged as the dominant pattern (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We narrowed the focus of our analysis to ask: How did participants engage in socially and individually valued learning experiences amid continual incipient, potentially disruptive, clashes? How does teacher learning occur during episodes of disagreement?

We decided to analyse the discourse in the first difficult moments of community building, the first time teachers were asked to share students' work to show how they were changing their practice—the third workshop session. We anticipated face threats⁴ but were surprised to find that fully half the morning, when teachers were positioned as experts, and fully half the afternoon, when teachers were positioned as learners, were filled with disagreements. In addition to noting the frequency, distribution, and duration of disagreements, we also noted the topics under discussion to document the sophisticated knowledge building of the participants. In all, ten discursive patterns emerged from the data.

Analytical framework

⁴ Every person wants to have their senses of themselves recognized and reinforced by others. To do so involves saving each other's face whenever possible by avoiding bald or outright face-threatening talk. There are also types of talk that unintentionally and intrinsically threaten face by limiting someone's involvement or discouraging their sense of independence (Brown & Levison, 1987).

To see how disagreements were managed productively as social practices, we needed an analytical method by which we could observe how disagreements were resolved interactively. We selected as our guide Miriam Locher's (2004) investigations of the interface of power and politeness and conflict in naturally occurring speech. Though Locher's work involves the study of conversations among family members, the similarities between teachers in conversations with each other and a facilitator and Locher's family conversations were striking. We observed the English teachers in the exercise of power involving conflict of interests, status challenges, subtle restrictions of action, mild contestation, as well as more blatant conflicts as categorised by Locher (2004). Parties in a conversation can intuitively recognise that the exercise of power and politeness can influence a particular disagreement, and so they act to sustain the social equilibrium as well as their own status. Individual LIA teachers recognised what counted as a disagreement differently, and they, like all people, had personal preferences for expressing themselves when disagreements arose. Consequently, to understand how the disagreements played out as a social learning practice, we needed to observe them as relationships between each situation, the teachers' and facilitator's exercise of power and politeness, and the outcomes in terms of disagreement management, individual learning, and group solidarity.

The experience and exercise of power was our key construct in investigating the source of tension in group learning. Power is the probability that a person will be in a position to carry out her own will though there may be resistance (see Max Weber, 1947). For teachers as well as the facilitator, the belief that they could exercise their power in a professional development group was critical to their continued buy in as was their need to experience "freedom of action" (Watts, 1991), to sense that they could freely achieve the goals they set for themselves. Politeness moves were deliberate utterances to maintain the equilibrium of the social relationship – to manage threats to speakers. All discourse utterances in the group performed identity-and-relationship-building, concurrent with knowledge-building. In this group, politeness moves permitted the exercise of power to continue in a manner that allowed former kinds of knowledge and ways of thinking about curriculum and ways of being a teacher to be reconstructed as socially held common knowledge.

Recognising, acknowledging and acting on disagreements were key to the success of the group dialogue. Excerpts from Gloria's sharing of student work on day three of LIA illustrate examples of power and politeness moves that maintained social equilibrium while knowledge building went forward.

Gloria, a telling case

Gloria, a history teacher newly recruited to teach English, shared her homework assignment, which was to teach students how to read the same two texts from two different perspectives and take a personal stance. She reported that texts dealing with the history of Native Americans and the Harlem riots had evoked strong anger from some of her students, which they shared in a class discussion and in their assigned papers. She asked the group for a response. "I don't know if it was completely successful? It was sort

of successful?" In the ensuing exchanges, Lesley questioned Gloria to discern what she understood as successful and had taught as taking a stance. Gloria referred to angry language used in the two pieces and a class discussion in which students "talked about a lot of the history of it" but she struggled to make the connection to the notion of stance as Lesley and the teachers had been using it. Gloria commented, "I'm not sure I'm answering your question."

Lesley, realising Gloria was having difficulty understanding the concept of stance, presented it as a practice her students could engage in. "So you've got kids here who are angry. Is it possible to take a stance on these texts that allows for anger in the stance that they can then go back into the text and pull some evidence for?"

Gloria's willingness to put herself forward as a learner in the group, and the willingness of the other teacher participants to allow Lesley to do the teaching early on (this allowance quickly changed), provided the opportunity for the social patterns accompanying public learning to begin to emerge and relational work to proceed. Gloria made two contributions in particular to the relational norms that were beginning to emerge. Firstly, even though she had been teaching nearly 30 years, she positioned herself as a learner among English colleagues, who included her former student teacher and members of her rival high school. Secondly, the tone, pitch and emphasis of her words indicated deference as well as lack of confidence, positioning her for softened critique to which she could safely reply. Her vulnerability allowed others to leave themselves open for softened critique later on and challenged teacher norms of isolation.

Lesley, in order to shield Gloria from bald-faced threats, keep her freedom of action as unrestricted as possible, and encourage the stance of vulnerability, responded to Gloria as a learner and made repeated attempts to have Gloria predict what kind of stance her students, since they were angry, would make toward the poems. When Gloria's response didn't appropriate the language of stance the group had developed, Lesley enacted positive politeness, stating what she was asking Gloria to do in a way that ameliorated threats against Gloria's face for not appearing to know. However, in exercising the power Lesley assumed the group allowed her, she also acted to mollify it through the use of "so" and "I guess." These words decreased the power difference between Lesley and Gloria, further softening the face threat. In this episode and 33 others during this day, when teachers took over the teaching role from Lesley, disagreements were ameliorated through power and politeness. By analysing these 33 interactions, we could observe community-building and learning in momentary performances of interactants' particular roles, within particular alignments, during a particular situation, to achieve a particular goal.

Conclusion: Why does this work matter?

A utopian vision of teacher learning communities has been displaced by a realistic assessment of the challenges of, and the need for, practitioner communities strong enough to support learning. The weaker the community, the greater the need to understand that disagreement is salient to what it means to learn together and that we can choose, in sophisticated ways, how to maintain and cultivate individual and group learning when seen as the subtle discursive interplay of power and politeness within a particular context. Everyone experiences face threats. What constitutes productive management is the groups' decision and responsibility. But we cannot manage what is unseen and un-named. To that end, our study of LIA contributes to the visibility of the complex, discursive interactions that support English teacher learners and their continual learning with and from each other.

WRITING TEXTBOOKS: NEGOTIATING WHAT COUNTS AS KNOWLEDGE AND PEDAGOGY (LINDA DENSTAEDT)

Introduction

The previous two sections have demonstrated how the language-in-use of community members helps to shape the social worlds within education and impacts teaching and learning. Now I wish to examine what is, perhaps, seen as a more conventional kind of language artifact – a writing textbook – and examine how it is both a product of traditional and widely accepted beliefs about learning and learners and a product of the author's beliefs. Additionally, a writing textbook can influence students' beliefs about writing, themselves as writers as well as impact social interactions in the classroom. The content and pedagogy of textbooks promotes an image of the students who will use it and assumes a teaching position from which instruction should proceed.

As a user of textbooks for fifty-four years, a National Board Certified teacher, an action-researcher, and a staff developer, I have strong opinions about textbooks. In my past, as a Title I Coordinator and Director of Writing for a major suburban school district, I was charged with studying and purchasing texts. Currently, I consult for high priority, low-income schools sanctioned by the state and struggling to meet annual yearly progress (AYP). Through federal grants, these schools are monitored for adherence to a text, so I work with teachers who must adopt and trust the pedagogy of a textbook. From my limited and personal experience, I assert that there is no textbook written that does not respond to market competition. I say this because I am also a textbook author. There are simple facts that one understands when one writes textbooks:

1. If you want to be published, you must collaborate with your editor.
2. Your editor represents the interests of the field and the company in order to produce a quality book that will sell.
3. Having a research-based voice helps in this collaborative marketplace.

Thankfully, I have a talented editor who has enabled my co-author, Richard E. Bailey, and me to maintain our belief in the importance of talk in writing classrooms and

instruction that integrates reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking. This belief positions us as authors of a progressive text in a field of more traditional texts. That doesn't mean that we haven't compromised. It simply means that we haven't lost ourselves and lined up with a more-of-the-same book mentality. In our text's preface we state, "Our primary goals in teaching writing are to change the way our students look at writing." We do not say that as text writers we designed discursive events to encourage the development of academic identities in students who have failed at school or have been failed by school, or that we want our students and the students who use this text to take responsibility for the power of their own language practices, to gain control of those practices and that language through social interaction that constitutes language-in-use. However, that is exactly what we attempted to do.

Context

Richard and I write from the informed position of action researchers, who use an ethnomethodological perspective while applying sociolinguistics and conversational analysis to inform, manage and mediate the writing and marketing of a developmental composition text based on our data. Developmental means coursework designed for students who score low on the Assets Test, a test used by many community colleges across the United States.

We research his classroom located at a community college in the US Midwest. This college serves a population predominately comprised of Arabic, African American and Caucasian students. His English classroom is mixed racially, ethnically, economically, as well as by age and gender; it contains 19-year-old, high-school graduates, adults returning to school after years of work or childcare, and immigrants predominately from Middle-Eastern countries, who speak English as their second or third language. Often the previous educational experiences of these students have not been successful, and they do not feel competent or confident as students.

Method

The research I wish to present and discuss took place over a four-year period prompted to achieve multiple purposes:

- Provide an informed position on the inclusion of grammar in the text we were writing in terms of content, context and quantity;
- Focus action research to collect, organise, analyse and interpret data in order to take action in the classroom (Calhoun, 1994);
- Develop a critical and reflective stance grounded in student learning and student identity construction as we wrote the text (Darling-Hammond 1997);
- Provide student samples for use in the textbook.

Each semester, we study the interactions of a single classroom and the writing portfolios of an identified group of students that represent a cross-section of that classroom. Currently, I attend one of Richard's English classes as a participant/observer taking

ethnographic field notes. Students are placed in this course – a non-credit composition course – owing to low Assets Test scores, indicating they are not prepared for standard freshman composition or for the course that prepares students for freshman composition. However, we also gather student samples from all of Richard's classes. Often in a single year, Richard will teach the full range of freshman writing courses offered at the college. This allows us to compare student writing as well as the acquisition of specific skills and strategies.

Conventional wisdom on writing instruction

The conventional wisdom when faced with this mix of students is, *Teach more grammar*. We have talked with colleagues at regional and national conferences: places like Peoria, Illinois; Annapolis, Maryland; McAllen, Texas; Albuquerque, New Mexico and Jackson, Mississippi. When we attended the Two Year College Association Southeast (TYCA SE) conference in Jackson, a few minutes into a roundtable on developmental writing, it was agreed that developmental writing students need grammar, plenty of it. After a moment's pause, we asked: What grammar? How does one determine what to teach? Again there was consensus: *Teach sentence errors such as fragment, run-on and comma splice⁵, subject and verb agreement, and dialect issues. Years of teaching experience tell us this*. Then the facilitator confirmed this consensus, "If you want to know where to start, just ask up and down the hallways in the office areas." I am guessing those halls would agree with this room.

A review of current textbooks would support this traditional view of students and learning. Seven textbooks currently available demonstrate this view. The average length, excluding readings, is 343 pages. The average number of pages dedicated to writing instruction is 86. The remaining pages are dedicated to exercises in sentence skills and grammar, often fill-in-the-blank exercises. The percentage of a composition text, excluding readings, dedicated to instruction of the processes and decisions of a writer and writing in various forms and for various audiences ranges from 13% to 42%. However, this heavy focus on grammar in textbooks and classrooms does not seem to change the overwhelming view that developmental students cannot write because they do not understand grammar. In conversations around conference roundtables, instructors reiterate that their classroom work using these textbooks does not facilitate writing. Their students are not constructing a transferable body of knowledge around grammar. Their students are not improving their writing.

These remarks and the review of current texts were resonant and important to us. For four years, we have been immersed in error like never before. We use a database to save and sort errors, saving in brain-numbing quantities the most egregious errors that occur in great frequency in developmental writing. Our intention was to write a book whose exercises consisted chiefly, if not exclusively, of real student writing. In addition, we used this database to inform our negotiations on the sentence and grammar skills to be included in the text. In a three-year period, the database grew to around 3500 entries.

⁵ *Comma splice*: A comma splice occurs when a comma is used to connect two independent clauses instead of a period or semi-colon.

That list enabled us to write the exercises we needed for the book, which came to be collected in part of the book called “The Toolkit.” However, we did compromise and included exercises on errors that we rarely found in our students’ writing.

As we progressed, we wondered, would students who did their skill-and-drill work on real student sentences become better editors of their writing? We wondered, was there a correlation between the type of error and the nature of the writing? That is, were some errors more likely to occur in a narrative writing than in a cause and effect writing? We wondered, would reflection develop metacognitive learners who apply and monitor their strengths and weaknesses? To all of these questions, we have informed hunches. Yes, we think students do become better editors when learning to edit language written more or less in code that resembles their own. Yes, we think there is definitely a correlation between the type of error and the type of writing students do. Yes, we think reflection enables up take and transfer of new learning to future cognitive tasks. These informed hunches enabled us to break ranks with other textbooks and offer in-context grammar instruction focused on a single grammatical concern. Now, our research has moved beyond simple collection and classification of errors. We are beginning to think more critically about how and when and to what extent we should focus on error in developmental writing.

We wondered, where do we start? Commonly, English instructors begin a semester with close examination of the sentence, especially the fragment; an error that they believe bedevils so many freshman writers. So we assessed our developmental students at the outset of our sentence-to-paragraph course. The students wrote for 30 minutes on a department-wide assessment topic. Our findings in two consecutive semesters of this analysis have been surprising. The vast majority of these sentences – always more than 90% – are complete. In a sample we took, at roughly midterm, we saw only 2% of the sentences were fragments, 2% run on, and 3% comma splice. (And this semester, we should add, we have not taught lessons on the fragment, run on, or comma splice.) These error numbers are statistically significant, perhaps. But just barely. What was striking was that 90 percent figure. Maybe developmental writers can write in complete sentences after all. Maybe that isn’t the first place to start.

How about the long, tangled up sentence? Ask most instructors of developmental writing, and they will identify the ill-formed, convoluted sentence as a very common error. We counted the number of words in each sentence and found, again to our surprise, a very low incidence of long sentences. In fact, the distribution looked like an almost perfect bell-shaped curve, with the median number of words per sentence at 13. Students write long, tangled up sentences? So much for that hunch.

What happens when we teach error? Most instructors, we suspect, have had a nagging suspicion, in the midst of recitation on the fragment, for example, that some students just do not get it. Worse, it seems the more we teach the grammar topic, the more befuddled these students become. In our action-research, we do not have any empirical evidence yet, but we find we have a new and (disturbing) hunch: when we teach error, we create error. Put another way, when we teach error, we risk undermining student confidence,

calling to their mind their deficits and what they cannot do. If they come to our classes with some competence, if they come to our classes with the hope of achieving, sometimes we do little more than undermine that confidence and dash those hopes. Granted, this may not be true in all cases, but in some, we now have a strong hunch that this is frequently the case. We know error matters. We do not advocate abandoning error completely. Our students need to know that correctness and care matter a great deal, whether in our classes or the classes of our colleagues in other disciplines. Now we wonder, have we been setting forth with the wrong question?

Now, instead of asking what students do wrong, we ask, what do they do well? Our early findings indicate complete sentences are a strength with 90% rate of success. In an entrance course in composition focused on sentence and paragraph construction, we began to study how instruction in social interactions produces knowledge of grammar that transfers to application in academic writing and in the students' own language practices. We followed five students, collecting literacy histories, informal and formal writing samples, timed freewrites, reflective writing, and we periodically interviewed them. In addition, we began to review our ethnographic field notes using conversational analysis and paying attention to the sequential analysis of adjacency pairs. We focused on a single pair of students and studied their paired action sequences. We found that focused, purposeful grammar and syntax instruction framed as discursive events over a period of weeks changed some of our writers in a variety of ways: an increase in fluency and inclusion of detail, a sophistication of syntax and thinking about a subject, a reflective stance toward reading and writing, and an increased use of academic language during classroom conversations.

Pete, a student profile

Pete, a 19-year-old white male, is representative of many students in the room. He entered with a sense that he wasn't a capable writer, and he found reading equally difficult. He reported that he disengaged in school because it was boring or unimportant. He came to community college because he decided he didn't want to be a fireman after he participated in a vocational program for fire fighters, but he didn't know what he wanted to do.

When I took ethnographic field notes in the room, I sat next to Pete and his self-selected, conversation partner Van, a 30-year-old, African American male who returned to school after the factory closed where he had worked for 10 years. Both men elected to sit in the back row of the classroom and shared the belief that they were not capable or intelligent. Neither male had a successful, high-school experience. One day I asked both Pete and Van why they did not write in the margins as requested for a homework reading. They independently explained that they didn't know what to write.

A series of writing exercises demonstrate the growth in Pete's writing skills.

- A thirty-minute, timed assessment, assigned on the first day of class, contained 67 words, three complete sentences (one contained a dependent clause), and one fragment (possibly an attempt at parallel structure). This first draft contained two

spelling errors, 100% passive verbs, and word repetition to begin sentences. The content was organised by repeating a single idea three times. He arranged the paragraph in gradual slant down the page by indenting each line just a little bit more than the last line.

- A month later, a ten-minute timed-write on violence contained 129 words, nine complete sentences (five contained dependent clauses) and one fragment (possibly for dramatic effect). This freewrite contained 11 errors in spelling or capitalisation, 90% passive verbs, use of detail, and use of parallel sentence structure to begin sentences. The content was an organised narrative containing five specific and detailed sentences to describe the stabbing he responded to while working as a fire fighter.
- A final assignment, a comparison-contrast paragraph, contained 149 words and 12 complete sentences. This revised, hand-written draft contained five errors in spelling or capitalisation, 78% passive verbs, increased use of detail to support a thesis, and use of parallelism to create transitions. The content defined two co-workers using specific details and parallel points.

As we presented Pete's work at conferences around the country, developmental educators articulately identified every error in his writing. However, they were also stunned by the growth in his fluency, syntax and thinking. They reported that they did not see this degree of growth in their students.

Another part of Pete's story that opened conversations with our developmental colleagues can be demonstrated in a single, 12-minute conversational sequence between Van, Pete and Stanley, a 19-year-old, African American male that joined the class two weeks late and attended irregularly. This conversation occurred during the fifth week of class. Stanley had not completed the homework because he had missed the previous class. The written responses by Pete and Van, which were read aloud, are included exactly as they appeared on the student papers.

1. Pete:

(Passage taken from Frederick Douglas Narrative) "When we had finished, one of them came to me and asked me if I were a slave, I told him I was. He asked, 'Are ye a slave for life' I told him that I was. The good Irishmen seemed to be deeply affected by the statement. He said to the other that it was a pity so fine a little fellow as myself should be a slave for life. They advised me to run away."

(Response to reading) I chose this passage because it seemed to me that the two Irishmen cared about the little boy. They thought it was a shame for someone that small to never experience life as being free. They advised him to run away so he, someday will experience freedom instead of being a slave his whole life.

2. Stanley:

That was pretty good.

3. Van :

(Passage taken from Frederick Douglas Narrative) "I read contemplated the subject, behold! That very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel like learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had give me a view of my wretched

condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to a horrible pit, but to no ladder which upon to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow slaves for their stupidity.”

(Response to Reading) Frederick Douglas describe this passage, as if being a slave was the lowest thing to being human. It was agony in just thinking of being a slave. The White man seemed to be evil and very cruel. The Master didn't want any of his slaves to learn to read or write. Frederick Douglas read negative articles which made his situation even worse. It seemed to be no good ending in being a slave. He didn't agree with fellow slaves view points. They seemed to be brain washed by the slave Master. IN this passage Frederick Douglas seemed to be a leader not a follower. I choose this passage because it showed Frederick to be a very strong individual.

4. Pete:

You're right. The kid is really young and has never experienced life.

But, you know, it doesn't really connect to me because I've never been in that predicament.

5. Van:

If you really believe in something you can overcome it, but he was a slave and that was the worse thing that could happen to him, but he escaped because there was lots he didn't know about it. And then he learned that there were places you could go to be free, like up north. Personally, maybe some of my ancestors were slaves, and it makes me feel bad that they had to do that. Probably my ancestors way before me. I can feel for them because they didn't have freedom back then.

This paired action sequence (1-5) provided an early indicator that social interactions were constructing an academic identity for Pete and Van. Prior to this conversation, interactions between this pair were indicative of procedural display or respectful politeness, often just a nod to acknowledge the speaker. Stanley's response (2), also respectful politeness, serves as a contrast and is typical of earlier encounters between Pete and Van. Here, Pete reacts to Van's reading by extending it with the meaning he had constructed from the passage (4). He goes on to express his own opinion through a personal connection. Unlike previous conversations, Van continues to extend their collaborative thinking and add his personal connection (5). This adjacency pair was the first indicator for us that conversation partnerships were enabling the construction of meaning from readings as well as potentially constructing visions of the speakers as capable learners. As a result of this observation, Richard and I designed future class periods around a sequence of discursive mini-lessons with an active involvement component such as turn and talk or turn and read to increase language-in-use.

As the semester continued, Pete saw himself as struggling with and facing a huge difficulty – seeing schoolwork as a chore and settling for being average. He began to see his reading and writing difficulties as solvable if he could fix this problem. He also began to write in the margins of his text, sub-vocalise answers to questions posed by Richard and other students, and volunteer answers or thoughts to the whole class.

Conclusion: What do we say at roundtables today?

Faced with the concern among teachers of struggling writers to correct and teach grammar, Richard and I suggest the place to start is with writing. Our research suggests that an initial difference between our struggling writers and the students in freshmen composition is fluency in respect of language and ideas. So we suggest that writers construct writing identities by writing. Responding to this statement, however, requires a shift in philosophy and pedagogy. It puts students at the center of the instructional design and the classroom. It asks the instructor to wonder about what a student can do before they ask what a student cannot do. Too many students believe that a writer works alone – that a pen, a piece of paper, a dictionary, and a grammar book are the only tools for creating a piece of writing, and that writing is about correctness rather than ideas. However, effective writing emerges when writers work in a community and integrate thinking, reading and talking into the writing process.

Speech is often a strength for developmental students. They communicate far more in informal settings. Their academic voices emerge as they gain confidence with a wider range of skills, strategies and tools. So we are trying to change the conversation around traditional pedagogies one conference at a time. We have also designed a textbook that enables instruction through discursive events in which students explore, share and reflect on their thinking before, during and after writing. This work is accomplished in multiple writes, peer conversations and collaborations, metacognitive self-evaluation, analysis and labeling of the decisions of professional and peer writers, and interactions in peer response groups. Our students see writing as a decision-making process; therefore, they adopt the academic vocabulary of the classroom in their speech and eventually in their writing. As we talk to our colleagues, we use the voices of our students to speak for us. Pete is one of our strongest voices. In a recent interview, he explained that he feels more confident as a writer because he no longer tries to get it right in his head before he writes. Now, “I just start writing, and write everything I can. At least I have something on paper.” Getting something on paper allows him to consider what to do next. But in our classroom he does not have to do it alone or even get it “correct” the first time.

THE DILEMMA OF TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH (DAVID WEST BROWN)

In her discussion of writing textbooks, Linda Denstaedt raises the questions, “What grammar? How does one determine what to teach?” Certainly, one of the more vexing issues in the teaching of grammar is reconciling the political and economic benefits of students learning Standard English with the social and cultural values connected to any non-standard varieties students might speak. On the one hand, proficiency in Standard English and academic genres can be an instrument of access. On the other hand, language use and identity are entwined; thus, altering an individual’s language practices has ramifications that are potentially destructive and coercive. This debate is a longstanding one. For the last thirty years, much of the discourse in the United States has been framed by the rival positions set out in *Why Johnny Can’t Write* (Sheils, 1975) and *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* (1974). The debate, however, has roots that are in evidence in nineteenth-century America (for example, “The growing illiteracy of American boys,” 1896) and can be traced back in Britain to the Middle English period

(see Bailey, 1991). This, then, is an issue that is clearly affected by established ideologies that connect perceived intelligence, aptitude and manners to language use.

In the US, some attempts have been made to negotiate a middle ground in the standard versus non-standard controversy (notably in Los Angeles; DeKalb, Georgia; Hawaii; and Oakland, California). In such places, educators have endeavored to inform language instruction with sociolinguistic principles in order to facilitate students' Standard English competencies, while maintaining an understanding of and respect for nonstandard varieties (Baugh, 2000; Hollie, 2001; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Tamura, 2002). Some of these efforts have managed to endure (Los Angeles and DeKalb) while others have met with alarming resistance (Oakland). These kinds of endeavours would seem to represent steps, however nascent, at "improving the quality of [curricular] input from linguists" (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005, p. 619). If we, as English educators, are to build upon these foundational programs, it is important to have a theoretical and methodological understanding of both the social as well the syntactic, lexical and morphological relationships between language varieties. It is equally important, however, that any theoretical framing of curricula be informed by the experiences and needs of stakeholders in the educational enterprise.

With this latter exigency in mind, I wish to present and discuss portions of an interview that I conducted with a student about her perceptions of her language use and how she construes the influence of that language use on her social relationships and academic success. The student, Jackie, is a high-achieving, African American student at a competitive university. While it would be inappropriate to generalise Jackie's experiences to any larger group, her interview suggests several significant considerations when attempting to conceptualise language pedagogy:

1. Standard English proficiencies are important to academic success, but speaking Standard English can be a fraught social negotiation for many adolescents;
2. Adolescents must figure out that negotiation themselves, or perhaps with guidance of a parent or friend, because schools do nothing to elucidate the social and grammatical processes of style- or code-switching; and
3. The social values that individuals ascribe to language varieties are neither stable nor predictable.

Early in our interview, Jackie makes the following observation:

I know that like the way you talk doesn't *define* your race. But like it kind of does.

This theme of the relationship between language and ethnic identity is one that pervades our discussion, and it is significant to Jackie for two reasons. Firstly, Jackie articulates a strong sense of her identity as African American. According to the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity, she demonstrates high-centrality and low-regard, meaning that her ethnicity is essential to her sense of self and that she perceives her ethnicity to be publicly stigmatised (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Secondly, Jackie speaks predominantly in a standard variety. Speaking in a standard variety of

English can have social implications for adolescents. In particular, and perhaps most problematic for non-white adolescents, speaking Standard English can index “whiteness” (Fordham, 1999; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). That is, for an African American student like Jackie, using a standard variety can be a signifier of ethnic duplicity. Or as Jackie observes, the way you talk kind of does define your race. There is, then, a potential disjunction between the strong ethnic identity that Jackie claims and the one that is performed through her language use.

This contradiction is a significant point of social negotiation for Jackie. Jackie is acutely aware of accusations of acting white prompted by her speech. For example, she discusses the ways in which some of her relatives responded to her language use when she was younger:

But then when you like have your cousins or whoever else that you know from like urban areas... they'll be like are you an oreo? Like are you a valley girl? Like you know?

Additionally, she describes how some of her white friends interpret her speech:

I know that I can talk to certain people and they can think a certain way about me. But at one point my white girlfriends would be like... oh yeah, we don't even see you as black anymore. And like, I was like I am black. What do you mean you don't see me as black anymore? And it just like got offensive so I'm just like maybe I just need to remind them every once in a while that I'm still black.

Reminding her friends of her ethnic identity, in part, entails switching into African American English (AAE). Thus, Jackie demonstrates not only an awareness of how her language use advertises her identity, but also the linguistic ability to adapt that use to enact her desires. This adaptability is no small feat. First, it requires an array of competencies, both social and grammatical. Second, it facilitates her academic success. Accusations of acting white may, in some cases, provoke resistance to academic success. In learning how to manage her language use, Jackie has developed a strategy that enhances her resilience.

Promoting such resilience by making the social and grammatical exigencies of code-switching explicit for more students would seem to be a potentially productive focus for reforming curricula with a greater contribution from linguistics. In this way, the kinds of choices that students like Jackie must negotiate daily might be made clearer and less coercive. Indeed, this is partly the goal of programs like those in DeKalb and Los Angeles. And I would enthusiastically echo these aims. As Jackie herself demonstrates, academic success and future access are tied to the mastery of these linguistic skills, so teaching them explicitly is certainly a worthwhile pursuit.

I would, however, sound a note of caution. In designing curricula, it is not uncommon to over-generalise instructional concepts. Language curricula present a particular danger. Because language and identity are so closely allied, generalising or colonising students' linguistic practices risks marginalising the very students a more enlightened curriculum is supposed to help. For example, it would be problematic as a curricular tenet to equate the

speaking of AAE with the foregrounding of an African American identity. Obviously, not all people who identify as African American speak AAE, and not all AAE speakers claim an African American identity. Thus, as a counterpoint to the previous discussion about ethnicity, Jackie accurately observes, “The way you talk doesn’t *define* your race” – nor does it define your gender, class, or any other socially arbitrated category of identity.

There are, in fact, a number of examples in Jackie’s narrative that indicate her switching into an AAE style in order to assert something other than her ethnicity. In describing the way that one of her close friends, who is white, talks, Jackie asserts that her friend uses a non-standard variety, uses “slang” rather than talking “properly”:

She never like talked that properly. And when she tries she can still talk proper. She doesn’t talk like full out ghetto. She still sounds like... a white girl. But like... her speech is a little... bit more slang.

Further, Jackie notes that when she interacts with this friend, her own style of speech changes:

With my white girlfriend it tends to be like... like I don’t know, like hey girl.

Being “hey girl” implies style-shifting into a form of AAE. Even though Jackie says that her friend does not sound “full out ghetto” and that “she still sounds like a white girl”, there is evidence elsewhere in her narrative that suggests “hey girl” is nevertheless a trope for AAE. Firstly, when explaining how she foregrounds her African American identity with white girls, Jackie again refers to being “hey girl”:

Like I change up the way I talk a lot but... like sometimes I just won’t feel like talking like them [white girls] and I’ll just be like, I don’t know. I just feel like being like hey girl. What’s up?

Additionally, Jackie states that her friend “confessed to me that she wishes she was black” and that “she’s had a lot of black boyfriends”. Thus, Jackie’s friend’s speech is an instrument in subverting her whiteness. For Jackie, however, shifting into being “hey girl” with this particular friend has less to do with creating an ethnic affiliation and more to do with bridging class boundaries.

The first thing that Jackie observes about her friend is that she comes from a working-class town that is adjacent to the wealthy suburb where they attended high school. Jackie describes her friend’s town as the “rougher side of the tracks” and “a little bit like... lower socioeconomic status”. It is to this working-class environment that Jackie attributes her friend’s lack of “proper” speaking. The saliency of class is made even clearer when she describes her close, African American friend:

One of my best friends who's like the bougie black girl... I don't know, she like talks really bougie.⁶

Being bougie is associated not with “acting white” but rather with middle-class status and a certain level of materialism. Jackie feels that she has bougieness in common with her black girlfriend, and that bougieness is communicated, in part, through their mutual use of a “proper” or standard variety:

With my black girlfriend generally like we talk pretty much the same way. So we have a tendency to just talk... very like proper for the most part. Like we definitely use certain words more than others but we don't use very much slang. It tends to be very proper.

Jackie's friendships reveal a complex relationship between ethnicity, class, gender and language use. Jackie uses language to promote affiliation with or distinction from various groups and to perform various aspects of identity according to the exigencies of social situations and her own desires. This very complexity should inform any efforts at reforming language curricula and the teaching of grammar. If a curriculum is to engage the social indexing and grammar of standard and non-standard varieties alike, designers need to be cautious about imposing meanings upon those varieties. For Jackie, “talking properly” or “bring ‘hey girl’” do not have simple, easily reducible meanings. And such complexity should not be approached cavalierly. A curriculum that fails to acknowledge the real ways that students use language would seem to thwart the goal of connecting their language practices to ones that will promote their social and economic access.

With that said, those educators who are interested in reforming language instruction should not be dissuaded. From Jackie's interview, it is clear that her ability to manage her language use has facilitated not just her social adaptability, but also her academic success. Other students would certainly benefit from the kinds of linguistic competencies and strategic awareness that Jackie exhibits. Further, the negotiation of Standard English by non-standard speakers is gaining immediacy in the United States only owing to two factors associated with NCLB: 1) the increased reliance on standardised testing and the concomitant privileging of Standard English and particular academic forms; and 2) the mandate that increasing numbers of students pass such tests regardless of their language background. Thus, developing methods for teaching grammar that expand students' repertoires while recognising their existent practices is a challenge that has serious implications for all those with a stake in language education.

A FINAL WORD

Throughout all our studies, it is language that constructs and reconstructs the educational worlds in which we study and work. The knowledge and identities of teachers and students are shaped through language. And it is through social practice that people create their own “grammars” to operate successfully in the world. However, creating contexts

⁶ *Bougie* is slang for bourgeois. It has somewhat of a pejorative connotation, but as Jackie does here, it is not uncommon for people to self-identify as bougie.

in which awareness-raising and change-producing linguistic tools can be productively discussed, taught, learned, and applied is a challenge. If we are to transform social practices, then we must teach people methods for explicating their own and others' language practices in their everyday lives and workplaces. The contribution of linguistics to education depends on making visible those methods that are unseen and un-named. Such transparency will enable intentionality on the part of teachers and students alike and in the best of all possible scenarios, promote greater access and equity in the world of English teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

- Achinstein, B. (2002). *Community, diversity and conflict among schoolteachers: The ties that blind*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Atwell, N. (1998). *In the middle: New understandings about writing, reading, and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Bailey, R. (1991). *Images of English: A cultural history of the language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ball, D., & Lampert, M. (1998). *Teaching, multimedia, and mathematics: Investigations of real practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Barksdale-Ladd, M., & Thomas, K. (2000). What's at stake in high-stakes testing: Teachers and parents speak out. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(5), 384-397.
- Baugh, J. (2000). *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic pride and racial prejudice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D., & Radley, A. (1988). *Ideological dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking*. London: Sage.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Calhoun, E. (1994). *How to use action research in the self-renewing school*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of Educational Research*, 24, 249-305.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (Eds.). (1999). *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Davies, B. (1989). The discursive production of the male/female dualism in school settings. *Oxford Review of Education*, 15(3), 229-241.
- Dodd, C. (April, 6, 2005). *The No Child Left Behind Reform Act*. Congressional Record.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edley, N. (2001). Analysing masculinity: Interpretive repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis* (pp. 189-228). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. New York: Longman.
- Fordham, S. (1999). Dissin' "the standard": Ebonics as guerilla warfare at Capital High. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30(3), 272-293.
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of 'acting white'". *Urban Review*, 18(3), 176-206.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gee, J. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London: Routledge.
- Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2001). Toward a theory of teacher community. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 942-1012.
- Gumperz, J. (1986). Interactional linguistics in the study of schooling. In J. Cook-Gumperz, (Ed.), *The social construction of literacy* (pp. 45-68). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gumperz, J. (1992). Contextualization and understanding. In A. Duranti & C. Goodwin (Eds.) *Rethinking context* (pp. 229-252). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, S. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hollie, S. (2001). Acknowledging the language of African American students: Instructional strategies. *English Journal*, 90(4), 54-59.
- Hudson, R., & Walmsley, J. (2005). The English patient: English grammar and teaching in the Twentieth Century, *Journal of Linguistics*, 41 (3), 593-622.
- Johnstone, B. (2002). *Discourse analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Little, J. (2003). Inside teacher community: Representations of classroom practice. *Teachers College Record*, 105(6), 913-945.
- Lima, J. (2001). Forgetting about friendship: Using conflict in teacher communities as a catalyst for school change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(2), 97-122.
- Locher, M. (2004). *Power and politeness in action: Disagreements in oral communication*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Luke, A. (1995). Text and discourse in education: An introduction to critical discourse analysis. *Review of Research in Education*, 21, 3-48.
- McLaughlin, M. (2001). *Professional communities and the work of high school teaching*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nichols, S., & Berliner, D. (2005). *The inevitable corruption of indicators and educators through high-stakes testing*. Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), Education Policy Studies Laboratory. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002). Retrieved December 12, 2005 from <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>.
- Phelan, R. (n.d.). Overview of the standards movement in the United States. Retrieved December 12, 2005 from <http://www.sonoma.edu/users/p/phelan/423/standards.html>.
- Pedulla, J., Abrams, L., Madaus, G., Russell, M., Ramos, M., & Miao, J. (2003, March). *Perceived effects of state-mandated testing programs on teaching and learning: Findings from a national survey of teachers*. Boston, MA: Boston College, National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology*. London: Sage.

- Rex, L., & Schiller, L. (in review, 2005). Speaking one's mind means more than telling it like it is: Toward understanding social practices in professional development communities. *Teachers College Record*.
- Rickford, J., & Rickford, R. (2000). *Spoken soul: The story of Black English*. New York: Wiley.
- Rogoff, B. (1994). Developing understanding of the idea of communities of learners. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 1(4), 209-229.
- Scollon, R. (2001). *Mediated discourse. The nexus of practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Sellers, R., Smith, M., Shelton, J., Rowley, S., & Chavous, T. (1998). Multidimensional model of racial identity: A reconceptualization of African American racial identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2(1), 18-39.
- Sheils, M. (1975). Why Johnny can't write. *Newsweek*, 58-65.
- Sternberg, R. (2004). Good intentions, bad results. A dozen reasons why the No Child Left Behind Act is failing our school. *Education Week*, 24 (9), 42,56.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Students' right to their own language. (1974). *College Composition and Communication*, 25(3), 1-32.
- Tamura, E. (2002). African American vernacular English and Hawai'i Creole English: A comparison of two school board controversies. *Journal of Negro Education*, 71(1-2), 17-30.
- Tannen, D. (1993). *Framing in discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The growing illiteracy of American boys. (1896). *The Nation*, 285-286.
- van Dijk, T. (1999). Critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 10(4), 459-460.
- Watts, R. (1991). *Power in family discourse*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice & poststructuralist theory*. Second Edition. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.

Manuscript received: August 24, 2005

Revision received: December 12, 2005

Accepted: December 14, 2005