

What is not said on hearing poetry in the classroom

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ABSTRACT: This article considers an exchange between pupils in response to heard poetry, approaching it through a “conversation analytic mentality” informed by the theories of Basil Bernstein. Using his terms, it describes an existing “pedagogic device” of poetry study for schools, to which responses under discussion do not easily correlate. This is more than an issue of discourse, as the modality of the classroom encounter with the poem – in sound – and the ensuing public discussion present distinctive questions of meaning-making extending beyond semantics to intonation and participation, elements not said. These are salient for the epistemology of classroom interactions with poems as audio texts and related discussion between pupils. The nature of responses can be viewed as entirely apt to the context and the nature of the stimulus, and may constitute subtle insight and imply sophisticated cognition. The discussion is developed with attention to current issues in UK poetry teaching, in particular the difficulties reported in examiners’ reports that pupils experience in trying to write about poetry in a conventional analytical discourse. One interpretation of the transcript is that pupils can indeed respond sensitively to poetry, though in ways not easily acknowledged by this established discourse of poetry in schools.

KEYWORDS: Poetry, response, conversation analysis, Basil Bernstein.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reflects on the responses of a small group of children to a poem they have heard in class, via a CD recording. It sets discussion relative to the broader issue, in the UK at least, of how children in general appear to have trouble engaging with poetry in school. The central transcript appears to suggest the capacity of pupils to respond to a poem in complex, subtle ways, though – and colloquially – on their own terms. The analysis adopts a “conversation analytic mentality” (Schenkein, 1978, pp. 1-6) informed by the work of Basil Bernstein around *public language* (1958/2010), associated *elaborated* and *restricted codes* (1973), and what he terms the *pedagogic device* (1996).

It is motivated by the dearth of empirical research relevant not only to poetry as a heard medium in schools, but to considerations of poetry *per se* encountered in educational settings. These circumstances parallel those in other strands of school-based literary study, where “there is almost no research specifically on the language children use in reflection on the language in literature written for them”, implying the same necessity to imagine “other possibilities for developing meta-awareness through literacy pedagogy” through research that can “expand a sense of how children might think about meaning-making in literary texts” (Williams, 2000 pp. 111, 127). It is interested in meta-awareness, but has first an interest in what pupils’ responses might tell us about their meaning-making and the nature of their literary awareness at the moment of public utterance.

This short extract from a transcript of classroom dialogue lies at the heart of the matter:

Mark = Mm̩:n tɑ:l̩k =

Mimics stress of recording

Teacher = George?
er

Mark Mm̩:n tɑ:l̩k

Mark, like his peers – including George – has just heard the poem “Men Talk”, performed by its author, poet Liz Lochhead. He repeats the refrain of the poem, apparently without context and certainly without invitation. What’s going on there? To what degree is his response evidence of getting to the crux, of engagement with the detail of the poem? I am interested because one possible interpretation is that through repetition of the “men talk” phrase this boy gets to the point of the text before his peers: he is *doing* something beyond repetition, that the timing of the contribution in the exchange contributes to its meaning. In my view it is more than coincidental that he replicates not only the words, but their intonation too. Indeed, he seems to perceive the quotation, intonation included, as a complete unit. In this I infer his thorough engagement with the text and response to how it makes meaning, and suggest this is more than parroting what has been heard. Yet his treatment by teacher and peers is also fascinating – he is in the moment effectively ignored – and this is the salient point which makes his own interjection so much of interest. Their conversation eventually gets round to attend to the unit he repeated, as if attention to this *does* constitute satisfactory interpretation of the poem or resolution of the discussion, though it was not accepted as such when he essayed its introduction.

CONTEXT

The instance here represents activity in a collaborative research project between schools and a university entitled Poetry as Sound. Fieldwork took place in two primary schools and one secondary school, where classes engaged in listening to poetry via CD recordings provided on an anthology drawn from performance recordings at the local Aldeburgh Poetry Festival (an annual event featuring poets of international renown with a predominantly adult audience). A key principle was that use of print-based materials, particularly poems in print, would be minimised. The CD provided a common resource for all participants. Audio-visual recordings of discussions that followed listening activity were made, the group conversations then transcribed via the method of Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA; see Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Sacks, 1966). Here, pupils aged nine and ten (UK year 5) reflected on one of the poems selected for consideration by the teacher from the CD anthology provided. The specific school setting was a suburban primary on a city periphery.

What happened, then, in this classroom encounter with poetry? First, the children twice heard a recorded performance (played for them via a CD) of the poem “Men Talk”, presented to the whole class in their daily classroom setting. The heard poem is presented below in conventional print form. Secondly, pupils responded verbally to what they had heard, the class separated by gender into smaller groups. This paper

represents as CA transcript the sequence of response arising from the group discussion of ten boys working with their usual teacher in a group-work situation (Kyriacou, 1991, pp. 41-43) for group talk (Sage, 2000, pp. 23, 37; DfEE, 2001b, pp. 51-64), around a number of desks pushed together to form a rectangle. They did not have a copy of the printed poem to hand at this juncture.

Now, the stimulus poem (Lochhead, 1985), with the caveat that this is not of course the same text encountered by pupils, but a representation in a different mode:

Men Talk (Rap)

Women
Rabbit rabbit rabbit women
Tattle and titter
Women prattle
Women waffle and witter

Men talk. Men Talk.

Women into Girl Talk
About Women's Trouble
Trivia 'n' Small talk
They yap and they babble

Men talk. Men Talk.

Women gossip Women giggle
Women niggle-niggle-niggle
Men talk.

Women yatter
Women chatter
Women chew the fat, women spill the beans
Women aint been takin'
The oh-so Good Advice in them
Women's Magazines.

A Man Likes A Good Listener.

Oh yeah
I like A Woman
Who likes me enough
Not to nitpick
Not to nag and
Not to interrupt 'cause I call the treason
A woman with the Good Grace
To be struck dumb
By me Sweet Reason. Yes –

A Man Likes A Good Listener
A Real
Man
Likes a Real Good Listener

Women yap yap yap
 Verbal Diarrhoea is a Female Disease
 Woman she spread she rumours round she
 Like Philadelphia Cream Cheese.

Oh
 Bossy Women Gossip
 Girlish Women Giggle
 Women natter, women nag
 Women niggle niggle niggle

Men talk.
 Men
 Think First, Speak Later
 Men talk.

On a semantic level, whether read in print or heard aloud, the poem attributes certain actions – or rather, ways of talking – to each gender by using a range of verbs (for example, *talk*, *nag*, *chatter*, *niggle*), some of which may be perceived as evaluative and derogatory. Given the inevitability of any performing voice being gendered, listeners to a voiced performance may respond not only to these semantic features, but may also attribute meaning to patterns or variations of intonation, volume, pace and emphasis manifest in each unique oral presentation. Indeed it may be the case that performers manipulate these to elicit different emotional responses or intellectual value judgements, with varying degrees of self-consciousness or intent.

The performance by the poet's author, Liz Lochhead, is uttered in a Scottish accent, the text demonstrating frequent fluctuation of emphasis, shifts between extremes of volume, and manipulation of speed. In utterances of the repeated two-word unit "men talk", intonation usually rises markedly on "men" and falls on "talk". The fall on its own would not be marked, but becomes very apparent following a marked rise. The salience of this difference is made the greater in instances where a brief pause creates a tension or counterpoint between the two words. My own interpretation of this relationship between the two is that the rising "men" builds suspense, especially with the pause, drawing attention as a magician might to a trick. It is as if the men are saying "Look at us, look at what we can do!" The elongated vowel, the "e" in "men", further suggests this attention-seeking, peacock flourish. I interpret what follows as an indication of men's claim to composure (also suggested in the lowering of volume), steadiness and pragmatism, though because a female voice utters the word this seems gently mocking and ironic. It is not the intonation alone, or even the gender of the voice, however, that gives rise to this possible interpretation, but the juxtaposition of the marked rise and then fall around what is usually a marked pause. The variation of intonation around the phrase "men talk" demonstrates Meyer's (1956) law of "return" while also avoiding "saturation", while the late pause and drop in tone reflect "poetic closure" (Herrnstein-Smith, 1968, pp. 36).

USING A "CONVERSATION ANALYTIC MENTALITY"

Studies in the CA tradition regarding children's interaction (for example, Melander & Sahlström, 2008) posit a dichotomy between the "how" and "what" of learning, where the "overwhelming analytic focus is on the former": the structure of interaction is

accorded far more attention than the content or topic, though it is exactly such “content-oriented learning that is perceived as highly relevant by mainstream learning research” but which “turns out to be mostly passed-by in micro-oriented studies” (Melander & Sahlström, 2008, p.4). In the case of my study, the motivating interest was how children responded to content and its mediation simultaneously – poems as texts in sound. The fact of the modality of the study poems in sound and response also conveyed through sound alone suggested an elision of the how/what, participation/content dichotomies: that in its necessarily public manifestation, classroom talk around poetry as sound may be distinct from reading printed poetry then talking about it, or from an encounter through the page where a poem is read then written about.

In its representation of intonation, volume and pace in the mode of print, CA affords close attention to individual poems as audio texts for analytic purposes. In addition, in its capacity to represent talk-in-interaction, it is well suited to rendering the collaborative responses made by children to poems in the situated, social and public contexts of classrooms. These two possibilities demonstrate its appropriateness for scrutinising pupils’ responses to poetry in classroom settings, acknowledging the collective nature of public response in a manner that existing studies of response to poetry do not aim to explore (for example, Tsur, 1992, 2006a, 2006b; Tsur et al., 1991; Carminati, Stabler, Roberts & Fischer, 2006), that CA studies have not considered to date, and that affords interpretation to complement studies in the domain of pedagogy and classroom interaction (for example, Sage, 2000; Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). In the area of English education, in respect of literature and specifically in regard to classroom engagement with poetry, such an approach provides a means to investigate a long-standing omission. Through scrutiny of empirical data it can add to considerations of responses to poetry on the printed page (for example, Britton, 1983; Benton, Teasey, Bell & Hurst, 1988; Benton, 1986; Dymoke, 2003), and to informed though often anecdotal commentary concerning how best to foster pupils’ responses to heard poetry in the classroom (for example, Hayhoe & Parker, 1988; O’Brien, 1985). In its match of a verbally-oriented method to the oral mode of poetry, a conversation analytic mentality can inform an area of poetry pedagogy hitherto little troubled by the findings of empirical research.

In response to the particular problem of listening to poetry in the classroom, I chose to treat the voiced performance of the poem as the first turn in each extended interaction, and by implication to regard the voice as a participant and as a likely origin of content, of the topics to which listeners might orientate.

THE RELEVANCE OF BERNSTEIN’S THEORIES

For me this chimed with Bernstein’s interest in the *pedagogic device* (1996, p. 39), the how of pedagogic discourse, and in particular to his qualification of this discourse as a “principle” (p. 46), having more interest in the “relay” of pedagogy (p. 39) than information itself. In this respect, a conventional view of discourse (with a focus on semantic webs of meaning and their implied ideologies) is relevant but insufficient because it does not attend to expression through interaction or through extra-semantic means. It assumes modality in words as inter-related semantic signs, whereas I want to accommodate the possibility that a poem as sound means in other ways, and that pupils’ responses mean through interaction and utterance as sound too. Ultimately, I

have an interest in the epistemology of classroom responses to poetry: what do the utterances of pupils reveal about what they know? This cannot, of course, be separated from the way in which they know it and the manner in which they express it.

Bernstein interest in the pedagogising of knowledge is relevant here because this is a matter of what is “thinkable” (1996) within the classroom setting and conventions of talking about poetry in schools. His “bottom-up” approach has a sympathy with the interest of CA in micro-level interaction. Application of CA assumes the cumulative and generative meaning-making potential of interaction, so when applied to classroom exchanges it complements Bernstein’s assertion that “the regulative discourse produces *the order in the instructional discourse*” (1996, p. 48), insofar as the ways in which conversation is managed by participants has a bearing on how teaching and learning occurs. He asserts that the recontextualising of specialist knowledge (in the immediate case the academic study of poetry recontextualised for schools) determines not only the *what* (the subject and content of pedagogic practice) but also the *how*, the theory of instruction, which is “not entirely instrumental...but contains within itself a model of the learner and of the teacher and of the relation” (1996, p. 49). His notion of *public language* (1958/2010) is also relevant, describing a “social relationship where meaning is implicit, where what is not said, when it is not said, and paradoxically, how it is not said, form strategic orienting cues”. All these are within the remit of CA, and have some bearing on the utterances of the pupil here.

Bernstein also presented linguistic codes with the capacity to “affect the culture and role systems of the major socializing agencies, especially the family and school” (1973, p. 174). In purest form, a *restricted code* is manifested in “ritualistic modes of communication” (p. 147) and generally precludes the signalling of individual difference other than “through variations in extra-verbal signals” (p. 148). In turn, “the code defines the form of social relationship by restricting the *verbal* signalling of individual differences”, having an emphasis on “here and now” (Rosen 1974, p. 5), context-bound and tending to the particular. By contrast, an *elaborated code* makes prediction less possible at a syntactic level, requiring “its members to select from their linguistic resources a *verbal* arrangement which closely fits its referents”. It is universalistic and context-free, aiming at meaning for all, creating condensed symbols, and tending towards rationality. Such a code is favoured in the *pedagogic device*.

The *pedagogic device* has rules that govern what pedagogical communication is possible, which in turn “acts selectively on meaning potential...the potential discourse available to be pedagogized” (p. 41). Clark (2005) has demonstrated what this means with respect to educational policy in English with reference to the National Literacy Strategy, attending to the centrality of the “Framework folder” text (p. 43), its glossary of grammatical terms and its tacit manifestation of what constitutes grammar in schools, in turn transformed into pedagogic practice (and definitive “good practice”) through mandatory status, advisory guidance and the inspection regime.

A comparable process is shaped in secondary phase poetry pedagogy in the UK by the existence of a core, examination-board-sponsored anthology, the requirements of examination response to poetry in writing, the framing of poetry in curricular detail as a print medium, and the more general recontextualisation of a literary jargon of poetry analysis to the school sphere, which in the UK sustains a metalanguage consistent

with practical criticism (Richards, 1929; Leavis, 1948) alongside the re-introduction of the unseen poetry paper.

Poetry in England has for a long time been regarded as a – if not *the* – problem area of the literature curriculum in English. Reports provided by the major examination boards (AQA, OCR) detail sustained difficulty on the part of pupils to shape and articulate engaged analyses of poems read in print. The boards describe “valiant but misplaced attempts to analyse rhyme schemes and structure without any real understanding of their effect” (QCA, 2008, p. 29); a “significant number” of pupils could list presentational techniques “but showed no understanding of the reasons for their use” (AQA, 2008, p. 5). Pupils “appear to be disadvantaged by an over-emphasis on technical terms, and a lack of emphasis on developing coherent comment on the use of the words” (AQA, 2008, p. 5). The reported responses exhibit cautious use of a limited vocabulary dedicated to the literary analysis of poetry, though where such vocabulary is used accurately (and often it is not), its use does not support developed response. By implication, these responses demonstrate little capacity beyond technique-spotting. In Bernstein’s terms these are problems of using a classifying system “regulating what comes out of it” (1996, p. 41). The example explored in this paper, I contend, shows a pupil grappling with different meaning potential and working within a *potential discursive gap* (p. 44), his contribution going unrecognised.

Perhaps there is a correlation between the difficulties pupils have and what the UK’s government inspectorate (OFSTED, 2007) consider to be limited practice in poetry teaching, both in the range of experiences offered to pupils and in the way they are taught. Poor practice is the case even where other teaching is strong. As well as describing current difficulties with poetry in schools, the inspectorate’s survey confirms that little progress has been made since reports of limited practice in the 1970s, articulated in the government review *A Language for Life* (DES, 1975): “Poetry has great educative power, but in many schools it suffers from lack of commitment, misunderstanding, and the wrong kind of orientation” (para. 9.27). The review held that too often poetry presented a bewildering puzzle (Benton, 1988) for pupils, in the face of which they felt great “vulnerability” related to the possibility of being judged: “is the value-judgement [the pupil] forms the one the teacher finds acceptable?” (para. 9.15). Poetry presented “the most exposing element” (para. 9.15) of their English education.

DATA: THE SOURCE TRANSCRIPT

Here is Mark’s contribution again (turns 17 and 19) in the context of its surrounding interaction, a discussion of the poem just heard:

- | | | |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | Luke | = he said <u>three things</u> about men (.) he said <u>men TALK</u> = |
| 2 | Joe? | = yeah = |
| 3 | Luke | =men li:ke good <u>listeners</u> (.) .hhh and rea:lly goo:d me:n like rea:lly good listene:rs= |
| 4 | Teacher | = [hmm |
| 5 | ??? | [uhuh[huh |
| 6 | Mark | [and the thi:ng is men <u>think</u> before they ta:lk= |
| 7 | ??? | = [as well |
| 8 | Teacher | [↑ahhhah, that’s quite positive i:sn’t it? (1.0) yes Joe? |
| 9 | ??? | and= |

- 10 Joe = we:ll (0.2) theyerr basically saying men are borrrɪ:ng=
 11 Mark =PFFYEAHH! =
 12 Joe =Men just talk=
 13 Ben =.men DO: ju:st ta:lk...
 14 Joe They're li:ke men just ta:lk about no:thing in parti[cular].
 15 Graham [hhcchiccuhnff!
 and ???
 16 ??? and then =
 17 Mark = Mme:n ta:lk =
 18 Teacher = George?
 19 Mark Mme:n ta:lk
 20 George Oh well in a wayyy (0:2) whoe:ver it is wrote the um (.) poem is being er-kind of negative about men (.) cos they're saying (.) wo:men a:re >talkative< and men are boring.

ANALYSIS: WHAT'S NOT SAID

Mark offers his echo of the poem with some urgency (“=” indicating this follows the prior turn without pause), and thus it could be considered a methodic sequitur to Joe’s comment (14) that the poem asserts that men “talk about nothing in particular”. Mark does not seem to be responding to any other turn, and certainly there is no direct invitation to echo the poem elsewhere. Insofar as he does not seem to give the utterance in response to a question it is, as CA would have it, a “dispreferred” action (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 64) if considered as the second part of an adjacency pair with the teacher’s question. It is not accepted into what Bernstein terms the *regulative discourse* (1996). Here, the utterance demonstrates traits of *public language*, emphasising “things rather than processes” and apparently functioning as a “statement of fact used both as a reason and a conclusion; more accurately, the reason is confounded with the conclusion to produce a categoric statement” (Bernstein, 1958/2010, pp. 55-56). Attention afforded by CA to the echoing of sound on Mark’s part, and to timing of the utterance in sequence, allows that this should not be interpreted as evidence of limited response. Precisely because Mark replicates the intonation of the poem it appears he is *not* simply repeating a general observation about men. Instead, he seems deliberate in this utterance, as if it is deployed as a *demonstration* of Joe’s observation, to offer evidence of Joe’s assertion. This is “language use which encourages an immediacy of interaction... a linguistic form such that what is not said is equally and often more important than what is said” (p. 58), though it challenges Bernstein’s separation of descriptive and analytic functions. That Mark returns to the unit later (19) will also be important to this point about what he is doing.

The next turn after Mark’s, a question from the teacher (18) to another pupil, indicates that Mark’s use of the phrase is not accepted as essential to the on-going discussion; indeed the action of questioning another pupil could be construed as a negative evaluation of Mark’s turn. At the same time, the teacher recognises a suitable opportunity to ask her question, indicating that she attributes some level of completion to Mark’s utterance. Mark, though, seems impelled to complete a coherent unit, adding a further utterance of “men talk” to his first. This could fall into the category of “short turns that might be considered interjections or quips” (McKellin, Shahin, Hodgson, Jamieson & Pichora-Fuller, 2007, p. 2177). However, it may be that Mark is listening very carefully to what is being said, and that his comment is in fact a contribution building on those of his peers, in confirmation of the mundanity of

male talk about “nothing in particular”. The utterance may be supplied as a quotation, as textual evidence to corroborate the comments of Joe (10, 12, 14) and Ben (13), which paraphrase and remark on the recorded text without citing details. His comment could be viewed as part of an adjacency pair with Joe’s turn (14), demonstrating “orderliness” (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 290) and confirming Sacks’ notion of “order at all points” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 17-24).

Furthermore, the echoed phrase is complete in words and intonation. He replicates the falling intonation given by Lochhead when he says “mme:n ta:lk”, but also the pause. In the case of Mark’s utterance, there is not a point of silence, however: he supplies each part of the unit either side of the teacher’s question to another pupil (20), suggesting the imperative to utter the phrase twice in succession. It is significant that he mimics the heard details in this way, as a coherent unit, as it suggests he perceives the item as having meaning *only* in its entirety, that its completeness is what makes it salient and worthy of repetition. In this sense, his contribution could be considered “methodic” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 20), not random, as first impressions might give us to believe. It may serve a function not acknowledged as relevant by the teacher, orienting to a *potential discursive gap* (Bernstein, 1996, p. 44) and to *meaning potential* not recognised in practices of the existing *pedagogic device*. In the moment, it is not publicly taken to reveal anything of Mark’s response to the poem, but instead is treated as offering “little content and limited conceptual elaboration consistent with instructional goals” (McKellin et al., 2007, p. 19). If Mark is indeed reaching at something here, if he is repeating with methodic intent, the conventional progress of classroom discussion around poetry does not accommodate what he is trying to say.

CONCLUSION: HEARING BETTER

What might this have to do with poetry in schools? Rosen claims that for Bernstein “schools are predicated upon the elaborated code” (Rosen, 1974, p. 18). Indeed, Bernstein states that “the organization of education often produces cleavage and insulation between subjects and levels and this serves to reduce role and code switching between person and object modes of the elaborated code and from restricted and elaborated codes” (Bernstein, 1973, p. 173). Within a *pedagogic device*, this contributes to framing, “the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization, pacing and timing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship” (1975, p. 88). The *pedagogic device* concerning poetry in the UK, I would argue, typifies strong framing (Sadovnik, 2001, p. 3), limiting options between teachers and students through its jargon of literary poetic analysis, established traditions of analysis, curricular and specification requirements, particular forms of response (whether coursework assignments or examination answers to predictable formulae), even by the categories that come to demarcate domains of learning (for instance, “Poetry from different cultures”). The examination board reports cited previously indicate the expectation that pupils develop some facility within what appears to be a specific and *elaborated code*, though they present an impression that pupils struggle with the aspects that constitute confidence with that code – for instance, assimilated and flexible use of a dedicated vocabulary, deployed to articulate thinking for an abstracted, universalistic reader such as an examiner. In pupils’ responses to poetry, such an inclination to rationality, to analysis, is

manifested in having to explain what a poet is saying, what they mean, or how the poem coheres or “works”.

The transcript above can suggest to us how we might see beyond the existing pedagogic device of poetry in schools. If we view the contributions of Mark in the context of Bernstein’s codes, it appears that he is operating within a *restricted code*, for these reasons:

- his response, in repeating exactly a phrase from Lochhead’s poem, has a ritualistic character;
- he appears to communicate within limited syntactic options;
- he does not enter into the extended *verbal* signalling associated with the *elaborated code*;
- his contribution is context-bound, directly related to the heard poem and the immediate discussion;
- his contribution *may* assume that his peers understand his intent due to the shared context, thus suggesting a “particularistic” and “communal” orientation that Bernstein aligns with the *restricted code*.

However, Mark’s contribution complicates the distinction between codes, and more importantly, brings into question the tendency in schooling to lend status to traits associated with *elaborated code*. In part, this may arise from the nature of the activity under scrutiny (a listening and response exercise), and its modality (mediated through sound). In this instance, extra-verbal means – those Bernstein associates with a *restricted code* – are pre-eminent, in that they are essential to the pupils’ experience of hearing the poem. Equally, characteristics of *public language* can be applied to Mark’s contribution. As I note above, I do not believe it is coincidental that Mark seems to perceive “men talk men talk” as a coherent unit: for me this implies some attribution of salience and meaning to the phenomenon, arising from the experience of the unit in sound, an experience that is distinct from an encounter with the poem on the page. Though Mark mimics Lochhead’s intonation, it seems to me that this may be more than a crude ritualistic tendency: the very fact of mimicry implies a sensitivity to sound and is indicative of careful listening – of the essence for attentive engagement with a heard poem. An awareness of extra-verbal signalling, whether to replicate heard texts or play with variations – should in this instance become a high-status capability. In addition, it seems entirely reasonable and indeed eminently sensible for Mark to assume the common awareness of his peers of the unit and its extra-verbal traits, given the immediacy of the shared listening activity and the intimacy of this discussion. In this sense an emphasis on the “here and now” – a characteristic of *restricted codes* and *public language* – can be viewed as methodic and appropriate, possibly a choice and not an approach necessarily borne of limitation. Finally, there may be efficiency and economy in Mark’s repetition of the unit. It may not be necessary to draw on less “predictable” or less “narrow” syntactic arrangements or *verbal* means because it should be reasonable to expect in the shared intimacy of the listening activity that the salience of the unit speaks for itself. Through repetition of the unit in Lochhead’s performance, and through the cumulative power of extra-verbal signalling, its affective impact may, from Mark’s perspective, speak for itself.

I have not been interested in social class in this discussion. It was not to my initial purpose to investigate the influence of social background on pupils' responses to poetry. I collected little data along such lines other than about the broad context of the relevant institutions, and in any case the distinction between middle and working classes is perhaps not so easily made in current times (if it ever was). What does matter to me, though, is this issue of the *pedagogic device* of poetry in schools, and how that shapes how we perceive their responses as successful, appropriate, intelligent or thoughtful: in short, how we attach merit or value to what they say. On this matter Rosen quotes Labov: "The myth of verbal deprivation is particularly dangerous because it diverts attention from real defects of the education system to imaginary defects in the child". My view is that school practices around poetry often value "handling abstract symbols, the ability to state explicitly the meaning of words and a richer knowledge of the Latinate vocabulary" (Labov, 1972, p. 192). His imperative to "find out how much of this is useful for the main work of analysing and generalising and how much is merely stylistic – or even dysfunctional" is the crux of my discussion and the reason for presenting the transcript I have. In a strong echo of the poetry context described earlier, he cites the tendency of pupils in their work to complicate syntax "to the despair of instructors" (Labov, 1972, p. 192), just as we find in contemporary examination reports. Mark's contributions are other than "merely stylistic", and afford an interpretation that sees subtle cognition and analysis in what he does, though in the immediate flow of the conversation transcribed this is not acknowledged. Certainly, his responses are not dressed in a manner conventionally viewed as "elaborated" or accorded value. However, the transcript presents the possibility that some activities actually require attributes that are associated with *restricted codes* and *public language*, though the appellation "restricted" is obviously misleading, since the deployment of such traits may afford subtle response and interpretive work not conveyed so appropriately through supposedly "elaborated" means.

If we agree that Mark "gets to the point" with this poem, we may wonder what purpose is served by his subsequent experience in the secondary phase of schooling in analysis of poetry? Why obligate him to a "strange linguistic apprenticeship" (Rosen, 1974) in the jargon of poetry analysis? We should indeed try to grasp better how children think and articulate meaning-making in literary texts (Williams, 2000, p. 112), but in the case of listening to and talking about poetry, attention to the discourse used will not suffice. Considering the relationship between the modality of a heard poem and what pupils do with its sounds in shared conversation can tell us something more of what they make of patterns and structures, can reveal what they "notice" (p. 115), and implies it is more than elementary. To engage with this begins to take up the challenge to "ensure that all children are provided with the means to adapt their linguistic and intellectual skills to a classroom context" (Blackstone, 2010). Why not respond with more sensitivity to what pupils already know and bring, why not hear them better and acknowledge their energetic and enthusiastic facility?

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Manuscript received: June 6, 2010

Revision received: November 16, 2010

Accepted: November 30, 2010