

**WORKPLACE DISCOURSE PROFICIENCY AS PART OF LABOR MARKET
COMPETITIVENESS**

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Abstract: The basis of Gee's theory is revealed in the distinction between 'discourse' and 'Discourse'. While sociolinguists have typically used the term discourse to refer to verbal interactions and sequences of utterances between speakers and listeners, Gee's distinction is designed to recognize the interrelationships between social relations, social identities, contexts, and specific situations of language use (Gee, 1996). In this regard, Discourse with a capital D describes a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or "social network" (Gee, 1996.) Gee's distinctions of Discourse (primary and secondary) and the traditional understanding of discourse have been referred to above with regard to the alienation students experience from the dominant discourse of tertiary education. Where discourses are closely linked to "the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society" (Gee 1990), those disempowered outside the discourse will not have access to the higher structures. Thus the project of workplace discourse turns out to be very helpful to studying, practice and acknowledging of the success of HRM (Human Resource Management), thus making a good practice in communication with the group and the people we communicate in the company, as well as understanding the difference in manner of speaking to another person. These reflections indicate a transfer of knowledge from one context to another. The new "work order" within fast-capitalism is seen by many to be a new 'enchanted workplace' where hierarchy is dead and 'partners' engage in meaningful work amidst a collaborative environment of mutual commitment and trust, where 'knowledge workers' are prepared for this 'enchanted workplace'. Both educationally relevant cognitive science (for classrooms) and the fast capitalist literature (for workplaces) heavily stress collaboration, active problem solving, learning in context, alternative assessment, communities of practice, and the integration of technology (Lankshear 1997). Gee therefore identifies three dilemmas in the new capitalism, about which proponents are aware (Gee, Hull & Lankshear 1996 in Gee unpublished 1999). These are commitment to adding value, motivation in acquiring and transforming knowledge, and the third dilemma is about *reflective knowledge*, which is celebrated by the new capitalism, but potentially lethal to the system. Gee indicates an emerging new 'solution' to these dilemmas: to bond people cognitively and affectively, not primarily to each other, but to a *practice*, developing a "community of practice" similar to a culture and co-membership (as found in micro-ethnography studies). In short, "tacit, extensive, distributed, dispersed knowledge dynamically developing in a coordinated network of people, tools, and technologies serving multiple, integrated, and overlapping functions – that is what is meant by a 'community of practice'." (Gee 1999: 29). Our goal in this paper is thus to elaborate on how this cooperative learning project facilitates the acquisition of workplace discourse taking these factors into consideration.

Keywords: workplace discourse, labor market, communication, collaboration, knowledge transfer.

1. INTRODUCTION - GENRE TEACHING

Teaching genres, giving explicit access to meaning-making closes the gap for those alienated from workplace discourse. Cope and Kalantzis assert that: "It means engaging students in the role of apprentice with the teacher in the role of expert on language system and function. It means an emphasis on content, on structure and on sequence in the steps that a learner goes through to become literate in a formal educational setting." (1993:1) Students using English as an Additional Language will not intuitively know the appropriate form of register in a given context, but need access to a range of communication strategies.

Genre instruction has been challenged by critics: it should not be a formulaic imposition of "institutionalized cultural practices for accomplishing social purposes" (Morgan 1997: 19), but a means through overt instruction to giving students strategies to "respond to the informational and organizational demands of various settings. Instruction needs to provide scaffolding so that students can progress toward more academically valued ways of writing, learn content material, and have a better chance to experience success in school." (Martin 1989: 35) Genre teachers are accused of

overlooking the "personal moral, aesthetic or even ethical formation of student-subjects. Their focus is on a more public competence and on the social benefits for the disempowered who understand the workings of genres." (Morgan 1997:19) In the aftermath of a culture of entitlement we need to instill ethics and accountability in the new generation who will be responsible citizens in a just society: the human rights struggle needs to be balanced with social responsibility and justice.

2. CRITICAL ACTION, RESEARCH, METHODOLOGY, DATA

Action Research helps teachers "become uniquely involved in their own practice, to professionalize themselves, and to give reasoned justification for what they are doing." (McNiff 1997: xviii). In retrospect the multiliteracies pedagogy suits this project and the third cycle will be a more informed application of these theories. With each cycle the project is modified according to feedback received from students, reflection and further readings (triangulation). Most of the data collected was qualitative focusing on the student work using alternative assessment practices:

- **LECTURER ASSESSMENT:** Monitoring, moderating and marking oral and written submissions, analyzing data.
- **SELF-ASSESSMENT:** Reflection papers (self-evaluation guided by questions) indicated that the video showed how inaudible they really were. Someone observed that her nervousness was betrayed by "shivering" trousers. Students recognize inappropriate body language and intend improving.
- **PEER-ASSESSMENT:** of group presentations by peer-groups the day prior to their own presentation was moderated by me, as the Spoonet group reported, "To be an evaluator as well as a presenter helps a lot because you will see where you might improve your presentation..."
- **GROUP-ASSESSMENT:** The process, written reports on company visit, compiling a portfolio was done cooperatively.
- **A REAL AUDIENCE:** watched the presentation and asked questions; memoranda to the Technikon; Letters to companies of confirmation and thanks were posted or faxed

3. CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy is concerned with the use of power in the teaching and learning dynamic, such as what knowledge is produced and by whom it is selected. It is also concerned with ways to provide students with means to resist oppression, improve their lives, and strengthen the democratic process for everyone, thus insuring progressive social change and social justice. According to McLaren (2003), critical pedagogy is concerned with a critique of society, around issues of power and developing students' critical abilities to work toward the transformation of society. McLaren also suggests that critical pedagogy focuses on the relationship between educational ideas, policies, practices, and larger oppressive political and ideological perspectives. Teachers using this approach engage students in critical questioning of their own beliefs and assumptions (Demarrais & Lecompte, 1992). Since Freire's revolutionary work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), radical (critical/feminist/multicultural) educators have endeavored to change the face of education by democratizing the student-teacher power relations into a more emancipatory form and by including the work and experiences of previously under- or unrepresented groups (Giroux, 1988a). McLaren (1994) elaborates on the concept of critical pedagogy that "should conceive of reality—most importantly classroom reality—as a multiplicity of social relations, embodied metaphors, and social structures which cohere and contradict, some of them oppressive and some of them liberating" (p. 201).

Perceiving the classroom reality in this way creates an avenue for each individual teacher to address how his or her "self" potentially becomes an embodied metaphor in the course of teacher-student interactions. In terms of implementation, Grossberg's (1994) model of a progressive pedagogical project is outlined below: 1. Hierarchical pedagogical. A practice that assumes the teacher already understands the truth to be imparted to the students. 2. Dialogic practice. 3. Praxical pedagogy. According to Grossberg, praxical pedagogy "attempts to offer people the skills that would enable them to understand and intervene into their own history" (1994, p. 17).

3.1. INTERCULTURAL AND INTEGRATIVE PROCESSES

In many European countries, school and sport politics have given sport an important role to play regarding intercultural and integrative processes. Nevertheless, consistent official guidelines and didactic concepts are lacking. Freiburg project group (Germany) tried to compile a theory-driven concept which was used successfully during practical projects with schools and while training sport educators and trainers. In the area of allied health care providers charged with the prevention, recognition, management, treatment, and rehabilitation of injury and illness in the physically active, we must become skilled clinical practitioners. As such, one of the central tenets of athletic training education should be to demonstrate and foster this higher-level thinking ability in all of our students.

Kogler presented an interesting argument for diversifying the curriculum, one that parallels the goals and intellectual challenges of allied health education. In this unique and fascinating endorsement of diversity education, he argued that a diversified curriculum has a positive impact on students, institutions, and the society at large and that our increasingly diverse society requires our educated professionals and leaders to be critically aware of the connection between social problems and race, class, sex, and other forms of diversity. Combining the pedagogy and practice of multicultural education with recent developments and insights in cognitive science and the philosophy of the mind in a very coherent manner, Kogler suggested that multicultural education advances cognitive capabilities in students. This enhanced cognitive ability enables students to genuinely understand different cultural perspectives, to develop a reflexive understanding of themselves, and to represent structures shared by individuals in different experiential contexts.

3.2. DIFFERENT COUNTRIES-DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

To help meet this end, Danish initiative proposes that a transfer of knowledge at both political and implementation level should have special focus residing on the realistic overall goals and actions supported by evidence-based best practices and experiences.

Kogler's central thesis was essentially that the actual thought processes provoked and unleashed by multicultural education can be seen as instantiations of deeper cognitive thought processes. According to this theory, the process of awakening the mind's eye and sparking the cerebral circuitry that is set in motion with multicultural exposure allows the recipients to see themselves in a very different light. This cognitive catharsis, in turn, enables the individual to better understand the plight and perspective of others. Like a rare and exotic orchid, if cultivated properly, this process allows the student to see and hear, with distinct clarity, the various truths and fallacies that surround our history, society, and culture. It allows the student to critically examine the past and present states of social injustice and "democratic" policy that have existed in the United States and other countries at varying levels for more than 400 years. There are however other contexts to grasp.

The Polish context underlies that social organization and questions of nationality and citizenship are constructed under very different circumstances and under the communist system, thus minimizing the importance of immigration, ethnicity and of national minorities. Portuguese initiatives look directly at the problems of exclusion and allow the strategy of inclusion through sports. Romania's initiatives run projects on social development on the deployment of social facilitators in different communities. Bulgaria follows the model of equal emphasis on athletic and pedagogical traits necessary to blend sport and multiculturalism.

This ever-evolving and highly plastic configuration process, which Kogler identified as the ability to apply a theory of mind, effectively enables and empowers the individual to think at much higher intellectual levels.

Through implicit or explicit means, we can make better sense of others by simulating or by employing the notion of empathy in order to understand others by putting ourselves in their shoes. The ability to do this openly, critically, and without bias requires higher levels of cognitive understanding and processing. Kogler concluded by commenting that the most gratifying and shocking experience for the majority of white students of multicultural education is that they learn to see themselves as culturally, socially, and historically situated selves. Or, to put it bluntly, they actually begin to realize that they too have an ethnicity. This theoretic construct certainly has implications for all university learning, including athletic training education and the ability to develop sound, mature clinical-reasoning skills.

4. CONCLUSION

Our primary motivation is to directly and efficiently make a contribution towards the assessment of Western Balkan Countries, emphasising of course, Serbia, into the European Union by providing the educational means for communication of science and professional expertise as a crucial way of reaching the required professional standards of the EU. There is an urgent requirement to address proper and adequate presentation and dissemination of the expertise performed in WBC towards the EU. There is much evidence that lot of quality work done in WBC is poorly and improperly presented in EU, and much of cutting edge EU expertise is not conveyed fully among the professionals of WBC, all due to the lack of linguistic knowledge of the specific professional academic discourses. It is either that WBC specialist do not have the linguistic skills relating to a professional domain to communicate their expertise, or for the same reason, are unable to fully comprehend expert literature coming from the EU. There is a need towards the overall paradigm shift in language teaching at tertiary education and life long learning from general to professional foreign language, or to put in practical terms, to workplace or specific domain professional languages, with the aim to include in the future other major languages of the EU, namely German, French, Spanish, etc.

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Teacher adaptation to the European higher education area is another challenge posed by the process of European convergence. It means that the university lectures must undergo a thorough adaptation. The Bologna Process requires teachers to program the entire course, prepare teaching materials in advance, and act as a tutor to students. In the area of planning this implies the effective use of teaching time and planning in detail how to make best use of the time available for each group and subject. Thus, one avoids creating programs which are too “ambitious” and impossible to complete in the time allotted. The contents of the programs and each learning activity should be assigned a certain duration. Moreover, the teacher should reflect a time scale for contents and activities in terms of dates. Establishing what to do in the time available, and when to do it constitute the essence of programming.

The knowledge-workers of the twenty-first century require the ability to jump between fields of technical specialization and capture the key issues quickly. A base-level of familiarity with scientific concepts and processes reduces the time taken to master new areas where emerging tasks and work processes occur. Generic skills are not just restricted to their usefulness in the workplace but are equally required across the spectrum of living experience in today’s world. Emerging work place demands a set of new generic skills for maintaining employability.

In addition to job-specific technical competencies, there is a requirement of a set of generic skills, which are generic to a cluster of occupations in order to perform competently as knowledge worker. Generic skills are required by all workers. However, the extent by which these skills need to be possessed varies from one occupational grouping to another. The varying levels of generic skills use needs to be determined, to further guide in developing educational content rich in job-specific and generic skills formation.

The good amount of research studies undertaken in studying generic skills are guideposts in formulating educational policies and initiating pedagogical reforms that can bridge positive consequences to the learning outcomes and achievements of the future workforce. While no single list of generic skills can be concluded as conclusive to one job or sector in this constantly changing economic and social landscape, the dominating skills sets and competencies required in 21st century occupations must be consigned to the learner. Doing this needs to utilize appropriate teaching and learning methodologies, integration models and skills formation adapted by educational systems and institutions, at all educational levels. The possession of generic skills, then, will be a flexible passport of the workforce to move from one job to another, and ticket to enter any given condition and environment within 21st century requirements.

Finally, what is it that we can expect from the students and the teachers as well, in the area of professional language skills to be applied in prospective jobs? If all goes well, if students acquire workplace languages knowledge and if this knowledge is properly valued and validated by the competent teaching staff, then our mutual goal of creating competent, highly organized, highly motivated students is going to be realized.

This is also a good opportunity for higher education institutions in a country such as Serbia, to widen its horizons, to present itself in the vast labor market, and become highly competitive in the knowledge market as well.

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