ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Encyclopedia of Language and Education

VOLUME 3: ORAL DISCOURSE AND EDUCATION

The volume titles of this encyclopedia are listed at the end of this volume.

Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Volume 3

ORAL DISCOURSE AND EDUCATION

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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

This is one of eight volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* published by Kluwer Academic. The publication of this work signals the maturity of the field of 'language and education' as an international and interdisciplinary field of significance and cohesion. These volumes confirm that 'language and education' is much more than the preserve of any single discipline. In designing these volumes, we have tried to recognise the diversity of the field in our selection of contributors and in our choice of topics. The contributors come from every continent and from more than 40 countries. Their reviews discuss language and education issues affecting every country in the world.

We have also tried to recognise the diverse interdisciplinary nature of 'language and education' in the selection of the editorial personnel themselves. The major academic interests of the volume editors confirm this. As principal volume editor for Volume 1, Ruth Wodak has interests in critical linguistics, sociology of language, and language policy. For Volume 2, Viv Edwards has interests in policy and practice in multilingual classrooms and the sociology of language. For Volume 3, Bronwyn Davies has interests in the social psychology of language, the sociology of language, and interdisciplinary studies. For Volume 4, Richard Tucker has interests in language theory, applied linguistics, and the implementation and evaluation of innovative language education programs. For Volume 5, Jim Cummins has interests in the psychology of language and in critical linguistics. For Volume 6, Leo van Lier has interests in applied linguistics and in language theory. For Volume 7, Caroline Clapham has interests in research into second language acquisition and language measurement. And for Volume 8, Nancy Hornberger has interests in anthropological linguistics and in language policy. Finally, as general editor, I have interests in the philosophy and sociology of language, language policy, critical linguistics, and interdisciplinary studies. But the thing that unites us all, including all the contributors to this work, is an interest in the practice and theory of education itself.

People working in the applied and theoretical areas of education and language are often asked questions like the following: 'what is the latest research on such and such a problem?' or 'what do we know about such

and such an issue?' Questions like these are asked by many people: by policy makers and practitioners in education; by novice researchers; by publishers trying to relate to an issue; and above all by undergraduate and postgraduate students in the language disciplines. Each of the reviews that appears in this volume tries to anticipate and answer some of the more commonly asked questions about language and education. Taken together, the eight volumes of this Encyclopedia provide answers to more than 200 major questions of this type, and hundreds of subsidiary questions as well.

Each volume of the Encyclopedia of Language and Education deals with a single, substantial subject in the language and education field. The volume titles and their contents appear elsewhere in the pages of this work. Each book-length volume provides more than 20 state-of-the-art topical reviews of the literature. Taken together, these reviews attempt a complete coverage of the subject of the volume. Each review is written by one or more experts in the topic, or in a few cases by teams assembled by experts. As a collection, the Encyclopedia spans the range of subjects and topics normally falling within the scope of 'language and education'. Each volume, edited by an international expert in the subject of the volume, was designed and developed in close collaboration with the general editor of the Encyclopedia, who is a co-editor of each volume as well as general editor of the whole work.

The Encyclopedia has been planned as a necessary reference set for any university or college library that serves a faculty or school of education. Libraries serving academic departments in any of the language disciplines, especially applied linguistics, would also find this a valuable resource. It also seems very relevant to the needs of educational bureaucracies, policy agencies, and public libraries, particularly those serving multicultural or multilingual communities.

The Encyclopedia aims to speak to a prospective readership that is multinational, and to do so as unambiguously as possible. Because each book-size volume deals with a discrete and important subject in language and education, these state-of-the-art volumes also offer authoritative course textbooks in the areas suggested by their titles. This means that libraries will also catalogue these book-size individual volumes in relevant sections of their general collections. To meet this range of uses, the Encyclopedia is published in a hardback edition offering the durability needed for reference collections, and in a future student edition. The hardback edition is also available for single-volume purchase.

Each state-of-the-art review has about 3000 words of text and most follow a similar structure. A list of references to key works cited in each review supplements the information and authoritative opinion that the review contains. Many contributors survey early developments in their topic, major contributions, work in progress, problems and difficulties, and

future directions for research and practice. The aim of the reviews, and of the Encyclopedia as a whole, is to give readers access to the international literature and research on each topic.

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INTRODUCTION

Oral Discourse and Education, examines oral language as a field of study, looking at the various ways in which we can both theorise the place of talk in education, and examine the way talk is actually done in educational settings. Given the centrality of literacy based practices in schools, a volume focussing on talk brings quite different and important perspectives to the study of education. Talk is something that has all too often been devalued and taken for granted. What becomes evident throughout the papers included in this volume is that talk is of central importance in establishing identities and the cultures in which those identities are located. This is made difficult by the fact that we are unused to reflexively examining the way we talk. The associated lack of awareness makes possible a serious disjuncture between

- a) what we believe talk should achieve, and
- b) what can be seen to be achieved in actual talk in educational settings.

The papers in Section 1, *Theorising Talk*, elaborate different ways of theorising and thinking about oral discourse in educational settings.

The volume begins with a review by Olson of the relation between text and talk, between orality and literacy. He describes the heavy reliance on, and the authority granted to, written texts as a critical feature of education as we know it. He discusses the difficulty of focussing on talk as something to be analysed and spoken about which he sees as a central problem in researching oral discourse in educational settings.

In the second review Young elaborates a critical pragmatic theory of classroom talk where he argues that talk or dialogue is fundamental to democracy and thus to the processes of schooling in any democratic state. Drawing on Dewey's pragmatic theory and Habermas's critical theory he says "the essence of democracy is not the mechanisms involved, but the process of participation in . . . self-forming dialogues – dialogues whose outcomes change human identities and relationships". Of central importance to classrooms, he argues, is the recognition that "democracy is never a finished state of affairs" and the capacity of citizens for social dialogue that is rational, and that can accommodate different and conflicting points of view, is fundamental to the evolutionary life of any community. Students must learn to engage in dialogue in which mutual respect and reciprocal valuing of each other is the basis for finding solutions to any problems which might inhibit the well being of the community.

In their review developing a sociocultural perspective on classroom

discourse, Measures, Quell and Wells also argue that language is “the principle means developed by human beings both for coordinating joint activity and for co-constructing knowledge about the world”. Drawing on the theories of Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Halliday they elaborate a theory in which the responsibility of the teacher is to enable students to become “critical and creative actors and thinkers who also transform cultural practices and knowledge.” Dialogue is thus seen as fundamental to education, both between teachers and students and amongst students.

Centring her theoretical analysis on the concept of communicative competence Grundy also elaborates the ideas of Habermas, but draws our attention to some serious flaws in the ideal of rational argument which lies at the heart of his philosophy. Starting with the premise that communicative classroom practices should privilege reasoned argument and challenge on the part of both teachers and students as they collaboratively construct the curriculum, Grundy then goes on to elaborate the way in which actual classroom practice falls short of these ideals. Teachers shape students’ identities in ways which only become visible following close textual analysis of their talk. Student talk, too, from the earliest ages, can produce patterns of “communicative competence” which are oppressive and irrational and which serve to undermine the Habermasian ideal. While the ideals of Habermas’s theory are liberatory in intent, his ‘ideal speech situation’ is one which arguably does nothing to counteract oppressive relations of power inherent in the culture. Grundy argues for the importance of participatory examinations of actual classroom talk on the part of the teachers and students which will generate “critical reflection by teachers, students and academic researchers upon the discursive practices which shape and through which they shape the world of learning in the classroom”. She draws on some of the research informed by poststructuralist theory to show how this might be done.

Baker elaborates the ways in which ethnomethodological research has made the phenomenon of classroom talk observable and reportable. She reviews the methodological and conceptual tools developed by ethnomethodologists and used for examining actual talk in educational settings. Unlike the theoretical positions outlined in the earlier papers, ethnomethodology does not start with a set of cultural ideals against which actual classrooms might be evaluated and found wanting. Rather the focus of ethnomethodology is making the practices of the culture observable and reportable. Through detailed analysis of actual stretches of talk, ethnomethodology enables us to see how it is that the “members’ methods”, that is, of both teachers and students, construct those scenes which we recognise as “educational”.

Alloway and Gilbert then elaborate the ways in which poststructuralist theory has also undertaken the examination of actual talk and as well, how it has worked to make visible the multiple and contradictory ways in

which the human subject is constructed, with all the tensions and contradictions between the discursive positionings made available or withheld. The research reviewed here calls into question the certainties entailed in Habermas's reliance on rational debate by showing the complex links between discourse, subjectivity and desire. The authors conclude with the observation that such "research offers the possibility of more sophisticated analyses that recognise the complex field of discursive play wherein organising principles such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, and school-based competence prove salient in determining the specificity of the subject produced through classroom talk."

Section 2, *Oral Language, Culture and Identity* examines in detail the ways in which culture and identity recreate themselves along gender, class and ethnic lines. The reviews also explore the complex and intricate interplay between being a person and being a member of a particular group.

A.D. Edwards opens with a searching review of the literature theorising the complex relations between language, culture and identity. Drawing in particular on the work of Labov, Bourdieu and Bernstein he goes on to elaborate research which shatters the illusion "that the discourse practices of schools are culturally neutral and therefore fair". His review then analyses the complex relations between spoken language practices, power and status, with a particular focus on class relations.

Tannen, Kendall and Adger examine different conversational styles and patterns across gender, class and ethnicity drawing on the ethnography of communication, ethnomethodology and sociolinguistics. Teachers' attitudes to different narrative styles and different conversational styles are shown to be intricately related to the patterns of privileging some groups over others in classroom talk. In their discussion they provide the important insight that students' readings of what is appropriate (rather than their assumed actual skills) are more important than we might have imagined. Students' may not display the skills they have because they do not see them as appropriate in the situation as they understand it. We can too easily misread this as lack of those skills and work on skills (which they already have) rather than work on different readings of what is appropriate in multiple settings.

The problems of teachers' privileging the symbolic property of the dominant classes is further developed in Heller's review. In particular she addresses the treatment of non-standard varieties of dominant languages. She points out that linguistic codes "represent institutional authority, or challenge to that authority, and can be drawn on in ways which serve principally to establish or resist the local, interactional order, and through that order the larger institutional, and social, one." By examining the discursive means by which privilege is established and maintained Heller makes it clear that "educational language choices are never neutral".

V.K. Edwards also explores the difference in oral language styles amongst diverse cultural groups and makes the very interesting point that “discourse conventions cannot simply be described in terms of linguistic difference.” “Rather”, she says “they are inextricably linked with different cultural values . . . it is sometimes difficult to see how accommodation can be reached between groups which hold highly divergent views of education and society”.

Gilbert goes some way to answering the problems raised by Edwards by developing the idea of critical oracy and its role in education for active citizenship. He points out that “the idea of active citizenship clearly implies that in promoting and challenging forms of power relations or social values, participants need a critical understanding of the consequences of arguments and actions, and their implications for the welfare of self and others.” As well he argues the importance of incorporating poststructuralist understanding of the inscription of bodies and desire through discourse in developing forms of dialogue which genuinely facilitate critical oracy and critical citizenship.

The next three reviews focus primarily on gender and identity followed by two very different reviews on the development of social/communicative competencies.

In her review on play Davies shows how children’s play and social structures and values are intricately connected. Research on play began with observations of what was taken to be natural and gradually focussed on the complex interplay between the social and the individual and the discourses through which each of these is constructed. The complex interplay between the real world and the fictional world is explored here and largely deconstructed. The lived bodily reality of the excitement and violence of virtual reality games for boys in video game arcades is a case in point. This review raises the problem of the recalcitrance of students’ imagined selves and imagined (but real) lived patterns of desire in the face of new and ‘politically correct’ admonitions from adults.

Bjerrum Nielsen and Davies then elaborate in detail the complex relations between usual patterns of talk in classrooms and the formation of gendered-identities. The research reviewed indicates that the apparent success of strategies aimed at “gender neutrality” is illusory. The qualitative studies which established the failure of these early attempts have given way to “studies of cultural meanings, the shaping of individual desires and the discursive strategies through which embodiment of self as boy or girl, both in and out of school, becomes possible.” Through such studies the “subtle interplay between the priorities and social orientations of girls and boys, the structure and content of classroom discourse and the response students receive from the teacher can be seen as almost inevitably maintaining and reinforcing the traditional gender order.”

In her review on narrative and the shaping of identity Golden shows how the “shaping of identity is intimately tied to the storylines that a particular society makes available and desirable to its members . . .” Golden shows the multiple and contradictory ways identity is shaped through narrative, not least of which is the humanist storyline in which identity comes to be understood (and partially achieved) as essential to each person, and as unitary and non-contradictory.

In Green and Dixon’s review this idea is pressed even further, with social competence being shown to be “not a unitary construct, but a situated one defined by particular disciplines, in particular ways, for particular purposes.” What Green and Dixon argue is that the linguistic, social and contextual presuppositions that individuals bring to events “influence both the interpretation of the unfolding event and the choices a speaker makes in participating.” As a result, “what people display to others through their interactions within an event reflects a complex set of interpretations and decisions as well as what was available in their communicative repertoires. . . . The group-individual dynamic” they argue “is central to understanding how social competencies are interactionally accomplished.” Far from competencies being located in the person, an individual’s repertoire for action “reflects the past and present opportunities talked into being within and across groups.”

Pagliano’s review, which follows, reveals how true Green and Dixon’s analysis is, but adds a very interesting twist. Through an examination of students with speech and language impairment Pagliano shows just how devastating the effects of missing out on opportunities for talk can be. Whereas many papers in this volume found some difficulty in focussing specifically on oral language as opposed to language, this paper, in reviewing the issues involved in the absence of oral language, highlights as none other does, the centrality of oral language to identity and to membership within any cultural group. The failure of many educators to take sign language seriously because it is not written, highlights the valuing of written texts over oral texts in Western culture. The absolute centrality of oral language for the formation of identity and culture perhaps goes some way to explaining how it is that those who have achieved oral competence can find it so taken-for-granted that it is hard to actually make it an object of study. In contrast, Pagliano describes the extraordinary team efforts amongst child, family, teacher, specialist teacher, specialists such as speech pathologists and targeted community representatives who work together to achieve oral competence in those children who do not have it. He also reveals the mistakes that are made when it is assumed that absence of oral competence means absence of knowledge. Technologies which have been provided to make communication possible for those without oral language sometimes reveal a rich and complex set of knowledges.

Section 3, Oral Language and the Curriculum, focuses on oral language as it is made relevant in a number of school curricula. The first five reviews examine various aspects of talk in classrooms generally and the final four papers look at the specific classroom settings.

Pontecorvo begins this section by examining the ways in which teacher talk might be changed to lead to more effective learning situations. She shows ways in which the traditional IRE and IRF sequences can be modified and developed such that teachers can “scaffold” the development of students’ thinking. Pontecorvo cites evidence that where students become confident users of exploratory talk, there are significant improvements in students’ performance on joint reasoning tasks.

Mercer then takes up the issue of what effective teacher talk might be and shows how difficult it is to reach a satisfactory definition of effectiveness. He comments that “Few research methods for the analysis of the communicative process of teaching and learning are able to deal satisfactorily with the fact that in all talk, meanings depend on the continual regeneration of a context of shared understanding amongst speakers.”

Westgate’s paper focuses on student talk. He examines the difficulty teachers and students have in establishing effective small group talk amongst students. To avoid idle chat, where students simply talk superficially about process, some researchers have suggested ways of carefully regulating what happens in small group discussions. Westgate points out, however, that this then reduces the possibility of exploratory talk, the development of which is seen to be one of the most important outcomes from small group talk. It is suggested that if teachers want students to engage in dialogic collaborative talk they will have to find ways to make clear what it is that they want from students. Some development in “metadiscoursal awareness” and the encouragement of a reflexive approach, with carefully considered teacher intervention and support are probably necessary if we are to evolve more effective talk-contexts.

Lyle focuses specifically on collaborative talk, showing how on the one hand there has been a recognition of its value since the 1960s, and on the other, how classroom observation studies have shown a remarkable absence of it. Lyle reviews the literature which reveals what the key elements of successful collaborative and exploratory talk are. These include mutual respect, groupings based on friendships and the teachers’ ability to suspend their role as “authorities on meaning” and instead “help the students clarify their understanding.”

de Klerk takes up many of the issues in the earlier papers in Section 3 and brings them into a discussion of tertiary teaching. He discusses the lecture format, its history and its limitations, and looks at the increasing reliance on small group talk in university settings. Drawing attention to the increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of tertiary students he suggests that researchers study verbal interaction as it is linked to wider

social processes and relationships. He suggests we should “explicate its role in confirming or consolidating or challenging and changing the organisations which shape it.” He goes on: “Viewing oral discourse at tertiary level as a kind of social struggle which could result in change, both in the mode of discourse and of wider social and cultural domains will require increasing attention to be given to what these discourses are and how they operate. . . .”

Scrimshaw’s review of talk and computers shows how what we mean by talk is already going through interesting changes as a result of new technologies. The research reviewed shows that as students talk around computers, for example vying for access to the keyboard or mouse or collaborating on a task to be done, some cultural patterns (such as oppressive gender relations) may become more entrenched while at the same time, new skills may be being developed. Equally the substantive material found on computers may have the same features of simultaneously entrenching values and opening up new possibilities. “Talking” with others (even “virtual” others) via computer link-ups may well open up new discursive possibilities for students and is an area in urgent need of further research.

Pirie’s review of the use of talk in maths opens another dimension of complexity in understanding the way talk works. The struggle to find everyday ways of talking about mathematical concepts creates its own set of difficulties. She says that while on the one hand, the “challenge for teachers is to reveal the intended power of mathematical language to be precise, unambiguous, brief and manipulable” they must do so “through the clumsy, imprecise, personal language of oral discourse.” She also comments that technology will increasingly take over the routine aspects of mathematics and that the teacher’s role will lie “in educating students in the processes of conjecturing, explaining and justifying their ideas, and classroom talk has a major part to play in such education.”

Boulter’s review focuses on the problems of science education beginning with the misconceptions science teachers have about what science is. Boulter cites the work of Lemke (1993) which views science, not as a mental accomplishment, but a “discursive performance in which signs and symbols including language are used to make and communicate meanings in the process of constructing the life of a community.” She also cites the work of feminist researchers which reveals science as “culturally positioned in the white, male, middle class western world.” She observes that in classrooms where theorising about the nature of the scientific process has become something both students and teachers engage in, “the reflective toss”, where a student question is followed by an incorporation of his or her meaning into another question, has replaced the IRE format.

McGonigal concludes this volume with an analysis of the intricate relation between literacy studies and oral language. The production of major literacy texts in video form allows them to be studied as spoken text. As

well, the linking up of students via the Internet allows them to “talk” to other students all over the world via the printed word. This has fundamentally blurred the difference between literacy and oracy. The majority of authors in this volume have struggled to extract oral language as a specific object to write about, and in part, that struggle is due to the taken-for-grantedness of orality in the process of communication and meaning-making. McGonigal’s review suggests that some of the shifts in the study of literature may lead to a greater reflexive awareness of spoken language and thus a greater capacity to subject it to critique.

Bronwyn Davies