

Heteroglossia: A space for developing critical language awareness?

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports on research into the challenges of implementing a critical writing pedagogy within a teacher education program in Australia. Participants in this study are student teachers enrolled in a compulsory subject, "Language and Literacy in Secondary School", a subject requiring them to develop a knowledge of the role of language and literacy across the secondary school curriculum and to show personal proficiency in literacy as part of graduate outcomes for teacher education dictated by the State Government of Victoria. To develop an understanding of the way that language has shaped their lives, students write a narrative about their early literacy experiences – a task which they all find very challenging, especially in comparison with the formal writing of other university subjects. Rather than simply reminiscing about their early childhood, they are encouraged to juxtapose voices from the past and the present, and to combine a range of texts within their writing. Later in the semester they revisit these accounts of their early literacy experiences and, in a separate piece of writing, endeavour to place these accounts within the contexts of theories and debates they have encountered in the course of completing this unit. The students' writing provides a small window on how they are experiencing their tertiary education and their preparation as teachers, including the managerial controls that are currently shaping university curriculum and pedagogy. We argue that such heteroglossic texts (Bakhtin, 1981) prompt students to stretch their repertoires as language-users, enabling them to develop a socially critical awareness of language and literacy, including the literacy practices in which they engage as university students.

KEY WORDS: New managerialism, professional learning, writing space, heteroglossia, literacy.

INTRODUCTION

We live in an "audit society" characterised by a culture and technology of performance management and neo-liberal corporate accountability (Power, 1999). This culture has become deeply rooted in the governance of education, reflecting the economic imperatives of "new capitalism". The new principles of work, such as neo-liberal practices of institutional control, market relevance and accountability, extend into every corner of Education Faculties – from the curriculum and pedagogy of teacher education programs to the organisation of research activities. This means increasingly improving the standards of teaching and research, competing for funding and students, and being subjected to internal auditing mechanisms, such as "client" satisfaction surveys, as well as external pressures by governments to produce graduates with certain attributes. "New managerialism" and the rituals of performance surveillance bite deeply into the identities and activities of teacher educators. These practices produce new subjectivities for teacher educators and a particular set of

practices which mediate their understandings of selves and relationships with others as they try to cope with the accelerated pace of internal and external pressures (Ball, 2001). These “inside out” and “outside in” controls and performance pressures generate identities disciplined by imposed targets and performance indicators, causing people to rethink what counts as teacher education and teacher professionalism.

The regime of neo-liberal accountability in teacher education claims to be serving the public’s interests but, paradoxically, by recasting curriculum and pedagogy to produce competency-based and highly specific graduate attributes (Doecke & Kostogriz, 2003), it effectively erodes education as a public enterprise. According to a list of graduate attributes prepared by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, student-teachers must display a “basic knowledge” of literacy pedagogy and the role of language and literacy in learning, a requirement which might be thought to reflect a worthy emphasis on the need for all teachers – regardless of their disciplinary area – to accept responsibility for teaching literacy.

Yet, this reflects a very limited notion of public accountability, in that language and literacy are treated as a set of basic skills that can somehow be conceptualised apart from the contexts and practices in which they are applied. The list of graduate attributes do not invite student-teachers to recognise how certain literacy practices mediate the relationships of diverse communities in Australian society, or to interrogate how school literacy practices privilege the literacy practices of dominant social groups at the expense of others. The external, “outside-in” imposition of such graduate attributes on teacher education often conflicts with the possibilities opened up by a critical pedagogy that encourages student-teachers to conceive literacy as literacies – as multiple, socio-cultural and ideological practices – and to recognise the political role they might play in ameliorating social inequalities when they become teachers. The neo-liberal modalities of control over teacher education arguably become a major hurdle in raising students’ critical awareness of language and literacy and preparing them to meet the needs of students in diverse communities.

In the current climate of teacher education, the writing students produce often takes the form of assignments that reflect the ideology of outcomes and the culture of compliance engendered by managerial control over professional learning. A successful performance in a writing task, from a managerial perspective, often equates with the reproduction of dominant knowledge and the ability to demonstrate this through an expression of one’s “individual” viewpoint. Students must typically demonstrate a mastery of formal writing genres such as the academic essay, thereby affirming their “ownership” of what they write. Students-as-authors have this obligation not only to display their ability to engage fully in the production of “meaningful” text but also to do this under the pressure of topics, purposes and criteria articulated in unit assessment tasks. They are obliged to find their “voice” in a situation characterised by a contradiction between the neo-liberal celebration of individualistic free-thinking and the panoptic control of academic/professional standards and learning outcomes. Given the fate of student “voice” in this kind of contradictory mixture of neo-liberal and managerial approaches to academic writing, it becomes increasingly difficult to see how students might develop a critical awareness of professional knowledge production. Everything seems to be pinned down in advance in the form of pre-specified graduate attributes, unit outcomes that

reflect those attributes, and formal assessment tasks that show individual students have achieved those unit outcomes.

This approach to writing pedagogy has been contested at least in some critical circles of educators (see Steiner *et al.*, 2000). In particular, some teacher educators have taken a firm stand with regard to the managerial control of learning outcomes (Sachs, 2001) which inevitably depoliticises and de-historicises the construction of teacher identities by removing professional learning from the arena of power and struggle over meaning. Outcomes ideology in teacher education works to make sure that dominant meanings, which underlie the regulatory discourse of what counts as teacher professionalism, are not questioned (Doecke & Kostogriz, 2003). By constructing student-teachers' learning as a unitary and progressive movement towards imagined professional standards, managerial discourse disregards the fact that internalisation of knowledge is caught up in a complex web of power relations – relations which, according to Foucault (1980), connect power and knowledge and which are constituted through language and social practice. Therefore, from a critical perspective on writing in teacher education, student voice can not be perceived simply as an “individual” expression of the “creative” subject who produces and “owns” the text. What students write depends on the complex interaction between the ideology of teacher education, available textual resources, pedagogical practices, student “locations” in the sociocultural milieu, and their ways of appropriating the words and voices of others.

Our aim in this paper and, indeed, one of our motivations for researching students' writing in our “Language and Literacy in Secondary School” unit, is to explore whether it is possible for students to gain a critical perspective on their professional learning by engaging in different textual practices from those usually associated with the production of academic knowledge. We are especially keen to investigate the potential of heterogeneous texts that enable students in education faculties to explore some of the tensions we have just considered. Their struggle is not simply a matter of understanding a certain “content” (e.g. critical language awareness) but of engaging in a set of textual practices that might open up such understandings. To see their writing as a space for “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981) or the play of conflicting voices is to conceptualise their learning as a struggle over power and meaning, rather than as a steady progress towards the attainment of certain graduate attributes or professional standards.

WRITING SPACE IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

While much has been said about the role of writing in teacher education, little thought seems to have been devoted to how students come to articulate their understandings in conditions of “new managerialism”. Our interest was originally triggered as we assessed our students' writing, when we became increasingly conscious of the conflicts they were experiencing when tackling the issues with which we were concerned. It seemed that their fashioning of their professional selves was marked by a tension between critical approaches to language and literacy education and the managerial climate of teacher education. And this was not simply because our students clung to common sense notions of literacy which they imbibed as children and consumers of popular media. To the contrary, many were able to embrace

“literacies” (even to speak of “multiliteracies”), but they were still positioned as the recipients of a certain type of professional knowledge and training, and their writing revealed ambiguities and contradictions that could not be contained by the logic and flow of a traditional academic essay. To understand the tensions and struggles in their writing and professional learning, and to open up the possibility of disrupting the lines of power in teacher education, we began to draw on a concept of writing as a social-semiotic space (see Doecke & Kostogriz, 2004).

Spaces come in all shapes and sizes, and the category of space has been increasingly used in educational research to study the ways of (re)presenting and (re)making professional, teaching and learning environments (Edwards & Usher, 2000; Doecke & Kostogriz, 2004; Kostogriz, 2005; McGregor, 2003). However, we cannot really use notions of spatiality productively unless we think of space as something constructed by language. As Crang and Thrift (2000, p. 4) argue, thinking about space always “occurs through the medium of language” and because “texts are worldly and worlds textual ...we also need to consider the relationship of space and language.” This idea also runs through the works of Lefebvre (1991) and Foucault (1986), who argue that the production of space is inseparable from language and the powerful workings of discourses. Language does not stand outside spatial locations and these locations do not pre-exist the acts of enunciation and narration. Rather, spaces are produced through language; they are written and spoken, as it were, into material existence.

Given this intimate relationship between language and space, *writing space* can be defined as a socio-culturally situated production and consumption of texts – a process which is mediated by cultural and textual resources at hand, by institutional organisation and its discursive practices, and by the experiences, histories and communication networks of people that cut through the apparent boundaries of local places. What and how one writes is related to how one is situated “here and now” and to one’s location in other places – to the “there and then” or “chronotope” of one’s social life (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). Because meaning-making involves this mix of spatial-temporal relations, writing space is about both social determination and agency. It is constituted by and constitutive of power-knowledge systems and it provides possibilities of re-framing them – possibilities that can be more or less consciously realised on the spatial boundary between the inside (socially situated and relatively fixed) and the outside (temporally unstable, semiotically fluid and socially diverse) in the production of meanings and identities.

This notion of writing space has proved increasingly helpful in our research into teacher professional learning. In our particular case, writing space is the space constituted through the discursive tension between the official/prescriptive and unofficial/counter-prescriptive representations of professional identity and knowledge and, through what appears in students’ texts, constitutive of this “power geometry” (Massey, 1994). Given our commitments to critiquing dominant representations of what counts as language and literacy, to disrupting the lines of power that enable the reproduction of dominant knowledge by engaging students in ways of writing that would reflect socio-cultural heterogeneity, difference and multiplicity of textual practices, we conceive of writing space as an arena of struggle for meaning. But while this critical take on writing pedagogy in teacher education appears to be a worthy goal, it also needs to be acknowledged that the writing process as it is experienced by our students is fraught with challenges. These challenges involve, as Giroux (1992)

suggested, teaching “students to resist particular readings while simultaneously learning how to write their own narratives,” and at issue here is “not merely the need for students to develop a healthy scepticism towards all discourses of authority, but also to recognize how authority and power can be transformed in the interest of creating a democratic society” (p. 210). Herein lies an enormous task for teacher educators and students alike, for critical awareness of these issues calls into question not only mainstream practices related to language and literacy, but also a whole range of social, cultural and pedagogical issues.

HETEROGLOSSIA WITHIN WRITING SPACE

The challenges of injecting a critical dimension into pre-service teacher education have to do, first and foremost, with broader challenges to destabilize the workings of ideological forces which constitute teachers as “pedagogic technicians” (Maguire, 2001) by depoliticising teacher education and, in turn, by repositioning those who come from working class and migrant backgrounds as members of a middle class who would promote dominant socio-cultural practices, literacy and knowledge in schools. Through this ideology in teacher education students are, to use Freirean words, “anaesthetized” and assimilated to a particular type of consciousness which can effectively preclude them from the possibility of critical reflection about their own professional learning as well as the possibility of producing new forms of knowledge for social change. In such conditions, many students are submerged in the endemic realities of “banking” approaches to education (which, with respect to literacy education, means teaching literacy as a decontextualized set of basic skills) and only some are open to the principles of critical pedagogy.

Exploring the nature of these contradictions in teacher education becomes increasingly important if we are to create new sites of struggle over educational knowledge, professional learning and identity. The Bakhtinian notion of “heteroglossia” is helpful in understanding better the contradictions and tensions of introducing critical pedagogy in the managerial climate of teacher education.

For Bakhtin (1981), discourse always represents a worldview – that is, it is “ideologically saturated”, and there are two distinct ideological forces in any society – one is centripetal and another is centrifugal. Centripetal discourses are “monoglossic” in that they tend to centralise or standardise language and fix or close meanings, while centrifugal discourses gravitate towards the periphery, decentralise and diversify language, and resist closure by articulating unofficial worldviews. Heteroglossia, according to Bakhtin (1981) refers to the conflict between these two forces:

The centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a “unitary language”, operate in the midst of heteroglossia. At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word ... but also – and for us this is the essential point – into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, “professional” and “generic” languages, languages of generations and so forth... Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward (pp. 271-272).

Heteroglossia therefore is a political-semiotic concept that cannot be confused with “polyphony”. While polyphony implies co-existence of different languages within national boundaries, heteroglossia denotes internal struggle and differentiation within a language.

Once heteroglossia is incorporated into writing space (whatever the form of its incorporation), the process of writing ceases to represent “individual voice”, and the author’s intentions become expressed in a subjected way as the enactment of twofold direction in meaning-making. Bakhtin (1984) calls this phenomenon a double-voiced discourse, which is “directed both toward the referential object of speech, as an ordinary discourse, and toward *another’s discourse*, toward *someone else’s speech*” (p. 185). Authorial writing, in this case, becomes dialogised in heteroglossic utterances, thereby permitting “a multiplicity of social voices” and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships to different discourses and languages (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and multiple discourses and languages are an elemental feature of heteroglossic writing space in which conflicting worldviews collide. Therefore, in the process of writing, heteroglossia is the context-dependence of particular utterances and dialogism is the driving force of meaning-making. By its sheer location within a writing space created by heteroglossia, the writing subject is decentred and her consciousness is located in-between conflicting discourses, created by heteroglossia. In this matrix of dialogised heteroglossia, meaning-making lies on the inter-discursive and inter-textual borderline and appropriating these social discourses and texts is a complicated struggle and ideological activity; “it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294).

From this Bakhtinian position, then, we might argue that writing as a situated practice of professional learning is not just about reproduction of a unitary knowledge, but rather involves its transformation based on rich heteroglossic potentiality. However, meaning-making dynamics are marked by dialogic uncertainty, for writing space is a site where multiple discourses clash, producing particular modalities of power dynamics in writing.

The main challenge in espousing critical pedagogy in teacher professional learning is to recognise and come to grips with the conflictual nature of students’ writing – conflicts generated by power relations between discourses of language and literacy education, between discourses of teacher educators and those of their students, and between individual students themselves. From this perspective, our students’ writing provides a space for an interplay of “voices” and contrasting perspectives in their professional becoming. How their professional identities and understandings are shaped in the era of “new managerialism” and how they articulate what they have learnt in our unit are particularly explicit in their subtle responses to the effects of bureaucratic, pedagogical and teacher professional discourses. How these discursive “geometries of power” work within the heteroglossic writing space is also more obvious in tasks when students are invited to think about how they have come to know what they know during the course of writing.

CASE STUDIES

To develop an understanding of how language has shaped their lives, our students write a narrative about their early literacy experiences – a task which they all find very challenging, especially in comparison with the formal writing of other university subjects. This is partly in response to Shirley Brice Heath's (1982) essay, "What no bed-time story means", when they first encounter the notion of "literacy events" and begin thinking about the different ways in which such events are staged in "Maintown", "Roadville" and "Trackton", the diverse range of communities that form the subject of Heath's research. Rather than simply reminiscing about their early childhood, the students are encouraged to juxtapose voices from the past and the present, and to combine a range of texts within their writing. In a separate piece of writing, which they append to their narratives, they are also invited to reflect on the significance of their stories. Taken together, their narratives and concluding reflections constitute a heteroglossic text that stretches their repertoires as language users.

Later in the semester they revisit these accounts of their early literacy experiences and, in a second piece of writing, endeavour to place these accounts within the contexts of theories and debates they have encountered in the course of completing this unit.

What follows are two cases studies that we have constructed on the basis of the writing which two of our students produced for this unit. We shall thereby illustrate the heteroglossic character of their writing and consider the extent to which this provides a space for developing a socially critical awareness of language and literacy, including the literacy practices in which they engage as university students.

Growing up in a rural community

Janine Carpenter's autobiographical narrative and her second assignment provide an example of how students locate themselves in the current moment by attempting to reconstruct moments in their early childhood. Her narrative begins with a vivid evocation of a "day" that "appeared to begin like most other normal weekdays", and involves a third-person account of her parents' activities in the farm kitchen, prior to her own entry on the scene, when "the Dad stepped over to the door and hoisted the young daughter up on to his hip smiling all the while". This might be viewed as a somewhat sentimental account of her childhood, evoking feelings of warmth and security relating to the family home, and her induction into "mainstream" literacy practices.

It is also noteworthy that, while her father was a farmer, her mother was a primary-school teacher who imported all her professional skills into caring for her children. As Janine observes in her reflections in conclusion (where she switches to the first person), her mother "really understood how to get through to us and she really was great at teaching us, even though it didn't seem as though she really was at the time". She also mentions that when she and her siblings eventually began school, the teachers "found us pretty easy to teach in the early years because all four of us could read so well and write legibly. They were impressed with what we really could do and we were often more advanced than the other children in our classes that we were given higher-level readers and harder exercises to do to keep us interested and challenge...".

How can any of this constitute a “critical” analysis of the literacy events of her childhood? Her mention of ranking students into those who were “more advanced” and who were given “higher-level readers” invokes the complex apparatus of school literacy practices, including the way such practices are used to discriminate between students and to promote a version of “literate” practice that privileges some social groups at the expense of others. This hardly appears to have any critical edge. Yet this voice or perspective combines uneasily with other dimensions within the text that preclude any pat judgment of this kind and enable us to better understand the productive work that Janine is doing with this writing.

From the beginning of the text, she signals the complexity of “placing” these experiences in relation to her sense of her identity as a student within an education faculty. Although the story begins with the observation that “the day appeared to begin like most other normal weekdays”, the next paragraph starts with the sentence: “However, this day was a little different...” But in the scene which follows, nothing is said which suggests that this moment was anything other than typical of the narrator’s everyday relationships with her parents, or that the scene does not typify her childhood. The narrator explains that usually the parents woke their children and presumably the difference today is that the young girl has entered the kitchen and requested her father to read her a storybook, but a sense of dissonance is nonetheless created, raising a question as to how exactly to “place” these narrated events in relation to the moment of narration (or what Bakhtin calls the “chronotope” of the narrated events in relation to the “chronotope” of narration). This uncertainty also becomes evident when, in her concluding paragraph to the story, she writes: “The book ended and they both stayed in their imaginary worlds for a few seconds before snapping back to reality” – which might be taken as a figure for the way the narrative as a whole relates to the time and place of the narration and the circumstances in which Janine currently finds herself.

The work that Janine is doing in this writing cannot be captured by conventional notions of textual unity – whether we invoke a notion of a “whole” story with a beginning, a middle and an end, or the sequence of ideas in a logical argument. The text is more properly described as enacting a process of becoming, as the writer struggles to position herself in relation to the events and voices she evokes. The story involves an assemblage of voices, involving dialogue between the mother and the father. The child just giggles, not yet in a position to speak, but she is receptive to all that is around her: “She could smell the hint of hay as well as grease in his clothes, most likely because he had fed the cattle and fixed whatever had broken on the tractor the day before.” The conversation between the parents takes place over the head of the child, and yet implicates the child in the decision by the father to read the story.

The critical edge of this piece emerges less through logical argument or analysis than through narrative complexities of this kind. Janine concludes her reflections (in which she tries to capture the significance of the narrative she has written) by saying:

Growing up on a farm has definitely been something that I feel so lucky to have been able to experience – I have really loved being able to be so free and able to do whatever I wanted in such a large open space. It has shaped me into being who I am, and while it may not have directly helped or hindered my literacy levels, it is something that has made me free and open to allow my wildest imaginations to exist and prosper in my own little part of the world.

The “performative” (Butler, 1993) character of this statement means that it is doing more than wrapping up an idyllic picture of the narrator’s childhood in a rural setting, but invokes “the world of the narration itself” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 255), indicating how she sees herself as engaging in the world as she now finds it, including the managerial environment of the university and the professional world of teaching. (Janine’s statement also provides an interesting example of heteroglossia, combining images of the “large open spaces” of rural Australia, including the “wild imaginings” that it inspires, with conventional educational discourse about “literacy levels”.)

When Janine went on to complete her final assignment, she returned to the topic of rural communities and schooling, when she was troubled by the fact that some of the statements she makes might be construed as “gross generalisations”. She claims, however, that: “I believe that the topics I will discuss are real problems that are out there, whether all teachers want to acknowledge they exist or not.” She describes herself as making “gross generalisations”, but instead her struggle appears to be that the specific character of her experiences – which she describes as something “quite unique” – may not provide a basis for making generalisations that are acceptable in academic writing. Her unease about the way that generalisations operate might be taken to be an implicit critique of the kind of textual work done in much academic writing. Against the generalisations that might be made about rural communities, she resorts to vivid detail that clearly derives from her own experiences, including the “busy periods ...on farms and how to deal with boys that fall asleep in class from being on the tractor all night, or girls that have been cooking for shearing and are tired from being up at 5am that morning.”

This writing also concludes with a statement about who she is and what she wants to become:

As someone that wants to teach in rural schools I think that looking at the issues now and getting as much experience with them though looking at other teachers and how they deal with them from experience is something that can only be beneficial to my teaching. From watching the teachers and how they deal with the individual problems of students from various backgrounds, it is clear that each case has to be take individually and it needs to be worked on to achieve the best possible outcome for the student. However, that is what teaching is all about and as a young teacher you want to get out there and hopefully make a difference, even if only slightly in the lives of your students.

Italian migrant working class parents

Some students struggle with Shirley Brice Heath’s concept of “literacy events” and her distinction between Trackton, Roadville and Maintown communities. Sophie Marchetta’s text provides an interesting example of this kind of struggle.

She begins her narrative with a conversation involving her sister and two-year old niece:

“Belinda, why don’t you show Aunty Sue those new books you got from the shops the other day...?”
 “Would you like me to read these to you?” I ask.

“Ess,” she says nodding her head.

“Should we go and sit on the couch so we can get comfy? Which book would you like me to read to you first?”

“Dis un,” she says smiling.

This exchange, however, is in a stark contrast with her story as it unfolds, which takes the form of an historical narrative, marked by the year of Sophie’s parents’ births in Italy in 1928, their experiences of their youth and early adulthood during the 30s and 40s, and then their migration to Australia “during the 1950s... to begin a new life, full of opportunity”. Her language at this point echoes the official rhetoric of Australia’s post-war immigration program, as well as the way the experience of migration is sometimes nostalgically recounted by people who arrived in Australia in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. She writes:

With all the challenges facing any migrant entering and living in a new land, learning a new language was central. In those days, many migrants were not given English lessons upon arriving in Australia. This was the case for my parents, and thus their English lessons came from the Australians they encountered through their work, their neighbours, etc. My parents fondly remember many Australians being very hospitable in verbally teaching them certain words in English. From this experience, my parents again were provided with a way of learning that involved listening, speaking, watching, and doing.

Sophie then goes on to describe her own education, involving a verbal mix of “broken” English and an Italian dialect: “My father had mastered ‘broken’ English, but could not read and write it. My mother, on the other hand, was able to understand English, but was not confident with the new language and was only able to speak a few words here and there.” This meant that her schooling presented a complete contrast to the world she knew as a child: “All my learning was gained through experiences that were ‘real’, not imaginative. My literacy came from my interactions with people, places, things, listening, watching, doing ... how could I relate to or understand a story which was not able to be compared to my world?”

Sophie includes quotations from Heath’s “What no bed time story means” in order to justify her conclusion that her childhood experiences should not be viewed negatively, as reflecting “a lack of preparation for my schooling, in terms of the ‘mainstream’ view or experience of literacy”: “As Heath (1982, p. 73) puts forth, the mainstream ways of acquiring communicative competence do not offer a universally applicable model of development.” Yet there are also signs that she is in dialogue with Heath, and that she is questioning Heath’s understanding of “literacy events”, rather than merely using her analytical categories to examine her early childhood literacy experiences. After evoking the scene with her sister and niece at the start of the narrative, she interpolates with the authorial comment that “reflecting on my early childhood experiences involving “literacy events”, as described by Heath (1982, p. 50), was an especially difficult task for me. In actual fact, I didn’t (and still don’t) remember any occurring.” This sense of a lack of fit between Heath’s analysis and her own childhood opens up a critical perspective on Heath’s account of the patterns of socialization and language development prior to schooling.

The narrative Sophie constructs is reminiscent of social realist tales of migration collected in oral histories. Indeed, by invoking the “real” vis-à-vis the make-believe

world of school books, she runs the risk of appearing to subscribe to a naïve realism, where the life of the “veggie patch” and the Italian community she knew as a child is more authentic than school and the world from which she is now writing. But this does not do justice to the identity work that she performs by narrating her parents’ experiences of post-war migration and her own encounters with school. Her text includes several important statements at different stages of the narrative about who she is, in much the same way that Janine Carpenter uses her narrative to affirm her sense of identity. Sophie writes in the first person singular but significantly widens her statement to include others, most notably her parents and (by implication) other members of her community:

On struggling to find an event, I realised that, to understand my lack of eventfulness with “mainstream” literacy events, I had to look at my parents’ lives – their childhoods and the circumstances they were in when I was a child. This is important because my early childhood experiences were a product of my parents’ influences... These are the experiences that are etched in my mind. This is my experience of “literacy”. One that is quite different to that of my niece in the opening extract... I, a first generation Australia, grew up in a situation that was far from “mainstream”. I grew up in a world created by Italian migrant working class parents, where the values, beliefs, norms and traditions were very different from many of my Australian counterparts. My early childhood learning was not the norm, and so as a consequence, my transition to school was not quite so progressive....

She then concludes this text with a statement in the first person plural:

Literacy is much more than being able to read and write at a specific level judged or dictated by a mainstream educational system. It delves into much deeper territory than what is classified as the “norm”. Rather, literacy is about who we are as individuals and how we explore our own worlds in terms of our interactions with different people, places, books, things, traditions, values, beliefs, norms, languages... Our whole environment. It’s about what we take from our world, imaginary or real, written or spoken, and the depth of importance, value and richness we place on these experiences.

It is significant that in this statement she appropriates Heath’s notion of “taking” from the world without quoting her. Heath’s text has become an echo within her “own” attempt to articulate an alternative understanding of literacy to those of the “norm”.

Sophie continues this kind of work in her final assignment, where she again affirms the importance of recognising that “many forms of literacy exist in our society, and although they may not be judged as “correct” against the dominant view orchestrated through the mainstream schooling system, each one of them is valid.” This insight is now set against the backdrop of her visit to a secondary school (in the course of the unit each student is required to complete a practicum), where she encountered different discourses at work. She revisits her own experiences of schooling, and the fact that “it was not necessarily my ability or capacity that was holding me back from doing well, but rather my cultural experiences which played a major part in my struggles. I was basically not accepted as a diverse student with different, enriching, and valuable experiences that consequently influenced how and what I learnt. I had to fit into the established mainstream method of learning literacy, even though they were foreign to me and did not complement the experiences I had prior to my entering the school system.”

At this point the language of the text becomes interesting, as Sophie endeavours to mediate between what she sees as the demands of the “mainstream” and her commitment to meeting the diverse needs of students when she becomes a teacher. For it is not as though she can simply embrace the alternative view of literacy education that she has been formulating through her writing, or that she is even confronted by anything as straightforward as a set of alternatives. Even when she is affirming the need for cultural diversity in defiance of the “mainstream”, her own language echoes traditional understandings of ability, as is also evident in her earlier autobiographical observation, that she was held back “from doing well”. This is not to say that the statements about her identity and her beliefs in this essay are any less powerful than those statements she made in her first assignment:

But at the same time, I know as a teacher, I will have my own values and beliefs that I will bring to the classroom. To add to that, I will be working within a system that expects a certain standard and measurement of competence. So the questions I ask myself are, to what degree will I impose the dominant mainstream view of competence? Will I be able to detach myself from my expectation, and consider diverse students and what they bring to the classroom? Will I look outside the “square”? I suppose being conscious and aware of these issues puts me one step closer to the type of teacher I hope to be.

CONCLUSION

We are proposing here a different take on students’ writing than traditional ways of assessing the assignments they produce, analysing them as acts of meaning-making or a performative practice of professional learning. We are interested less in what their texts say (i.e. in identifying some kind of pre-specified “content” or “outcome”) than in analysing how they have arrived at a particular vision of things. By foregrounding the heteroglossic character of Janine’s and Sophie’s texts, we develop a better understanding of their struggles mediating between the official and unofficial, dominant and subjugated views of teacher professionalism in the area of language and literacy education.

This is to argue for a more nuanced understanding of critical language awareness than is usually associated with this notion. Taken together, Janine’s and Sophie’s narratives and concluding reflections have a multileveled character that is captured by Bakhtin’s (1981) understanding of how “the chronotope of the represented world” in a narrative is comprehended within “the chronotope of the readers and creators of the work,” producing “a mutual interaction between the world represented in the work and the world outside the work” (p. 255). By “chronotope” (literally, time-space) Bakhtin (1981) names “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” – a concept which obviously has a larger significance than that of simply a formal literary category (p. 84). With respect to our students’ writing, it describes a complex process whereby, to borrow Bakhtin’s (1981) words, the worlds they construct in their narratives and their existing world “can never fuse with each other or be identical to each other”, and yet are, “at the same time, interrelated and indissolubly tied up with each other” (p. 255). Janine and Sophie are asking questions about how the events they originally narrated might be understood from the place and time in which they are currently situated. The way this exercise is formulated prompts this kind of inquiry, not only through the conscious choices they

make when constructing their narratives (the point of view, the construction of time and place), but also because they are invited to append a reflection in conclusion in which they endeavour to draw out the significance of the events they have constructed from their current standpoint.

Later in the semester, when our students revisit their early narratives, and reconceptualise their literacy experiences within the analytical frameworks provided to them in the course of completing this unit of work, our students are once again confronted by this paradox of identity and non-identity between their former selves and their current selves. This paradox is played out in the way the theoretical perspectives and voices they combine in their writing do not necessarily produce a coherent whole (the seamless text of a logical argument produced by a rational individual who is able to survey the world and make a dispassionate judgement about what is “there”). Their writing is, instead, best conceived as a space in which a range of voices clash.

The kinds of practices that currently dominate teacher education have produced a paralysed or limited space for conceptualising professional learning. Yet it is important to continue to affirm the possibility of developing acritical language awareness in teacher education, precisely because of the way the latter is currently constrained by conditions of managerialism and new models of professionalism. It is crucial to mobilise accounts of teacher agency that can help support a political struggle for democratic education. The students’ writing which we have examined in this article provides a small window on how they are experiencing their tertiary education, including the managerial controls that are currently shaping university curriculum and pedagogy. We have reason to be optimistic that the critical language awareness which they have developed in their writing will subsequently inform their professional practice as secondary teachers.

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