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Transformative Agendas for Educational Equity

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The transformative agenda described in this presentation emerged from a two year ethnographic exploration we conducted of educational experiences among secondary school and college students in Hawai`i. The study revealed a historical legacy of language education policies that ignore or negate immigrant linguistic resources and needs (Davis, 2001). We found that ensuing linguistic power differentials have resulted in low educational achievement among secondary students, particularly those from Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian backgrounds (Davis et. al. 2005a, 2005b). The study revealed that immigrant students attending community colleges also experienced poor academic performance, frequently displayed apathy and resistance, and subsequently often dropped-out of school. More recently, increasing evidence from national and state reports (e.g. Orfield et. al., 2004; Hawai`i State Department of Education, 2007) suggest that NCLB policies and practices are further disadvantaging immigrants and other minority students.

Given inequitable schooling in Hawai`i and elsewhere, the Center for Second Language Studies (CSLR) at the University of Hawai`i is committed to developing educational programs for linguistically diverse student populations that help reverse the pattern of educational failure. Although we focus on a community college project in this paper, we refer to other CSLR sponsored high school and university programs for immigrants that utilize similar theories and pedagogical approaches.

I'll begin our presentation with reviewing the primary theories we used in developing curricula. Renae, a former teacher of the community college project, will then describe how she translated theories into practice.

Transformative Curriculum: Theories into Practices

Our approaches to curriculum development first and foremost intends to recognize and build on students' language and cultural resources. We take a New Literacies Studies (NLS) approach that views languages and literacies as social practices (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivani_, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 1996, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Luke, 1999; Street 2003, 2005). This perspective argues that, rather than a set of static, decontextualized, and discrete skills, literacy is always instantiated, dynamic, situated, and multifaceted, through local practices which are “embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, 2003, p. 1). Multiliteracies “signal multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations, and the increasing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity” (Schultz & Hull, 2002, p. 26). This social practice approach, known as New Literacies Studies (NLS), explores how literacies are multiple, ideological, and both locally and globally situated (Street 2003; 2004). NLS scholars are further investigating associated theories of multimodality (Stein 2004; Hull & Nelson 2005) and hybridity (Anzaldua, 1987; Arteaga, 1994; Bhabha, 1994). Glenda Hull & Mark Nelson (2005) define multimodality in view of recent technological trends. They suggest that:

It is possible now to easily integrate words with images, sound, music, and movement to create digital artifacts that do not necessarily privilege linguistic forms...but rather that draw on a variety of modalities—speech, writing, image, gesture, and sound—to create different forms of meaning (p. 224-5).

Yet Kress (2003) also suggests the need to investigate multimodality as it's realized within cultures, across ages, and through various modes of representation. Pippa Stein (2004) describes local forms of multimodality in South Africa, including “the visual, the gestural, and the performative” (p. 95). In other words, multimodality is deeply embedded in ways of being in and viewing the world. This epistemological stance can be particularly important in considering how schools may draw on multimodal representations of both heritage communities and popular culture (Ginwright et. al., 2006; Mahiri, 2004; Morrell, 2004b) in developing curriculum. In addition, hybridity or complex identity formation is reflected in what Anzaldua (1987) refers to as living a mosaic of multiple languages and cultures—always in a state of transition, ambivalence, conflict and yet also a potentially rich and enriching resource.

In designing student investigations of school practices, our instructors linked the concept of multiple identities with Gee's notion of Discourses (1992; 1996) which includes ways of talking, believing, valuing, doing, being—or whole identity kits. Thus, hybridity expands to include the ability of individuals to function across multiple Discourses and through multiple literacies. Framed in another way, Wenger (1998) views learning as identity construction that takes place while apprenticing to particular communities of practice. Our intent is for project participants to explore multiple communities of practice (CoP) located in neighborhoods, schools, and social service agencies, including how they are often microcosms of the larger social and political world, such as illustrated by Bourdieu (1991).

Bourdieu (1991) describes the mutually reinforcing and regulatory social relationships which characterize the human social environment. His notion of *habitus*

holds that through socialization, one develops particular class, culture-based and engendered ways of seeing, being, occupying space, and participating in history . The various language and literacies practices of individuals and groups are articulations of the linguistic habitus (Carrington & Luke, 1997). Bourdieu defines *capital* as the cultural, economic, social, and linguistic indexes of relative social power. These concepts suggest the need for student awareness of language and literacy as situated practices imbued with power relations both in and out of school. For example, students can explore how local habitus may lack the linguistic and social capital recognized in school fields of practice. Yet other social theories and pedagogical practices go beyond more deterministic notions of habitus in assuming individual agency and the ability to transform social inequities.

Central to student exploration of multiple identities and communities of practice is the notion of third spaces which Bhabha (1994) defines as the constructing and re-constructing of identity which is fluid, not static. He also views third spaces as “discursive sites or conditions that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized anew” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). According to Lam (2004), we can “create third spaces or zones where immigrants may engage in discourses that serve to construct an in-between space or trajectory for speaking and that they use to subvert the dominant discourses of both their native and adopted countries” (p. 85). Bakhtin (1981) suggests that individuals often “struggle against various kinds and degrees of authority” (p. 345) in the process of developing their own ideologies and personal identities. Thus, while recognizing relative social power, participants can apprentice to CoP discourses and/or develop agency for negotiating or taking up alternative/hybrid identities of their own within discourses. In these ways, CoP can offer individuals the possibility of exploring

imagined communities or new ways of being that lie beyond the current state (Wenger, 1998).

While theories concerning the situated and multifaceted nature of language and literacies formed the basis of our curriculum development, two overarching pedagogical approaches were used in carrying out our high school and college projects. The practice of “students as critical researchers” (Davis et. al., 2005; Morrell, 2004; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Ginwright et. al., 2005, 2006; Mahiri 2004) draws on ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods as teaching tools. By emphasizing and legitimizing the knowledge that exists in families and communities, ethnographic projects encourage students to view home knowledge as resources for their academic learning. Students further conduct ethnographic investigations of their school discourses and ultimately make connections between home and school communities. Critical Language Awareness (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995; Janks, 1993; Pennycook, 2001; Wallace, 1992) approaches highlight the notion that text can be deconstructed and, through this process, unmask text laden with values associated with power, while providing what Cope and Kalantzis (1993) call an “explicit pedagogy for inclusion and access.”

The theories I’ve described here have formed the basis of our high school and college projects. In the next part of our presentation, Renae describes how she put theory into practice at a community college.

Preparing for College at College

The community college project was conducted at the behest of the local community college’s department coordinator, who reflected the college’s growing concern with underserved and underrepresented minority populations. Teachers,

counselors and administrators had indicated that immigrant students who had gone to U.S. public schools appear to be “falling through the cracks” of the educational system in Hawai’i’s community colleges. These educators report high drop-out rates, poor academic performance, and frequent displays of apathy and resistant behavior among this population. To try and reverse the pattern of G1.5 educational failure, we agreed to design a course to meet the needs of this linguistically diverse student body. In the next few minutes I will describe the curriculum I developed and implemented in an ESL class at the community college that are based on the range of interconnected theories that Kathy has described. The activities were designed to 1) promote students’ linguistic and discursive proficiency, 2) to help students develop an improved understanding of the social and educational expectations of teachers at U.S. colleges in general, and within classrooms and across disciplines, 3) to allow students “third spaces” in which to negotiate or resist the encoded meanings of dominant discursive practices or knowledge frameworks.

For the purposes of clarity, I have divided the curriculum examples into three sections which represent the following themes; cultural awareness, text awareness and discourse community awareness. Critical cultural and textual awareness approaches were important to the project in that they were designed to help students go beyond their previous experiences of learning as passive recipients of knowledge and to help them become active participants, as well as to help them to see the ways in which discourses operate in various contexts. These critical language awareness activities culminated in ethnographic studies that allowed students to make explicit many of the implicit values and norms of particular disciplines and help them successfully apprentice to the discourse community.

Cultural Awareness

I began the course by exploring the complex meaning of culture in order to move to an understanding of the various discourse communities that shape their lives,. We talked about Gee's concept of Discourses (1992; 1996) and his notion that every individual has multiple Discourses, multiple literacies, and therefore, multiple and evolving identities.

I modeled a number of humorous role plays wherein I took up an inappropriate Discourse within various social contexts or environment, whether because I used the 'wrong' language, or the 'right' language but the wrong action or body language. A discussion ensued as to what a social context consists of, such as people and their social relationships, the geographic place, the purposes of the actors, unspoken or implicit rules about how to talk in a particular social context, and the register being used. Members discussed how people can disrupt a social environment by using an inappropriate or unfamiliar Discourse in that environment (an extreme example would be cursing in a confessional box). We considered how people can suffer many different kinds of consequences for disruption, from being ostracized by a particular social community to being beaten up in a biker bar. After writing and performing their own role plays, some of the questions I posed were: Why was the Discourse inappropriate in that particular situation? How is language related to situation in each role play? What are the consequences for not enacting the appropriate Discourse for each situation, e.g. job loss, ostracism, violence, being snubbed, causing confusion, having others think badly of you?

After getting a firm grasp on the notions of culture and Discourse, class members constructed an identity map which illustrated the different microcultures of which they were a part. Members discussed the different identities that they display within their

different social groups. I then asked class members to envision the school as Discourse communities and explore what values are inherent in high school and in college classrooms. Students read through parts of their college handbook, explored online websites and drew on personal experiences to identify implicit and explicit school values. We brainstormed ways that those values are reinforced (grades, detention, rewards, etc.), the hierarchical relationships in schools; the distribution of power; the social relationships between all of the social actors; the instruction methods encouraged; the geographical lay-out of their various classrooms and how these positions positively or negatively affect various social relationships; and the assignments students are required to complete and the negotiability of those assignments. Next, the group discussed ways that students often resist, negotiate and accommodate the requirements and/or the cultural values perpetuated in the classroom/school. On the one hand, there is the kind of negative school resistance that involves slumping in the back of the classroom with the baseball cap on backward, texting a friend across the room. We discussed how students could make their resistance productive and take ownership over their learning. For example, one Korean immigrant student documented the conflicts and struggles that arose for her in school in the process of trying to acculturate to American school norms and values. While trying to negotiate the strong contrast between American and Korean academic cultures and teacher expectations, as well as learning the differing elements of academic writing styles, this student found herself silenced, struggling to gain legitimacy, and experiencing large power differentials between herself and native English speaking students. Eventually, through participation in one of the courses in academic literacies development, she found spaces for resistance to the ways that she was positioned as a non-native speaker of English, she explored strategies to turn negative stereotypes of

“the other” into strengths, and she learned the ability to perform different roles, or take up different discourses.

Textual Awareness

Of course, an important aspect of the discourse of school is the writing and reading of texts. Many of these students have been identified as having poor Standard English academic literacy skills so the next task we engaged in was developing textual awareness which involved class members in the negotiation of texts (whether literary, or non-literary, written, spoken or conveyed through images) or ways of reading and writing those texts (and by extension ‘reading and writing the world’). Developing textual awareness and other parts of the curriculum are influenced by Luke and Freebody’s (1997) four resources model of literacy which purports that reading and writing necessarily involve a repertoire of practices. For our purposes the two central resources are that social and cultural functions shape rhetorical forms and that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral.

Part of the work of reading texts, especially in an academic environment, involves critiquing them or ‘being critical readers’. Acquiring literacy then, is not just about being able to ‘read or write the words’, but also about bringing analytic and critical resources to bear on the social and ideological forces that underlie or determine the meaning of texts, as an integral part of the reading and writing process. So, the next slices of classroom pedagogy attempt to illustrate some ways in which I have taken up the Luke & Freebody’s theoretical model in this context. In these exercises there is an interaction between appropriating or learning the genres and bringing critical analysis to bear in the process of acquiring academic skills.

Class members were given explicit instruction in genre and common ways that texts are organized. These concepts included analysis of some of the following: the distribution of information in sentences; patterns of organization in sequences of sentences and paragraphs and how these foreground some people/events while backgrounding others; basic paragraph structures; visual information in texts; and generic structure. As these concepts were introduced, a number of mini-activities were used to illustrate the concepts. For example, students were given two newspaper articles which covered the same story, but reflected differing ideologies through the use of syntactical features, vocabulary and the way that they positioned the readers. The particular articles I used reported, one sympathetically and one judgmentally, the arrest of a mother who had killed her five children. Class members noted which information was foregrounded, which information was suppressed, emotive language, the use of active/passive, and other syntactic and lexical features which revealed the hidden ideologies present in the two storiesⁱ.

Students were then asked to practice genre writing by using all of the elements of the narrative genre in telling or inventing a story about something that happened to them.ⁱⁱ Course members then cross-compared the narrative genre with that of newspaper stories, and indicated how their grammatical, structural, and visual elements differed. In the college computer lab, students worked in groups to transform their narratives into newspaper stories with all the relevant textual features such as use of graphics, columns, headlines and rhetorical elements such as details about the people in the story and commentary from authority figures (which may have to be invented). Questions I then posed included: Who “speaks” or is called upon to speak in the news story? Who “speaks” in the narrative? Were any of the news stories misleading, or did you distort the

events of the narrative to fit your purpose? Through these activities students' awareness of textual features and architecture was raised; they began to recognize the social and cultural functions of textual features, and they realized their ability to manipulate and transform texts.

Discourse Community Awareness

As text analysis tools are being explicitly taught, course members went out into their school communities as ethnographers of communication in particular disciplines. Students chose a discipline that they had joined or planned on joining, and documented and analyzed discourse practices within them and how those practices fit into broader social contexts. Drawing from Gee's notion of 'Discourses', we explored the distinct discourse and literacies practiced in particular disciplines (e.g. lab reports vs. term papers, seminar style discussions vs. teacher lectures) and thus uncovered the expectations of and the behaviors valued by different teachers in different disciplines.

As part of apprenticing to the Discourse of the community and developing life-long critical language and literacy learning, course participants developed student-as-ethnographer skills which included interviewing, observation, and artifact collecting skills. After selecting a communication site (a classroom and department) as their primary fieldwork area, students were provided with both theoretical and hands-on experience with a range of methods for collecting information on communication and language. For example, students contacted and interviewed teachers and students within the department, observed classes and took field notes which were collectively analyzed within our classroom, and collected and critically analyzed discourse artifacts, including books, student papers, teacher hand-outs, etc using the textual analysis techniques introduced earlier.

Finally, all of their data and analysis came together as they began to write their ethnographic essays. Much class time toward the end of class was devoted to writing and writing workshops and students received one-on-one as well as group instruction with content, as well as structural and grammatical features of their texts. After multiple revisions, students submitted the final product along with the remainder of the portfolio. Students also gave class presentations on their findings, interpretations and perspectives.

Through this training in ethnographic research methods students were able to accomplish a number of objectives, including the following:

- Develop awareness of academic and literacy genres within their chosen fields.
- Become aware of language resources and how to better utilize attentional resources.
- Develop explicit awareness of classroom norms and teacher expectations and critique them.
- Become aware of how the school acts as a socializing force and how socializing forces within the school exert power over them and other members.
- See themselves as participating in democratic political processes with their writing.
- Engage with others in a community of practice.
- Develop literacy skills through a social process approach to writing.
- Gain increased self-efficacy through recognition of their own resources and the academic product that they are able to produce.
- Broaden their field of possible identities.

Conclusions: Transformative Agendas for Education Equity

In the last decade, public education has experienced increasing national and state control as exemplified in the No Child Left Behind Initiative, the continued commercialization and corporatization of public school spaces, a change of goals from producing democratically-minded citizens with an equal shot at cultural and economic capital to that of socializing students into their respective roles in a world of increasing global economic competitiveness, and continued attacks on bilingual education. A new study from the Harvard Civil Rights Project (Orfield et. al. 2004) reports a “national

crisis” in graduation rates of minority students, even in those states with the worst overall records of student graduation. They further note that there are incentives to push low-performing students out of school in order to avoid the low test results that would result in restructuring and other school sanctions. If these discriminatory trends continue, we will see fewer minority students entering college and those who do enter lacking the cultural capital to succeed.

In this paper we have outlined some of the theories and practices of a curriculum developed for linguistic and cultural minority students in Hawai’i. We do not suggest that this curriculum alone is going to “fix” what ails schooling. What we do suggest is that the approaches described here provide a model for challenging current educational practices and provide students with the abilities needed for academic and economic achievement.

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