FRAMING THE DISCOURSE: CO-CONSTRUCTION AND PEER INTERACTION IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM.

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ABSTRACT

The study is an account of the conceptualisation, design, implementation and evaluation of an innovative curriculum in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) proficiency program in Japan. The study takes the form of an interpretative case study and monitors classroom interaction of learners who are 'false beginners' (British tradition) or 'interactive novices' (US tradition) in a process syllabus, where learners must 'co-construct', or negotiate together, the planning, management, presentation and evaluation of substantial elements of the curriculum, in peer groups. A central element is the theorising of discourse in terms of a system of social relations and symbolic power; as a mode of social practice, and focuses on contrasting subject positions of learners and their investment in classroom discourse in different EFL settings. In this way, the crucial issue is the translation of power and control into principles of communication, which become their carriers or relays (Bernstein 1996: 93).

The context of the study is the *transition* of young Japanese learners from the foreign language pedagogic practices of high school to university. It therefore includes a critical review of the sociocultural context of foreign language pedagogy in Japanese high schools, and the way that the pedagogic subject tends to be constructed: restricted to responsive roles, often in the learners' first language. The innovative curriculum described here (hereafter the Kanda Curriculum) is a response to this situation and aims to transform learners' institutional experience of foreign language pedagogy by shifting the locus of discursive control ('framing') away from the teacher to the learners, involving a very different 'speech exchange system' (Sacks *et al.* 1974) and hence more active/signifying and less responsive roles by learners. A pivotal assumption is the Foucaultian idea (1969) that a change in the order of

discourse is not a trivial change, it amounts to a transformation in social practice and hence consciousness of the individual.

The curricular goal is to provide opportunities for learners to engage in sustained collaborative problem-solving in the target language, which stands in contrast with the more usual implicit goal of learners' 'acquiring' a second or foreign language. The curriculum is aimed at a prospective identity for learners; one which is built around the idea of the acquisition of 'communication': actively signifying in the target language across a range of situations and activities.

The research component of the study empirically explores *how* different activities in the curriculum differentially afford opportunities for participation by learners; in other words, how the 'contexts' of talk and activity mutually (re)configure each other, and empirical links between activity and discourse types are demonstrated and discussed. In this way, the thesis explores the potential for communicative practices in foreign language education, and is especially relevant to relatively monolingual societies where the target language is seldom used in the wider community.

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