3 THE CURRICULUM

In this chapter I set out the principles and design of the Kanda Curriculum as an instantiation of the more generalised and theoretical discussions of the previous two chapters. Firstly I should clarify what is meant here by the terms 'curriculum' and 'syllabus' since these are potentially confusing: a situation compounded by a difference of understanding in British and American circles. I follow R. White's (1988) British usage where 'syllabus' refers to the content, materials or subject matter, whereas 'curriculum' refers to the totality of content to be taught and the aims to be realised; therefore a curriculum subsumes a syllabus.

According to Kumaravadivelu (1994) ELT is currently situated in the era of the 'postmethod condition' of which 'principled pragmatism' is the defining feature. This idea of principled pragmatism captures the development of the Kanda curriculum very well; the curriculum is a specific response to a specific problem and does not draw upon a prototypical method (Rogers and Richards 1986) as a kind of panacea in L2 learning. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1.2, the discourse that results from learning to communicate in a L2 is very different from learning a language in terms of rules and usage; the former represents a more 'naturalistic discourse' and the latter, 'pedagogic discourse'. I have already identified the goals of the curriculum in terms of transforming the possibilities of social practice in the target language, through a restructuring of the 'order of discourse' (Lemke 1995: 30), and the design of the Kanda Curriculum is driven by the importance of the *process* of co-construction and does not model language as a list of items to be acquired. This has much in common with radical versions of constructivism in education (Peters *et al.* 1999).

According to the activity theory of Leontiev *et al* ., human activity is always motivated by goals and so there has to be some purpose for learners to interact and something non-trivial for them to negotiate. This point is echoed by Bernstein (1996: 7) where he notes that participation is not only about discourse and about discussion, that it "...is about practice and a practice that must have outcomes." The implication from this is simple. From the learners' point of view, the goal of the curriculum is not that learners should talk in order to practice language in the sense of 'acquisition' of lexis, grammar and phonology; instead the goal is that learners should negotiate, among themselves, the *curriculum itself* (Candlin 1984). There is not a detailed plan, coordinated and monitored by the teacher, of who should speak to whom, about what and for how long. Activities and texts produced in the class are driven by negotiated decisions among learners in small groups (Breen and Candlin 1980). As Wells (1999: 231) puts it: "...discourse is a means, not an end in itself, and verbal information is valued not for the correctness of the way in which it is formulated but for its use as a means towards the achievement of some larger purpose."

The idea of the classroom as a site of collaborative negotiation of the curriculum by learners in small groups is a microcosm of Malinowski's observations mentioned in Chapter 1: namely, that human language, in a fundamental sense, serves to coordinate action in social collectives. This is not something that necessarily involves formal and conventialised assemblies as in workplace meetings, conferences, planning committees etc., though these are implicated. Instead, interaction through speech pervades, in a constitutive sense, and regulates, directs and transforms all collaborative activity in human life, including the banal and everyday. The curriculum then should offer opportunities for learning, as a process of interaction in the linguistic and discursive environment, which faces learners with new kinds of problems (i.e. the syllabus) and situations to solve (see Linell 1998: 284)

through negotiated action. In this way, the syllabus is a resource which may realise learners' development in the philosophical and pragmatic terms outlined in earlier sections of the study. The curriculum is modelled on a community where the self is "...in continuous production and (which) emerges as the individual participates in ... practices of a culture." (Lantolf 2000c: 163)

As discussed earlier, discursive interaction with others in human collectivity is rarely free of the distortions introduced by relations of hierarchy and hence differential power. This is hardly surprising since, in a Marxist sense, all societies tend to differentiate role according to division of labour. As the means of production develop and become more complex, so too, the society becomes progressively more differentiated. It is not only through the dominance of a teacher's voice in discourse that learners may be alienated from the very communication that they are supposed to be party to; cultural and ethnic considerations may well bear on learners' engagement with an L2 pedagogy.

While Norton (in Chapter 2) has discussed learners' socially and historically constructed relationships to the English Language from the point of view of adult immigrants in Canada, Kumaravadivelu (1994) and Canagarajah (1999) have critiqued the appropriateness of pedagogic texts in EFL classes in USA, and Sri Lanka, respectively. Kumaravadilevu (*ibid.*) discusses dissatisfaction among learners of English, primarily from the Middle East, in an EFL class in the USA who resist participating in discussions of readings about 'American heroes', feeling that no account is taken of their own backgrounds or interests. In the case of Canagarajah, reading texts in EFL classes are described, where learners from backgrounds which are far from affluent, under conditions of civil war, struggle to relate to reading texts depicting bourgeois life in southern England. Canagarajah (*ibid.*) describes Sri Lankan learners working through texts where the principal character drives around

with (unchaperoned) girlfriends, visits discos and generally inhabits a world scarcely recognisable from their own lifeworld. In both instances, the authors point out the broad mismatch between such texts and the realities of learners' own backgrounds, and the difficulty of expecting learners to be engaged by the values and lifestyles depicted therein.[1]

In a related vein, although much theorising in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) assumes native speaker/non native speaker interaction, this format has the potential to situate the learner as the 'other', where we might expect the native speaker to dominate the interaction in terms of language proficiency, if not also in terms of being a legitimate speaker. Aston (1993: 285) suggests that in interaction between L1 and L2 learners the negotiation of solidarity can be impeded by differences in cultural experience, while suspicions about ethnic otherness can hinder the development of rapport. Aston (*ibid.*) proposes that this be understood as the 'interpersonal' counterpart to the transactional problematicity that traditionally concerns communication strategy research (see Kasper, Kellerman 1997, for overview).

For example, in the case of Japanese learners, if the teacher represents an ethnic or cultural group that has historically 'owned' English, learners may feel that they have little investment in interacting on such terms. There may be little purchase for them to participate with any authority and if there is a large difference in age, the problem of relating may be compounded. However, if we shift from a text-centred syllabus to more of a project or process-centred syllabus (Legutke and Thomas 1991; Kenny and Laszewski 1997; Kenny 1993; Hall and Beggs 1998), where learners essentially work together in collaborative groups, then there will be more opportunities for learners to learn how to process data themselves and take a more active voice in *co-constructing*

texts of their own, rather than focusing on comprehending received texts (Bowers 2000).

Habermas' notion of communicative action (1984) suggests a model of the small group interactional format between peers. Where social relations are relatively horizontal, there is less likelihood of the assumption of dominance and hence distortions that may occur when teachers interact with learners. Ideally, we have then 'engineered the interaction' so that the locus of control and hence framing of discourse lies with learners themselves as they *negotiate* what to do together, in a relatively democratic manner. Completely symmetrical talk and engagement of all participants is, of course, utopian but this is at least a strong idealised base from which to start. A syllabus that does not provide a lot of texts with pre-written tasks requires learners to process data themselves to construct their own texts; Breen terms the negotiation of what to do and the negotiation of associated roles, *procedural action* (Breen and Littlejohn 2000). This notion is developed in greater depth in the following section but it is important to note here that Habermas' communicative action is the template of structural relations of the Kanda Curriculum; while Breen and Littlejohn's notion of procedural action* [*though note, my usage of the term differs slightly from that of Breen and Littlejohn] is the process which drives the curriculum itself. In many ways, procedural action is the essence of the Kanda Curriculum.

The Kanda Curriculum is, in broad terms, an examplar of what Bernstein (1996) calls a competence model of pedagogy (chapter 2.3, earlier). Competence models are associated with symbolic control, on the behalf of learners, and are usually contrasted with performance models (Bernstein 1996), which emphasise transmission pedagogies and structural curricula with clear stipulations about what is to be 'acquired'. All competence models share a preoccupation with development

of the consciousness of the learner (Bernstein 1996: 68). We might further add that the orientation to communication based on the intentions, interests and dispositions of the learner (1996: 60) suggests an identity that is 'future-orientated', implying an active and creative role in signifying practices.

I have discussed the Kanda Curriculum in general terms and now I examine the component parts in greater detail. The following section presents the syllabus, which comprises broad outlines and frameworks of interactive problems and dilemmas for learners.

3.1 THE PROCESS SYLLABUS

The syllabus consists of the materials and guidelines concerning what teachers and learners actually do together, and so is fundamental to the culture of the classroom. While modelling the Kanda Curriculum before trialling it in classrooms, I became interested in the so-called 'process syllabus', developed at Lancaster University in the 1980s, as the optimal way of realising the curricular goals that I had drawn up. The syllabus that I developed was, speaking accurately, actually a *variant* of the process syllabuses reported in the academic literature but nonetheless, it was still based on this prototype. Below, I briefly review the history and development of the process syllabus in general terms and then I discuss the way I have operationalised it for the specific purpose of the Kanda Curriculum.

The process syllabus was originally developed by Candlin (1981, 1984, 1990) and Breen (1984, 1987), (Breen and Candlin 1980) at Lancaster University. The process syllabus is a radical analytic syllabus in that it does not pre-select the linguistic

content of instruction but instead uses problem solving tasks. Developed within the context of the CLT movement of late 1970s, the process syllabus defines CLT in curriculum terms and links language content and classroom methodology, so that a specifically communicative perspective on the teaching-learning process in the classroom can be explored (Breen and Littlejohn 2000: 18). It was developed as a reaction against the prevailing transmission modes of education at the time and was an attempt to provide a broader curriculum base for a more constructivist model of pedagogy.

Central to the process syllabus is the idea that teachers and learners should undertake *procedural negotiation* together concerning roles and content of the curriculum, as the course proceeds. Candlin (1984) claimed that any pre-designed syllabus becomes redundant once actual work on it commences and therefore we can say that the syllabus is emergent: the only genuine account would a retrospective one of what work had occurred and what had been the outcomes. Markee (1997) differentiates between strong and weak forms; in a strong form, content, materials, methodology and assessment are negotiated between teacher and learners as the course progresses. Learners help select course content and materials and provide input on how they want to be taught and assessed and in this way, the strong form is a kind of 'designless design' (Markee 1997: 23).[2]

The element of negotiation is significant since there is evidence (reviewed by Dörnyei 1998, 2001, under the rubric of *self determination theory*) that if learners take more control of their own learning, instrinsic motivation is enhanced, leading to a greater commitment to the learning process. However it is important to realise that while negotiation of the curriculum is fundamental to the process syllabus, the degree to which this is implemented will depend on the goals of the course, cultural background, age and maturity of learners, and probably institutional culture in

which the learning takes place. Weaker versions of the process syllabus often involve project work (Benson 2001: 165), as in the case of the Kanda Curriculum (see also Legutke and Thomas 1991; Hall and Kenny 1988), in which learners decide on method of enquiry and outcomes of group research. This effectively means that learners have control over content of the project and forms of input and output. Collaboration and communication concerned with work in progress, provide opportunities for learning (Benson 2001: 165).

On the other hand, stronger versions of the process syllabus do not even prescribe any particular content or approach, since these should be negotiated and renegotiated throughout the course. Clarke (1991) believes that stronger versions are unlikely to be appropriate in all but a few cases and there are actually few published accounts or evaluations of the strong version in action. However, work by Simmons and Wheeler (1995) and Budd and Wright (1992) do report successful implementation of stronger versions in university and migrant classrooms respectively, while work by Dam (1995) in Danish secondary schools has been constructed around an ongoing self-evaluation cycle in which learning plans are evaluated and revised. There are also other accounts of stronger versions in Breen and Littlejohn's (2000) edited book, including work by Ribé; Linder; and Serrano-Sampedro, *inter alia*.

Breen and Littlejohn (2000) discuss the relationship between negotiation and the process syllabus in L2 learning and their account generally assumes, like the earlier parts of this section, that negotiation of the syllabus takes place between the teacher and learners. Here I introduce a radical difference in the syllabus of the Kanda Curriculum: the syllabus is co-constructed through negotiation but between *peers*, in other words, between learners and learners. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the learners in the program are Japanese teenagers who have just graduated from a

largely authoritarian system of schooling and I believe that most are not prepared, by virtue of their prior experiences of institutional learning, to participate in this kind of negotiation with teachers. Secondly, and much more importantly, the goal of the study is for learners to co-construct the curriculum, i.e. interact collaboratively, (within reasonable limits) symmetrically and in the conversational/contingent manner discussed at the end of Chapter 2, whereby the locus of control lies with learners. The only way that learners can participate in a way consistent with these objectives is if learners 'frame' the discourse themselves.

Breen and Littlejohn (2000) elaborate on the theme of 'negotiation' in human communication and their account is of central relevance to operationalising the syllabus in the Kanda Curriculum, even though my context involves learner-learner negotiation while theirs focuses more on teacher-learner negotiation. Essentially, they maintain that negotiation typifies and generates the way we communicate and they identify three kinds of negotiation in terms of the functions that they serve:

*personal negotiation

*interactive negotiation

*procedural negotiation

'Personal negotiation' (2000: 6) is basically an intramental process involving mental activities such as discriminating, analysing, synthesising, memorising and recalling, and is implicit in any interaction; this is less relevant in the context of this discussion. It is the second and third kinds that are more significant here.

INTERACTIVE NEGOTIATION

Breen and Littlejohn (2000: 7) use the term 'negotiation' in the sense of Garfinkel (1967) where people use language in interaction to indicate either their

understanding or their failure to understand others. I have discussed in Chapter 1.4 the notion of 'intersubjectivity' and how this is constructed and maintained in conversational talk through turn taking, so I will not repeat it here but simply reiterate the principle. On the other hand, in the second language acquisition (SLA) literature, the interactive process has been seen as crucial for language 'acquisition', with a stress on the importance of appropriate or comprehensible input (Krashen 1981, 1985). This and subsequent work (see van Lier 1998, 2000 for critical review) has tended to focus on repair strategies following communication problems which generate interactional modifications.

Van Lier (1998: 172) makes several observations which caution against assigning special status to repair, in the context of discourse analysis or pedagogy. First, repair work can indicate convergence of perspectives among participants, rather than problems (Aston 1986), or represent closure on a problem (Ruddock 1973); furthermore, interlocuters sometimes give up on problems and move on (Yule 1990). Repair may then have results other than increased comprehension. Secondly, interactional modifications may be the result of the type of discourse investigated. Where activity types used for data are communication tasks where participants, often native speakers and non native speakers, need to exchange information, the interaction is usually asymmetrical and unequal; this is an environment in which explicit repair tends to be salient. However, ethnomethodological studies of conversation, as opposed to tasks in SLA, indicate an avoidance of explicit repair following communication problems and instead indicate a preference for self-repair (Schegloff et al. 1977, inter alia).

Thirdly, repair, or attempts to achieve mutual understanding in the face of problems, is only one of several sets of actions that are orientated towards mutual engagement and intersubjectivity in talk. Successful interaction is dependent on the skillful use of

many modalities of pragmatic and linguistic resources. Van Lier (1998: 174) summarises a list of such resources into three main categories, each with several component elements. The three components are:

*proactive resources (planning, predicting)

*concurrent resources (making signals during one's own or another person's turn)

*reactive resources (summarising, rephrasing, wrapping up).

Repair is one component under the rubric of 'reactive resources' and according to this highly plausible scheme, is only one of several forms of negotiation for meaning.

Van Lier's fourth objection to assigning special significance and status to repair, is of an epistemological nature (1998: 174). Nearly all the work in applied linguistics concerning the role of input and interaction assumes an input-output model of communication, suggesting a view of language as one of transmission from one person to another. According to van Lier, and consistent with the dialogical and interactional perspectives that I have developed so far in this study, this ignores issues of *reciprocity* and *contingency*. In other words, such work gives a monological account of what I would argue, is a matter of language as a process that is co-constructed and dialogical. With this in mind, the syllabus was designed as a resource for learners to 'bootstrap' off each other as they construct the curriculum together. I return to these issues later in Chapter 6 but I now turn to what is probably the defining feature of the Kanda syllabus: procedural negotiation and the way that it is operationalised in this instance.

PROCEDURAL NEGOTIATION

According to Breen and Littlejohn (2000: 8), the primary focus of procedural negotiation is less about negotiating meaning with others (though of course this is

implicated) than it is upon *reaching agreement*. This process is exemplified by (*ibid.* 2000: 8) "...discussions between people who are likely to have different interests or different points of view but who seek to reach agreement on a matter, *solve a shared problem* (my emphasis) or establish ways of working that are acceptable to them." The authors continue (2000: 8), that in the context of language learning, the primary function of procedural negotiation is the managing, teaching and learning as a group experience, involving decisions such as: 'who will work with whom, in what ways, with what resources and for how long, upon what subject matter or problem, and for what purposes.' Furthermore, outcomes from the process must also be discussed and evaluated in some way so that this too, can be considered a focus for negotiation.

Breen and Littlejohn (*ibid*) see the procedural negotiation of the syllabus itself, as the defining quality of the process syllabus. The syllabus is not pre-determined in the sense of the teacher leading learners through pre-written materials with specific learning objectives; instead, the *actual* syllabus emerges as an ongoing compromise between the provisional syllabus (if it exists) and the different learning agendas, as they are revealed to the teacher (see Candlin 1984). The major function of procedural negotiation, as defined in these terms, is to reach a shared understanding and negotiated resolution of conflicting agendas about classroom work.

For the purposes of the Kanda Curriculum I have taken the notion of procedural negotiation but operationalised it under different conditions. Throughout the syllabus and in varying degrees, depending on task or activity in question, learners in small groups of three or four people, are faced with dilemmas about how to proceed and must resolve these, not through negotiation with the teacher, but with *each other*. For example, in order to 'complete' the syllabus/fulfill requirements, learners must negotiate together roles, subject matter and managerial details of

project work in the syllabus, along with grades and comments for evaluating self and others. This has important consequences for the pedagogical discourse of the classroom. Learners have essentially appropriated (though some control still rests with the teacher, as recorded data later shows) the regulative discourse (Bernstein 1996) of the classroom by assuming managerial/regulative roles that are generally considered to be within the domain of the teacher, as they negotiate and collaboratively plan the direction of activity. Under these conditions procedural negotiation comes to equate with the *communicative action* of Habermas (1984), where rational decisions should be made on the basis of negotiation between individuals with equal rights of participation.

I have theorised the syllabus in general terms and we can conclude that the Kanda syllabus pivots upon the evaluation of a set of actions that have been agreed upon by learners in collaborative groups. Negotiation is therefore a central element but this does not refer to the 'negotiation of meaning', based on misunderstanding, that predominates in SLA literature (see Pica 1994 for representative summary). Rather, it is negotiation for *action* that is significant here.

In the following section I discuss the role of tasks in the syllabus and the relationship between guidelines of what learners are supposed to do in class, and the activities and interactions that actually emerge. This leads on from the final section of Chapter 2 earlier, which modelsclass room discourse in terms of learner control and initiative in talk, consistent with Bernstein's (1996) competence pedagogy.

3.2 TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

SAME TASKS, DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES

Tasks are the fundamental building blocks of the syllabus and can be said to 'afford'

interaction in the curriculum; without tasks there is no reason for learners to interact.

According to Coughlan and Duff (1994), experimental research in SLA tends to

assume that tasks are *constants* in the design of the research, since task

implementation is subject to close control by the researcher. Coughlan and Duff

(*ibid.*) question the assumption that tasks can ever be adequately viewed in such an

invariant way and provide firm evidence that, at least in the case of one elicitation

task used in SLA research, the same task is approached quite differently, not only by

different subjects but also by the same subject at different times. The same objections

are raised by Kumeradivelu (1991) and Block (1994) who found that learners may

interpret the purpose and procedures of the task differently from the teacher and

there is evidence in my data that learners interpret similar tasks differently (Breen

1987) on separate occasions (Chapter 6, later).

Coughlan and Duff (1994: 175) therefore propose that we understand the task as a

kind of 'behavioural blueprint provided to subjects in order to elicit linguistic data.'

In contra-distinction to tasks, they define activity as the behaviour produced by the

process as well as the outcome of a task, in its sociocultural context. The activity

then, depends on the interaction between individual and task rather than on

properties inherent in the task itself (Appel and Lantolf 1994: 480). Lantolf (2000b)

sees the centrality of learners' agency in interpreting tasks (as opposed to being

directed and monitored by teachers) as a positive factor, important for mediating

learners' development of agency in interacting in L2. However, it is perhaps short-

sighted to understand learner perceptions of tasks as monolithic goals, formulated at

or before the start of activity; Roebuck (1998, 2000), for example, found evidence of learners reinterpreting tasks on-line in the context of written recalls of Spanish texts. Where activities leading from tasks are negotiated by learners in a group, we would expect some or perhaps all learners to change their orientation as the direction of the activity is negotiated on-line or challenged by a member(s).

Understanding the process and outcomes of tasks in terms of emergence, subject to the goals and interpretations of learners (Breen 1987), is entirely consistent with the metaphor of the curriculum as an 'ecology', (Candlin 2001b: 6) discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.3, later. However, this should not be pushed too far since the functional demands of particular tasks will tend to implicate particular activities and discourse types. This position is articulated by Ellis (2000: 214) where he acknowledges that task performance is necessarily constructed rather than determined but he also believes that researchers must recognise that certain tasks will have a *propensity* to lead to certain types of language behaviour. This is entirely evident in my data (later) where there is considerable variation as to how tasks are appropriated by learners but certain 'core' patterns of activity/discourse are in evidence. For example, it is difficult to see how the discourse of re/co-constructing the text of a grammar dictation could resemble the discourse of planning a presentation to the class, in terms of the focal activities of putting together one collaborative written text or discussing the allocation of roles for a presentation. However, we might expect that learners will interpret very similar tasks in different ways depending on the time and interest they wish or are able to invest in the task (Coughlan and Duff 1994: 175). This is a finding that also emerges in my own data in Chapter 6, where learners in both focus groups are less persistent in pursuing tasks to completion on their second attempt at a 'dictogloss' activity than on their first attempt, a few weeks earlier (see Chapter 6.1).

In summary, there is strong evidence that viewing tasks as constants in terms of learner processes and outcomes is naïve, where learners are in control of task execution. It is helpful instead to see tasks as 'blueprints' (Coughlan and Duff 1994) that generate activities, rather than conflating the ideas of task and activity. However, having said this, along with Ellis (2000), I would reject strong versions of this argument which play down a fundamental correlation between task-type and activity/discourse. In accounting for differential processes and outcomes in task performance (on the same task), one important variable may be the time, effort and interest that learners are prepared to take. It is important to understand that there may also be factors external to the classroom which constrain a learner's investment in classroom learning, as discussed by Norton (2000) in Chapter 2.4, earlier.

PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

In the introduction to the study I stated that the purpose of the curriculum was to provide an interactional environment where learners could gain increasing experience (and hence some degree of accumulated expertise) at collaborative L2 problem solving across as wide a *range* of situations and activities as possible. Borrowing from Lantolf (2000b: 84), the intention was to construct learners in the subject position of "...authors, interpreters, narrators and critics" in the L2, thereby nurturing a *diversity* of interactional activities and discourse, rather than identifying a narrow optimal definition of activites and discourse in terms of the curricular goals.

In reviewing the literature on task based learning (TBL) much that is written is not helpful for my situation, since many studies follow a recurring assumption of mainstream SLA that task utility is related to an associated degree of comprehensible input (Duff 1986; Long 1989; Pica *et al.* 1993, *inter alia*). However I follow Berwick (1993) who argues in favour of exploring different types of language associated with

tasks with different combinations of qualities. For example, Berwick (1988) had earlier contrasted results of learners interacting with two very different kinds of tasks (experientially-based and expository, respectively) and found that the former produced very different discursive features to the latter. The findings indicated that more experiential tasks produced more confirmation checks and referential questions while expository tasks produced more definitions and lexical uncertainty. Berwick (1988) argued for the relative merits of both instead of asserting the greater utility of one over the other: a principle that I adopt here.

Since the curriculum revolves around the co-ordination and negotiation of joint action, most of the tasks that form blueprints for learner activity/discourse are 'convergent', as opposed to divergent (Duff 1986), implying the necessity of an arbitrary but agreed upon solution to resolve problems or dilemmas (Skehan 1998: 106). However, there is considerable variation within the design of tasks in the curriculum and Brown's 1991 scheme is useful for modelling such variation. This consists of three different dimensions: tight-loose, closed-open and procedural-interpretive. In the case of the first, a tight task is one where the instructions or sub-tasks are definite, with little room for interpretation, while a loose task is the opposite. In the case of the second, a closed task is one where solutions to a problem come from a limited set; an 'open' task implies an unlimited set. The third dimension, procedural-interpretive, refers to the extent to which tasks involve doing things, getting things done, as opposed to a need for interpretation.

This is only an approximate gloss and I introduce other criteria for evaluating *discourse type*, associated with different tasks, in section 3.4, later.

A final note in this section concerns the interaction between learners and tasks in the syllabus. Most of the literature concerning TBL assumes that tasks are performed by

learners in small groups while being monitored by teachers in classes where the pacing of activities is lock step. In the case of the Kanda Curriculum, learners work for the most part by themselves and hence have more control over contextual shift between episodes of discourse/activity; the teacher does not pace and regulate episodes of talk to the same extent. With relevance here, Kenny and Laszewski (1997: 131) discuss 'exercises' and their conceptual opposite, 'pieces of work'. An 'exercise' is performed in response to a problem identified by a teacher while a 'piece of work' involves matters of personal, social or professional relevance (Kenny and Laszewski 1997: 130). We might expect interaction in the Kanda Curriculum to be more in line with 'pieces of work' than 'exercises' but this depends very much on how learners interpret what needs to be achieved and how much they are prepared to invest in the activity. In my data analysis in chapter 6, I find empirical evidence of both phenomena in connection with similar tasks.

CONSTRAINTS AND RESOURCES

In evaluating the extent to which different tasks/stages in the syllabus tend to engender the interactional goals of the curriculum, and gauging in what ways they do this, Giddens' (1984) notion of constraints and resources is particularly useful. Assuming that there is a fundamental relationship between the functional demands inherent in tasks and the *focal* activities/discourse that they engender (Ellis 2000), we can characterise particular stages of the curriculum as implicating particular activities/discourse. Of course, as stated earlier, it would be foolish to be overly deterministic about this.

Van Lier (1996: 8) has equated the dynamism of constraints and resources with the rules of a game, such as chess. Certain moves are constrained by the rules, i.e. there are moves that particular pieces may not make but without such rules the game could not take place at all. Constraints and resources are really two perspectives on

the same issue of the interaction between task blueprint and emergent activity/discourse on behalf of the learner; some characteristics are likely to emerge in the activity/discourse while others are unlikely or 'constrained'. For example, Skehan (1998: 118) summarises discourse characteristics of task-based interaction along three sets of distinctions: convergent-divergent (Duff 1986, Pica *et al.* 1993), transactional-interpretive (Brown 1991) and focused-differentiated (Tizard and Hughes 1984). Skehan (1998) claims that these three distinctions all capture a related contrast between *circumscribed* tasks (convergent, transactional and focused) and *extendible* tasks (divergent, interpretative and differentiated) and claims that the latter generate 'complex, cutting-edge language in a more dependable way' (1998: 118). In the case of the Kanda Curriculum I believe that complementarity of as wide a range of activity/discourse types as possible is optimal; I see value both ways though the balance between task types is something that must be subjected to critical scrutiny.

3.3   AN ECOLOGY OF PRACTICE

The discussion so far of negotiated co-construction among peers, of project work, of contingent discourse, of learner control and initiative in talk, leads us to see the class room as a complex social system (Breen 1985; Lave and Wenger 1991), where the curriculum is perhaps best understood and modelled as an 'ecology' (van Lier 1996: 200), or more precisely a 'semiotic ecology', which 'affords' learning.[3]

The notion of an ecology, at least as drawn upon in educational linguistics, is mostly derived from the work of the psychologists Bateson (1987); Gibson, in the field of visual perception (1966, 1979); with Bronfenbrenner in child development (1979); and

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Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994), *inter alia* [in van Lier 2000: 251]. Van Lier (1996, 2000) has elaborated ecological interpretations in applied/educational linguistics in greater depth than other contemporary scholars (though see Lemke's 1995 'ecosocial' systems), so I draw extensively upon his work in the following section.

To model a system as an ecology, means essentially that the observer or researcher confronts a 'complex interactive system' (Bateson 1987: xxi) rather than a reductionist and more orderly model of dependent and independent variables, as is usual in positivistic and post-positivistic approaches to the physical sciences and also cognitive psychology. Van Lier (2000: 246) discusses the scientific reductionisms associated with Cartesian approaches to science and, by way of contrast, then elaborates ecological principles as they apply to language learning. Van Lier makes three basic observations (*ibid.*: 246): firstly, instead of assuming that all phenomena can be explained in terms of simpler components, properties *emerge* that cannot be explained by earlier levels. Secondly, not all learning can be explained by intra-mental processes of cognition and thirdly, the perceptual and social activity of the learner, particularly aspects (verbal and non verbal) of interaction, are central to an understanding of learning.

From an ecological perspective, the learner is immersed in a semiotic environment of *potential* meanings and the actual course of learning emerges as the learner acts on and within this environment. While not denying the existence of intramental cognitive processes, the 'active learner in her environment' (van Lier 2000: 247) is the focus for the researcher, not the 'contents of her brain' (*ibid.*). Discourse emerges out of semiotic activity (see Chapter 1.4.1 earlier, for discussion of semiotic activity and distributed cognition) with the learner engaging with and taking up some aspects of the 'semiotic budget' (van Lier 2000: 252) while ignoring other parts. The semiotic budget[4] may be thought of as analagous to the energy budget of an ecosystem (van

Lier, *ibid*) and does not implicate 'input', in the sense of a stimulus-response model, available for the learner. Instead it refers to the totality of *opportunities* (which may or may not be exploited) for 'learning'. In the context of the Kanda Curriculum, such learning means the modification and construction of the learners' own social and symbolic environment, in small groups (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994): co-construction of the curriculum.

Gibson (1996) emphasised the 'coupling' between an organism and its environment in an ecology, and the environment *'affords* (my emphasis) the sets of actions and events which a moving perceiver will engage in' (Forrester 1992: 61). Affordances offer or have the potential for sets of actions and are best understood as properties of neither actor nor object, but as a relationship between them (van Lier 2000: 252). From an L2 pedagogical perspective, van Lier (2000: 253) adapts these abstract ideas and suggests that learners benefit from being provided with a rich 'semiotic budget' and having activities and participation structured so that access is available and engagement encouraged. From such access and engagement, collaborative construction of affordances arises; Lantolf (2000a: 17) relates these to the concept of ZPD (zone of proximal development) where people working jointly are able to construct contexts in which expertise emerges as a feature of the group rather than of the individual.

Van Lier (2000: 253) suggests that conceptualising learning in these terms brings ecological language learning in line with Lave and Wenger's (1991) proposals for situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation, and also Rogoff's (1995) guided participation, apprenticeship, and participatory appropriation. I would add to this list, in the particular context of the Kanda Curriculum, the following: the notion of dialogism (outlined in Chapter 1.4); the semiotic and distributed mediation of cognition, (Chapter 1.4.1); 'competence' pedagogies/the process syllabus and

constructivist models of education, (Chapter 2.3); Habermas' communicative competence, (Chapter 2.5); and the notion of symbolic control by learners/autonomy in language learning, (Chapter 2.6).

The lifeworld of the classroom community (Breen 1985) is one which, although built around the concept of 'language learning', is not fundamentally a linguistic one. Instead it is primarily *participative* (Sinha 1988). Therefore the emphasis is on the perceiver (learner) and the ways in which she takes up and organises affordances in the available semiotic budget, transforming these as contributions in discourse to be attended to by other interactants. This process entails the structuration of conversation (Forrester 1992: 64) where learners develop context on-line in the contingent (van Lier 1996) sense, discussed earlier in the final section of Chapter 2.

Focusing on affordances foregrounds the perceptions and action of the active learner (van Lier 2000: 257) and suggests an analytic focus on actions and processes, rather than products and outcomes. Van Lier (*ibid.*) suggests that the more dominant metaphor of language *input* in SLA/L2 pedagogy can be replaced with that of *affordance* and this is consistent with hermeneutic research (see Chapter 5) but not with the scientific method, which is actually its antithesis.

The construct of affordance and the relative indeterminacy of what the learner will perceive or choose to take up in the available semiotic budget, has parallels with the way, discussed in Chapter 3.2 earlier, that learners tend to appropriate activities from task blueprints (Coughlan and Duff 1994; Donato 2000). In this sense, an ecological perspective suggests that language learning is always 'situated' and (socially) contextualised (Lantolf 2000: 25) and this has strong implications for appropriate research methodology for interpreting L2 learning in the terms discussed here. This point is developed later in Chapter 5.

3.4   THE SYLLABUS CYCLE

In this section I focus explicitly on the classroom syllabus in a more concrete way; I analyse and explain the design of the materials, tasks and pieces of work that students work with, and the pacing and grading of classroom work. The syllabus cycle is represented in Diagram 3.1 and shows in a simplified but accessible way, how learners move through generic stages of the syllabus, working in small groups, for periods of three to four weeks when a new 'theme' in the syllabus begins. Generally, the class meets four times a week for ninety minutes, each time. As explained more fully in the section following this, the class does not function in a co-ordinated lock-step fashion but instead, each small group works autonomously, with the teacher functioning as an advisor in the classroom.

If there is one concept that underlies the syllabus design more than any other, it is that of *contingency*, as elaborated by van Lier (1996). The syllabus does not consist of all pre-written pedagogical materials which the learners must all work through in lock step fashion, since this is not conducive to encouraging the kind of autonomy and learner-directed initiatives discussed in Chapter 2, under the rubric of autonomy, investment and intrinsic motivation. The antithesis of this would probably not be very helpful either: where there are no materials at all and learners are supposed to negotiate what happens tomorrow with teachers (an extreme version of the process syllabus), we might expect serious confusion and complaints from learners and administrators of the college. This would probably be compounded when dealing with teenage Japanese learners who have mostly just

graduated from an authoritarian high school culture of learning (see Chapter 4.1, 4.2, following).

The syllabus instead consists of *some* pre-written pedagogic materials that serve as structuring elements in the course: these lend an element of predictability to the learning cycle and *set up* possibilities for independent project work by learners. It is this 'setting up' that captures on a macro level the contingent nature of the syllabus. While learners must co-construct much of the syllabus themselves, especially in the later stages (see Diagram 3.1), there is some order and discernible organisation to the syllabus, established by generic elements (order of stages in the cycle) and a familiar routine in the syllabus cycle. Learners follow a similar routine with each cycle of the syllabus over the course of a semester and when the syllabus was designed, it was assumed that this would encourage learners to approach their work with increasing confidence, after the initial confusion of a largely unfamiliar learning environment.[5]

Generally, the syllabus was initially designed and materials written with van Lier's (1996: 213) apt metaphor of a 'thick' curriculum and 'thin' syllabus as the defining maxim. The curriculum as a whole is clearly theorised while the syllabus, as discussed earlier, does not consist of all pre-written materials, as we might expect in the case of 'performance' or transmission pedagogies (Bernstein 1996). The 'spaces' in the syllabus are elements that leave opportunities for negotiated co-construction among learners in groups, allowing for the possibility of creative action.

The syllabus cycle represented in Diagram 3.1 is a unit of work that should take 3 – 4 weeks, moving through the stages depicted until the end, at which time learners begin a new cycle. Each cycle of work is built around a 'theme', which is essentially a bank of materials, tasks and resources, structured around a common topic. Examples of such themes include: Travel, Living in a Foreign Society, The World of

Advertising, and The Cinema. These themes can be selected by learners in groups, according to their own preferences or interests, so that each group may be working on different themes (but at broadly similar stages of the syllabus cycle, as shown in Diagram 3.1) at the same time. However, at the beginning of the year's introduction of the Kanda Curriculum, teachers will probably introduce each part of the syllabus to the whole class in a more lock step fashion, until learners become familiar with the *modus operandi.*
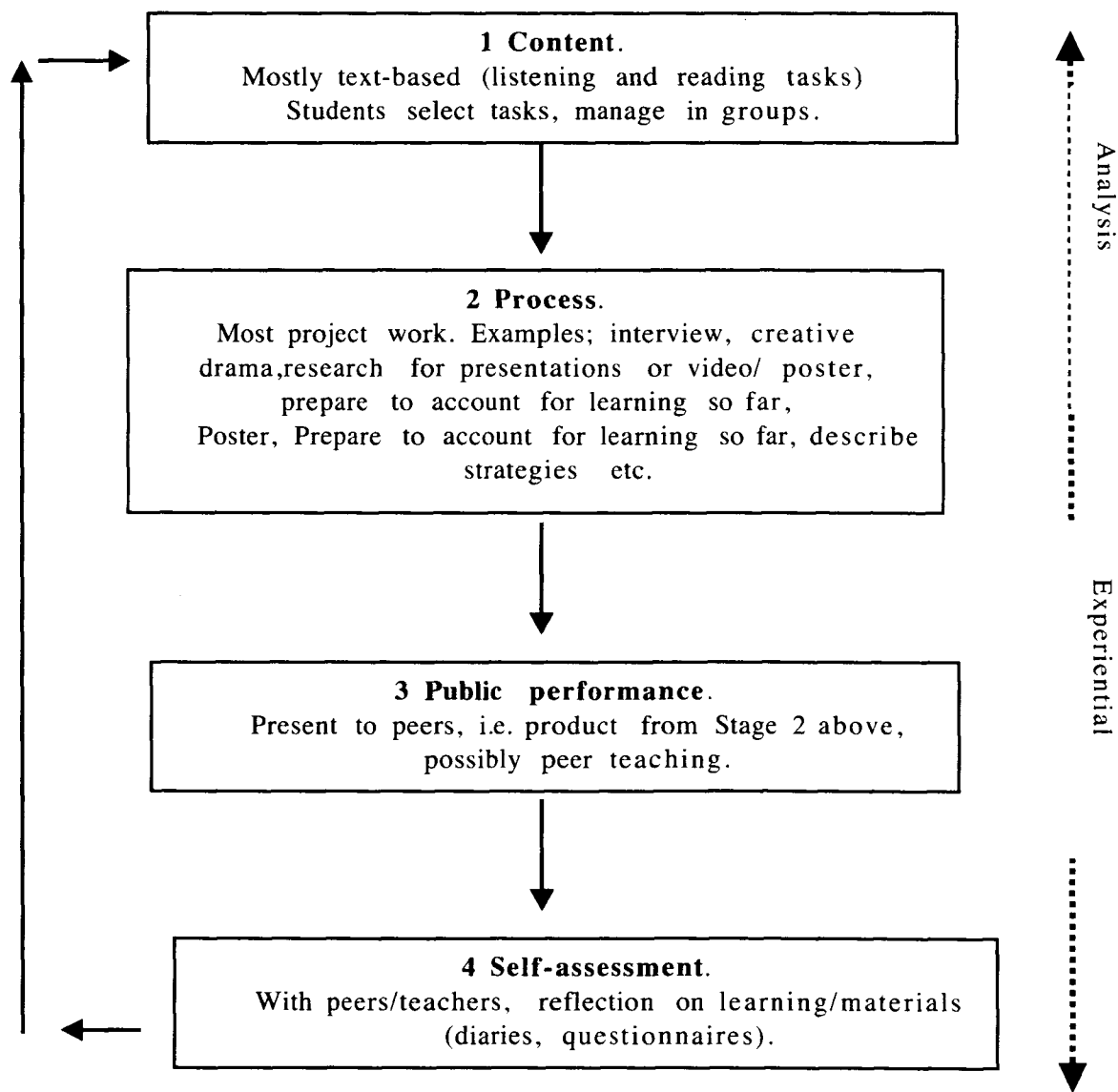
The line down the right margin of Diagram 1 represents a continuum from more 'analytic' learning at the start of the cycle, to more 'experiential' learning towards the end. This is similar to Legutke and Thomas' (1991) 'content' vs. 'process' aspects of the syllabus, where the former refers to texts (multi-media but usually including images, written language and spoken text) which learners 'study', for the purposes of comprehension or critical reaction. The latter refers to collaborative interaction among learners, with the object of generating and contributing materials and texts concerned with the particular interests and biographies of the learners themselves.[6]

Of course, this separation of content and process is actually a simplification; both occur simultaneously since, for example, learners must complete homework assignments outside of class to build up schema and lexical resources in connection with the theme, so they have semiotic resources on which to draw, in later stages of the cycle. In practice too, both do occur together at the same time in class. I would however expect more 'content' work to occur in earlier stages.

Diagram 3.1 is only an outline of the syllabus and does not provide any helpful information about the task blueprints for group work that learners can draw upon. There is not enough space to include banks of materials in this study since my focus is on the *process* of interaction in the curriculum. The syllabus was set up with the purpose of affording or engendering certain types of interaction at different stages,

though Coughlan and Duff's (1994) caveat earlier, that learners cannot be expected to conform to mandated interactional behaviour, is very important.

Diagram 3.1 Syllabus – A Prototypical Theme

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          ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐         ▲
    →      │              1 Content.                      │         ┊
    │      │  Mostly text-based (listening and reading   │         ┊
    │      │  tasks)                                      │         ┊  Analysis
    │      │  Students select tasks, manage in groups.   │         ┊
    │      └─────────────────────────────────────────────┘         ┊
    │                        │                                     ┊
    │                        ▼                                     ┊
    │      ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐         ┊
    │      │              2 Process.                      │         ┊
    │      │  Most project work. Examples; interview,     │         ┊
    │      │  creative drama,research for presentations   │         ┊
    │      │  or video/ poster, prepare to account for    │         ┊
    │      │  learning so far,                            │
    │      │  Poster, Prepare to account for learning     │
    │      │  so far, describe strategies etc.            │
    │      └─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
    │                        │
    │                        ▼
    │      ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐         ┊
    │      │         3 Public performance.                │         ┊
    │      │  Present to peers, i.e. product from Stage   │         ┊
    │      │  2 above, possibly peer teaching.            │         ┊  Experiential
    │      └─────────────────────────────────────────────┘         ┊
    │                        │                                     ┊
    │                        ▼                                     ┊
    │      ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐         ┊
    │      │           4 Self-assessment.                 │         ┊
    ←──────│  With peers/teachers, reflection on          │         ┊
           │  learning/materials                          │         ▼
           │  (diaries, questionnaires).                  │
           └─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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The syllabus cycle was therefore designed not on a haphazard basis but with certain expectations of learner interactive behaviour at different stages in mind (Ellis 2000). Briefly recapping the pedagogic goals of the study, it was intended that learners should engage in collaborative problem-solving across a range of activities: this is

what Candlin (1984) terms the provisional syllabus, resulting from *strategic planning*. Such classroom activities on the part of learners necessarily implicate a variety of 'discourse types' (Sarangi 2000) according to functional goals (and sub-goals) within activities. These discourse types can be investigated according to textual analysis (primarily mode, in Halliday's 1985 terms) and also in terms of discourse strategy (Chapter 5, later).

Tactical planning (Candlin 1984), as opposed to strategic planning, is the way in which teachers implement a course and how the content is graded and sequenced. The syllabus cycle in Diagram 3.1 therefore represents my 'tactical' attempt to realise the curricular goals and philosophy as outlined earlier in the study, in terms of the actual design, grading and sequence of pedagogic materials at the level of classroom interaction. In this way, the syllabus cycle realises my forestructure of understanding (Heidegger 1962) of interaction in the curriculum, which is evaluated later against empirical data in the research section (Chapter 6). For the sake of simplicity and convenience, I have represented these stages in four steps in Diagram 3.1 and these correspond exactly with the organising principle for interpreting the data of classroom interaction, later, in Chapter 6.

As I have stressed already, it is important to understand that the stages depicted in Diagram 3.1 are simple representations and cannot model adequately the complexity of interaction in actual classes. For example, while a task or piece of work may implicate a particular activity; in practice there will be more than one activity associated with a piece of work. This is difficult to both predict beforehand and to represent in the strategic plan, so in this sense, the diagram of the syllabus cycle is simplistic.

The comments below are only a summary of my strategic plan for the syllabus; several findings from data of classroom interaction were not anticipated (Chapter 6) and in some cases actually contradict what I had expected. In particular, I had not anticipated, before studying transcripts of learner interaction, the extent to which even the most banal or (as I had expected) simple task would engender a range of activities (Hasan 2000b) and discourse types, rather than a simple prototypical form. Discourse analysis of classroom interaction provides the basis of the conclusions to the study, later. Meanwhile, I gloss the four stages in diagram 1 as follows:

Stage 1. Content.

Goals. Diagram 1 shows that this beginning stage of the cycle is primarily text-based. There are three reasons for this: the first is to have learners develop semantic resources, i.e. lexico-grammar, associated with the field/theme they are studying. The second is to make available conceptual schema related to the field. For example, the theme concerned with Living Abroad has one interview with a Western teacher's first experiences, positive and negative, of living in Tokyo. This was seen as a way of showing learners the potential of interviewing people for firsthand accounts of living in foreign societies: there is broad scope for drawing in issues of culture shock, intercultural awareness, racism, etc.

These first and second points are actually closely related. The overall goal of the curriculum is for learners to co-construct the curriculum through collaborative talk, but (to state the obvious) they must have something to talk about, both in terms of lexico-grammatical resources and schema related to the field. Finally, I expected that learner discourse resulting from working through pieces of work in stage 1, would be very different, and a balance to, the type of discourse engendered by activities in stage 2. This is necessary since the goal is to engage learners in a *range* of problem-solving activities across a *range* of interaction/discourse modalities.

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Materials. The pieces of work that form the basis of data analysis for stage 1 (Chapter 6.1), later in the study, are recordings of small groups of learners working on a grammar dictation, or dictogloss (Wajnryb 1990) that includes cloze work, too. Dictogloss activities have been theorised by Swain and Lapkin (1995) and Swain (1985, 1995), *inter alia*, largely in terms of Swain's 'output hypothesis' (*ibid.*), related to accuracy. Briefly, Swain (*ibid.*) discusses the 'noticing' or consciousness-raising role, the hypothesis-raising, and metalinguistic/reflective functions of learner collaboration on tasks of the type described above. It was felt that this would be an explicit opportunity for learners to focus on form (Long and Robinson 1998) as the task requires that learners collaboratively re-construct a text after listening to a recording. This represents a shift from the semantic processing that characterises much of the interaction in the curriculum, towards a more syntactic-based processing. I visualised that learner discourse would be of the type described by Skehan (1998: 118) as 'circumscribed': convergent (leading to an agreed solution to a problem), transactional (orientated to practical outcomes - completing the text) and focused.

Expected characteristics of discourse. In terms of a textual (Halliday 1985) analysis of discourse, I expected that the functional demands of these tasks would generate episodes of discourse with short turns (probably much ellipsis) and less complex language (Duff 1986; Skehan and Foster 1997), as a function of many 'local agreements' (Skehan 1998: 117) in the ongoing activity of reconstructing a text and completing a cloze passage. I expected that this would involve learners in discourse placing low cognitive demands on on-line planning, probably resulting in quite a lot of overlapping and latched speech, as evidence of bidding for the floor. I thought that there was limited scope for learners to creatively interpret activities from the task blueprint, except in terms of the time and effort they would invest in the

activities, meaning that the activities in the 'content' stage are limited from the point of view of Habermas' *Diskurs* and Breen and Littlejohn's (2000) procedural negotiation, discussed earlier. In many ways, the expected discursive outcomes of this stage of the syllabus are the opposite of stage 2, following.

Data of interaction are analysed in Chapter 6.1, later.

Stage 2. Process.

Goals. This stage of the cycle is the one which takes the most class-time (perhaps half of all class time), is the most open to symbolic control and creative interpretation by learners, generates probably the most varied range of activity/discourse types (Sarangi 2000) and is also the most difficult for teachers and learners to co-manage, if either or both parties are used to operating according to the norms of 'performance' pedagogies (Bernstein 1996). There is a clear shift of emphasis away from the 'text-as-input' of stage 1, earlier, towards collaborative negotiation of project work by learners in small groups, driven by the goal of public performance/presentation of some aspect of the project work in stage 3, later. We might expect that 'control of discourse' (autonomy) on behalf of learners will afford expression of creativity, in terms of investment and intrinsic motivation that I discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

Project work is an excellent vehicle for the implementation of process syllabuses (Skehan 1998: 273) and it is this stage (see Diagram 1) which affords the clearest opportunities for procedural negotiation (Breen and Littlejohn 2000) among learners as they negotiate what they will do in groups, the logistics of how to do it, and the role of each member.

Materials. The pedagogic guidelines tend to be the least defined or specified for this stage. Learners may be given *suggestions* for subject matter for role-plays or factual

presentations but in general, there are no task blueprints telling them what to do, at least in terms of subject matter. In fact, the whole point is that learners should produce work that is the product of their own collective interests, and these should emerge from their own ideas and 'input' from pre-written texts in stage 1, above. However, as is evident in the data later, learners are accountable for their projects and teachers do reserve the right to veto ideas that are thought to be inappropriate, unhelpful or offensive. There are however, guidelines for progress reports to the teacher and deadlines. While it is expected that learners will be working in autonomous collaborative groups, all must be ready to present their work at the same time (usually two class periods of ninety minutes each) so the pacing of groups within the class needs to be geared to common deadlines.[7]

Expected characteristics of discourse. In some ways, I expected the learner discourse in stage 2 to be very different from stage 1. In Brown's (1991) scheme, we might expect learner discourse to be 'loose' (vs. tight), where there is considerable room for interpretation over how to proceed with various activities of problem-solving; solutions to problems (Brown *ibid.)* will be less 'closed' (vs. open) in that solutions to problems will come from a much less limited set of options than in stage 1. Discourse should be both 'procedural' and interpretive compared with stage 1, in that there is both a functional need to get things done and for interpretation. These characteristics are not readily categorisable in Skehan's (1998) contrast between discourse resulting from 'circumscribed tasks' (convergent, transactional and focused) and 'extendible' (divergent, interpretive and differentiated).

It is difficult to categorise the discourse that we might expect from the discourse in stage 2 simply because I expected a considerable range of speech acts and discourse types (Sarangi 2000) here. Stage 2 includes a very diverse range of activities and therefore discourse types (Sarangi, *ibid.*), given the varied functional demands placed

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on learners, in planning, negotiating and completing elements of project work. In this way, I expected the functional need for constant re-classifying of context (Hasan 2000) and hence 'fluidity' of discourse to resemble that of more 'naturalistic' discourse, compared with stage 1, earlier. I thought that learner discourse in stage 2 would show greater 'contingency' (van Lier 1996) than in stages 1 and 4 since there is more scope for negotiation by learners (Breen and Littlejohn 2000) about how to proceed, since this is not stipulated in task instructions in stage 2.

Data of interaction are analysed in Chapter 6.2, later.

Stage 3. Public Performance.

Goals. There are two principal goals of the public performance: the first is largely motivational while the other is pedagogic. Firstly, public performance, which usually means a presentation or role-play to the whole class near the end of the syllabus cycle, is a tangible end-product, making stage 2 above, meaningful and purposeful, and serving as a kind of public record of the project (Skehan 1998: 274). In this way, pressure for individuals to perform under the scrutiny of others, should exert pressure to work collaboratively with others in stage 2.

The second goal, the pedagogic element, is very important.   Skehan (1996, 1998), Skehan and Foster (1997) and Foster and Skehan (1999) have drawn attention to a central problem in approaches to language learning, like the Kanda Curriculum, which place priority on meaning, rather than form. Learners who are encouraged to place emphasis on meaning will not necessarily worry about the exact forms they use (Kess 1992), given the processing burden of planning speech while engaging in on-line dialogue (or multilogue). Indeed, in less formal conversational settings, native speakers often make much use of ellipsis in speech. In this way, learners may bypass ser :tivity to form, with negative consequences for interlanguage

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development, if they make widespread use of 'communication strategies' (Kasper and Kellerman 1997), in the sense of strategic solutions to communication problems. If these become habitual or proceduralised, learners may become disposed to avoiding speech focused on precision or accuracy and over-rely on gesture, elliptical utterances and lexical processing.

While the pedagogic goals of the Kanda Curriculum clearly favour unplanned, spontaneous and 'contingent' (van Lier 1996) discourse, it is useful to introduce at least some element of planned speech to shift priority, for a brief period, towards form. In Swain's (1985) terms, this is a move from semantic to syntactic processing and the preparation of scripts may push learners to notice 'the gap' between their interlanguage and L2 (see Schmidt 1990) target forms. Public performance also affords the opportunity for feedback on performance, in the terms outlined below (*Expected characteristics...).

*Materials. These are all generated by learners in stage 3.

*Expected characteristics of discourse. Learners generally have the choice of making a factual presentation or a role-play about an issue concerned with the theme of study. In the case of a factual presentation, learners prepare scripts which are then rehearsed and presented to the class, sometimes with the help of cue cards, with different members responsible for different parts. These scripts are usually checked with the teacher for lexical/grammatical editing. Such factual presentations will be different to more 'conversational' interaction in other stages of the curriculum in several ways. Firstly, discourse will be of a monologic nature and should be grammatically accurate with greater complexity and lexical density than at other stages of the syllabus. The combination of planning and rehearsal allows learners time to develop fluency and accuracy (Skehan 1996, 1998; Skehan and Foster 1997;

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Foster and Skehan 1999) and also to direct conscious attention to aspects of pronunciation.

I would expect role-plays by learners to be less useful in terms of 'pushing output' (Skehan 1998) than the above, since learners are not 'informing' in this instance, but instead are acting out scripted dialogues or multilogues, usually with the goal of entertaining.

Data of interaction are analysed in Chapter 6.3, later.

Stage 4. Self-assessment.

Goals. As in the case of the previous stage, there are two very distinct goals of learner self-assessment at the end of the syllabus cycle. Firstly, assessment procedures are of central importance in institutional education generally and according to Boud (1993), it is assessment methods and requirements which generally have a greater influence on learning than any other factor, including materials and teachers. Self-assessment by learners is a cornerstone of the curriculum in several ways. If assessment is conducted unilaterally by teachers, it is difficult to see how the student responsibility and accountability (Boud 1993: 11) that are necessary for learners to operate 'autonomously' in groups, can be engendered. My own experience suggests that requiring a high degree of accountability from learners is the most effective trigger for commitment to the learning process and this argument is developed at some length by van Lier (1996).

Earlier (Chapter 2.6) I have discussed motivation largely from the point of view of intrinsic motivation and I have argued above that investing learners with a high degree of control over the curriculum itself, as in the case of process syllabuses, may be conducive to engendering intrinsic motivation among learners. Van Lier (1996:

110) proposes that there is a need for both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in education, rather than an 'either/or' scenario. It is important to take all positive steps to make courses as interesting and enjoyable as possible for learners but there must also be some mechanisms of accountability as extrinsic checks on the learner. Self-assessment performs this function very well. Learners must assess themselves, in collaboration with the teacher (who may veto the learner's assessment if s/he feels that it is inaccurate) in order to determine grades. Beyond the function of accountability, self-assessment also serves as a useful vehicle of reflection and meta-cogntion on learning, sensitising learners to their own strengths, strategies and goals; it may also provide support and feedback from the teacher in a counselling capacity.

Secondly, the group self-assessment procedure, where learners collaboratively negotiate grades for their own group on various criteria (elaborated below) fulfills an important discursive role, with something significant to negotiate with others.

Materials. There were actually a range of self-assessment materials that were used by the two focus groups (from different classes) who provided the data of class room interaction. These materials were of broadly two types. Firstly, there were forms for individual use, which required learners to write short reflective answers and assign a numerical grade (based on written criteria which were supplied) to themselves, and then submit these to the teacher during a short interview. Secondly, there were task sheets for learners to use as they reviewed recordings of their presentations and negotiated grades and some comments about their performance over the whole of the syllabus cycle. It is this latter part that is the subject of my data analysis in Chapter 6.4, later.

Expected characteristics of discourse. When designing the syllabus, I expected the task characteristics of learners negotiating grades and evaluative comments to be a little

similar to that of stage 1 in the cycle, minus the short turns expected of collaborative re-construction of a grammar dictation. In other words, I expected discourse to be, in Skehan's (1998: 118) terms, 'circumscribed': this means convergent (implying an agreed solution)' transactional (aimed at fulfilling a practical task) and focused. In the textual sense, i.e. mode (Halliday 1985), I expected that much of the text would show turns of fairly short length, with a fair amount of overlap and latching, indicating many local agreements involved in completing the assessment form.

Data of interaction are analysed in Chapter 6.4, later.

3.5   ROLES OF TEACHERS, ROLES OF LEARNERS

ROLES OF LEARNERS

The idealised learner described so far in this chapter is one who is both empowered *and* required (see issues of 'self assessment in the previous section) to take the initiative in class room interaction, through the collaborative planning, drafting and presenting of work, then assessing her own performance, instead of reacting as a 'consumer' of pre-packaged materials. This construction of this idealised 'Kanda learner' then is entirely consistent with Bernstein's (1996) competence pedagogy, whose distinguishing feature is that of symbolic control by learners ('weak' framing: see Chapter 2.3) where the locus of control (Norton 2000) is vested in learners rather then teachers. Furthermore, the 'weak classification' (Bernstein 1996: 101) implies a less strictly defined pedagogic identity and therefore more flexibility in discursive role (see earlier discussion in Chapter 2.3).

Except for episodes of whole-class administration/management, learners should interact in small groups by themselves, without interference and hence prominence in discourse, from the teacher. In order for this to happen effectively, the class does not function as one 'lock step' unit, co-ordinated by the teacher, except for short periods where the whole class must be addressed together for purposes of administration; or at the end of the cycle (stage 3 in the previous section) where groups in turn present their work to the whole class. Instead, learners may be occupied with different aspects of work in different groups, especially at later stages of the syllabus cycle (above).

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2.7.3, instead of responsive roles, learners are now able (in theory) to 'bootstrap' off each other's utterances in a contingent (van Lier 1996, 1998) way, thus co-constructing the context of their own discourse, on line. The control relations which structure talk are now subject to learner initiative with management of transition of turn and con/textual shift (see Chapter 5.4.1, later) no longer directed by a teacher. In this sense, learner control functions in a kind of 'capillaire' (Foucault 1977) fashion, permeating and driving the ongoing and emergent context of talk.

ROLES OF TEACHERS

The roles of learners and teachers are complementary and configure each other, and engineering the conditions of interaction whereby learners assume a high degree of discursive control, depends largely on the strategic initiative of the teacher in the class room. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2.6, the design of the Kanda Curriculum was influenced by European, rather than North American approaches towards 'autonomy' and learning (especially, see Little 1995), shifting the primary role of teacher from that of an expert to a facilitative role. As van Lier (1998) puts it, this is a change from being a 'sage on the stage' to being a 'guide on the side'.

'Pedagogic discourse' (Bernstein 1996) in both its componential parts: 'regulative' and 'instructional' (Bernstein, *ibid.*) then becomes obsolete. Instead, the teacher circulates around the room to help groups with advice when questions or problems arise, as learners work by themselves. There are few occasions when the teacher addresses the whole class, except for administrative reasons. Such is the teacher's role that is consistent with the kind of learner small-group autonomy theorised earlier in this chapter. However, this is a somewhat literal position and some interesting anomalies may arise.

While encouraging and promoting the idea of learner autonomy (and bearing in mind that the learners are young adults, not children), it can be difficult for teachers to explicitly proscribe plans or ideas for project work that learners produce. To do so directly, may contravene the ethos of autonomy that the teacher has presumably been trying hard to promote, while to accept *any* learner contribution may mean abrogating the role of teacher altogether. Later in the study, see Chapter 6.2.2 (4), I examine an interesting case of teacher/learner interaction where this delicate role relationship is tackled. The teacher (a native speaker of English) disapproves of the proposed idea for project work that the learners have come up with but finds it difficult to tell the learner directly that his plan is unacceptable. Instead the teacher's contra-indication is expressed through extended, indirect speech acts with a high degree of modality.

The teacher is effectively couching his contra-indication in the discourse of 'advising'. This is an excellent illustration of the complexity of the teacher's role as an 'adviser' and the source or prototype study of this kind of institutional negotiation of role is Candlin and Lucas 1986 (see also Sarangi 2000). As in the case of Candlin and Lucas (*ibid.*), where the authors are actually discussing the setting of

Family Planning, the teacher in this classroom instance realises his pragmatic aims by 'advising'. This giving of advice may potentially cover a range of modes, extending along a continuum from the 'giving of information' at one end, to 'contra-indication' at the other. Of course, the irony in the instance described above, is that the teacher's sophisticated employment of modality and reasoning may be lost on the L2 learners; the two people in question definitely became aware that the teacher was opposed to their idea but it is not clear whether or not his reasoning was understood. In any event, the two learners dropped their first proposal and began devising a second.

3.6 SPATIAL ORGANISATION OF LEARNING AND GROUPING OF LEARNERS

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, Bernstein's (1996) notion of 'classification', in its strong version (specialisation), is usually associated more with 'performance' pedagogies than with 'competence' models of education. In transmission models of learning (described in the following Chapter, 4.1), regulated seating arrangements with restrictions placed on movement, serve to maximise surveillance of learners, in a less extreme but similar way to Bentham's Panopticon, (Chapter 2.2).

In cases like the Kanda Curriculum, structured around project work, such spatial arrangements where learners are assembled in orderly rows, are clearly counter-productive. Minimally, learners working in small autonomous groups need to face each other in order to interact. Interaction entails more than being in earshot of the other's auditory signals, as Heath's (1982, 1984; cited in Levinson 1988) discussions

of kinesic and postural displays of availability for participation and displays or recipiency, show (see also Goodwin's (1984) study of gaze and appropriate facial display, as demonstrations of social role). Furthermore, the kind of class room participation that I have outlined in section 3.4 above, means that small groups are often engaged in very different activities to each other at any given time, and may be using different forms of media from the others around them.

For these reasons, a model classroom was created at the research site where the Kanda Curriculum was trialled, see Diagram 3.2, below. The design principles follow Bernstein's (1996: 59) discussion of pedagogic space in competence models of education and the model room was designed to hold anything from a few learners working independently, to a full class of a little over 30 members. As the diagram shows, the room is set up with clusters of (movable) desks for small groups and the floor space is thus not clearly bounded. Circulation of learners (and teacher) is not constrained by regulatory boundaries and in this way, classification (specialisation of space) is weak, except for the few dedicated work stations such as TV/VCR units, computers and printers, and storage cabinets for banks of materials. The easy circulation of people in the room, dedicated work stations available for accessing a range of media, availability of the teacher as a resource for learner questions or helping solve practical problems, all amount to resources in van Lier's (2000) total semiotic budget, available as affordances for learning.

Key to Diagram 3.2.

A = movable desks; B = movable stools; C = TV/VCR units; D = dedicated work station; E = teacher's desk; F = storage cabinet; G = dedicated work station; H = storage cabinets; I = storage for worksheets/materials; J = TV; K = VCR; L = audio cassette recorder.

Diagram 3.2: Experimental Classroom

PRESENTATION
AREA

Blackboard

Blackboard
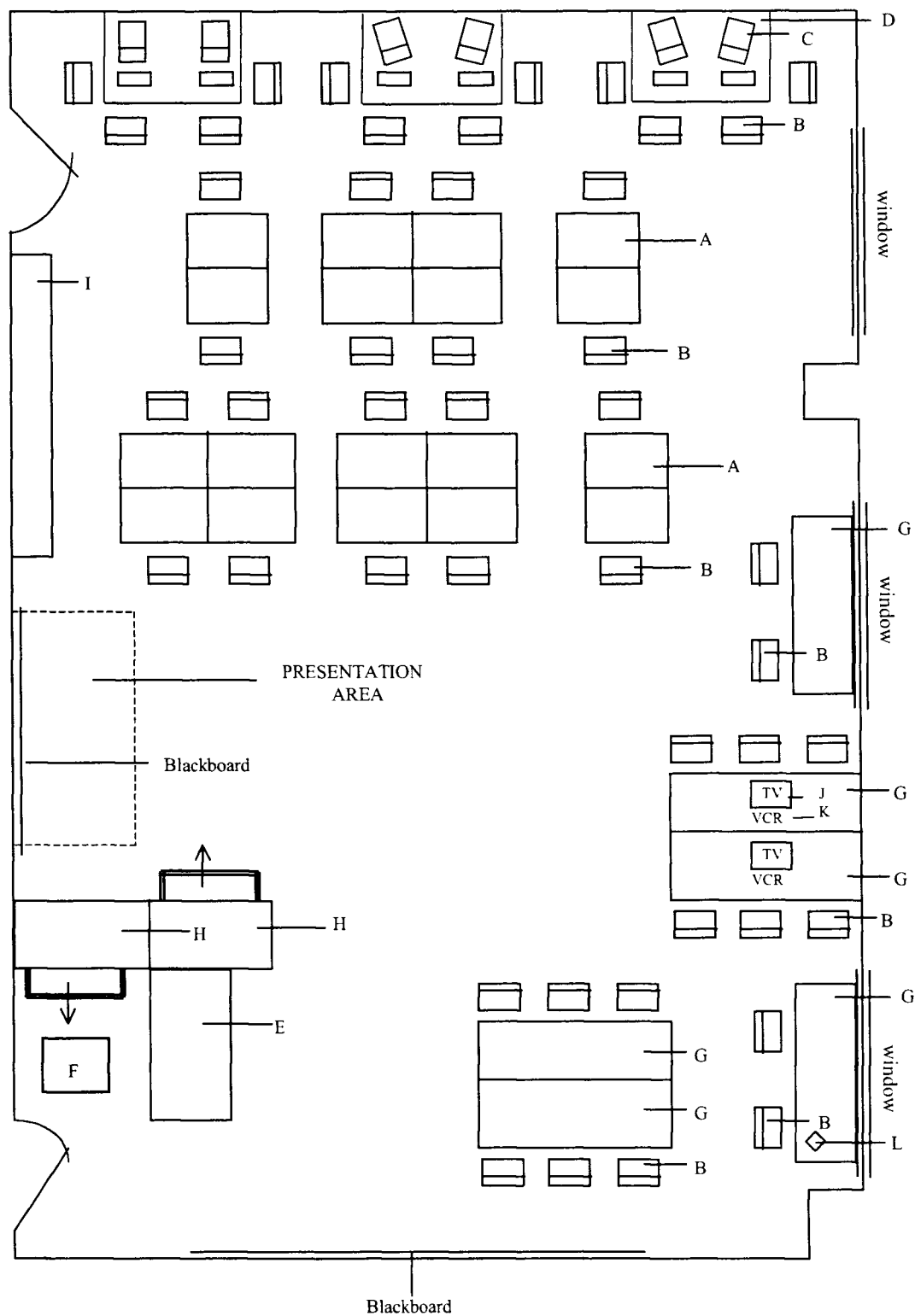
The usual and preferred group size that learners worked in was three members, but where 'left over' learners were without groups, there were some groups of four people. Groups of three were the preferred format since this encourages multiparty conversation or multilogue (Eggins 2000). Talk between three people becomes more complex than between two, since alliances become possible. Perhaps more importantly, in multilogue, there is increased competition for turns and this provides learners with opportunities for more 'authentic' discourse, governed by competition and initiative, than dialogue. Numbers greater than three however, are less desireable since transition becomes difficult to manage. Selecting next speaker by gaze is difficult in a large group and back channel markers may go unheeded (van Lier 1988).

The model classroom was not always available for class time because of pressure of numbers of classes. Where it was not possible to use this room, teachers organised resources in 'conventional' classes in a similar way, as best they could, especially with regard to clustering of desks. All classrooms at the research site were equipped with VTRs and TV monitors and learners could use mobile audio tape players with power extension cables.

3.7   CODA

This chapter has theorised the Kanda Curriculum in terms of the concepts presented earlier in Chapters 1 and 2. I have modelled the curriculum on a variation of the process syllabus, thus shifting initiative and control of discourse away from the teacher, towards the learner, allowing for collaborative co-construction of significant elements of the syllabus by learners themselves. The central construct here is that of

the 'control relations' of interaction in L2 classrooms, and the implications for the pragmatics of learner/learner interaction when the teacher's voice is peripheral rather than central in classroom interaction. As is usual with process syllabuses, perhaps the single most noteworthy aspect of the design of the Kanda Curriculum is the move away from the centrality of text, towards the *process of interaction* in the curriculum.

I model the provisional 'co-construction' of the curriculum by learners on Breen and Littlejohn's (2000) 'procedural negotiation', which has strong parallels with Habermas' notion of *Diskurs*: a construct related to his theory of communicative action (1984). Here, co-construction of the syllabus pivots upon the evaluation of a set of actions that have been agreed upon by learners in collaborative groups. Different stages of the syllabus are more likely to engender this kind of interaction among learners, especially the planning and preparation of project work (stage 2 in the syllabus cycle: 3.4). However, the pedagogic goals of the curriculum are to engage learners in problem solving across a *range* of activities and situations, with implications for associated discourse type (discussed in more depth in Chapter 5). The logical outcome of this is that learners should not plan project work all the time; there is value in interacting in modes with other, different combinations of activity and associated discourse type, and the syllabus cycle is a provisional attempt to engineer these conditions.

Finally, it is necessary to re-iterate that the curriculum is not a specification of linguistic items to be 'acquired', rather it best understood through the metaphor of 'semiotic ecology', where there are semiotic affordances which form the basis of interaction and construction of the syllabus. Theoretically, this should allow a degree of symbolic creativity on behalf of learners, in ways that are not constrained by the structures of pedagogic discourse (Bernstein 1996). In this way the syllabus is

a resource for the 'acquisition of communication' (Breen 2001b) in various modalities. The syllabus outline that I have presented here is provisional (Candlin 1984) and sets up a yardstick against which data of interaction in the emergent or actual curriculum (Candlin 1984) can be evaluated later (Chapter 6). It is this tension between the provisional syllabus and the emergent syllabus that is the focus of the research component of the study, in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

The subject of the following chapter is the learners themselves. This begins with a generalised account of institutionalised L2 learning in Japan prior to university entrance, followed by an analysis of factors that have led to this situation, finally, the last section presents individual biographies of the focus learners who provided the classroom data of interaction in Chapter 6.

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[1]. Though in both cases, texts like these can be exploited as resources to which learners can critically respond and re-contextualise, reflecting their own positions. This is the 'constructivist' position in education (Candy 1991) which underpins the 'project work' component of the curriculum, described later in section 3.4).

[2] Candlin (personal correspondence) prefers the term 'design-emergent design', where the design is better understood as a principle rather than a blueprint.

[3] This is a different usage of 'ecology' to the one used at other points in the study, with reference to Cicourel's (1992) notion of the complex nature and multi-layering of 'context' in human interaction.

[4] The discussion of an ecology here refers to the way in which learners recognise affordances and choose to exploit opportunities in the interactional environment. For discussion of a related but more sociopolitical notion of 'ecology', see Candlin 2001b: 6. Here, the 'ecology' expresses Cicourel's 1992 interconnectedness of local actions within variegated contexts of the broader social formation, and it is the ecology which drives the *economy*, where participants' contributions are evaluated against the perceived worth of the social 'market' (Bourdieu 1982, 1991).

[5] In actual fact, the repetitive and formulaic pattern of the syllabus seemed to have negative consequences as well, as discussed later, in Chapter 7.1.2.

[6] For a recent and comprehensive review of experiential learning in foreign language education, see Kohonen *et al.* 2001.

[7] See Legutke and Thomas (1991) and Kohonen *et al.* (2001) for comprehensive discussion of examples of the uses of projects and experiential work in foreign language education.

4 THE LEARNERS

The subject of this chapter is the prior institutional learning experience of students enrolled in the Kanda Curriculum (sections 4.1 & 4.2) and the transition involved in beginning to work in the innovative curriculum (section 4.3). As discussed in the introduction to the study, the goal of the curriculum is *transformation* of the learner as pedagogic subject from that of recipient of a transmission paradigm of education, to one of an active, signifying agent in the L2. The Foucaultian notion of the pedagogic subject has been discussed in Chapter 2 but it is also useful here to consider Harré's (1987) concept of 'self' in connection with the pedagogic subject. While a 'person' is the publicly recognised individual who is the focus of practices in daily life, the 'self' is the centre of experience to which various conscious states, including organisation of memory, perception and agency are attributed (Harré 1987). As cited by Lantolf (2000a: 163), a self is a coherent dynamic system (Penuel and Wertsch 1995: 85) that is in 'continuous production' (Harré and Gillet 1994: 111) and which emerges as the individual participates in the (especially discursive) practices of a culture.

This social 'self' is best understood in terms of individual consciousness, built from the outside through relations with others. The mechanism of social behaviour and the mechanism of consciousness are held to be the same (Vygotsky, edited by Kozulin 1996), while the critical point in the development of consciousness of the pedagogic subject is the rules shaping the construction of pedagogic discourse (as described in Chapter 2) and its various practices (Bernstein 1996: 17).

This chapter therefore examines the prior learning experiences of learners in the Kanda Curriculum, and the ways in which the dominant relations of control (Bernstein 1996) have tended to construct their subject positions in the terms described above. Prior experiences of institutional learning make up a kind of co-

present historical/institutional *context* for learners; in the concrete terms of this study the individual enters university education as an already enculturated person. In this way a person's interactional behaviour has a history that starts long before the singular encounter (Linell, 1998: 47). The significance of schooling practices should not be underestimated; for example, Elkonin (1972) saw institutional practice as the main source of psychic development in the individual. Different institutions, including the family and the school, are dominated by different activities and the dominating institutional activity becomes the leading activity in different periods in the life of the individual (Elkonin 1972).

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 below take a different focus from each other but they are dialectically related. Firstly, section 4.1, following Wertsch *et al.* (1995) is a *sociocultural* account of learning in Japanese primary schools (before L2 education begins) and learning English in Japanese high schools. This account foregrounds semiotic and interactional aspects, reflecting Wertsch's (1995) concern with 'mediated action' as the unit of analysis. What we are looking at here are situated accounts of the micro-structures of interaction, interpreted in various ethnographic studies and it these experiences which construct the pedagogic consciousness of the individual.

While semiotic and interactional accounts are of course useful, they are inadequate by themselves in the sense of accounting for the conditions under which such practices arise; Wertsch and his colleagues do not engage with issues of historicity, object orientedness and collective aspects of human activity. According to Engeström and Miettinen (1999: 11) such collective practices are not reducible to the sum of individuals' actions but instead require theoretical conceptualisation in their own right and an understanding of the historical time frame in which social practices have evolved. This *sociohistorical* section of the study is explored in section 4.2 and together, we can say that sections 4.1 and 4.2 correspond to Layder's (1993)'context'

strand in his map of four research elements, described in the introduction to Chapter 1.

Layder (1993: 11) stresses that the different elements of his research map operate on different time scales and this is very apparent when we consider the relative perspectives of the 'situated activity'/ sociocultural focus and the 'context'/ sociohistorical focus, above. A sociocultural perspective analyses interactional and semiotic phenomena while a sociohistorical perspective provides an account of why and how such practices have arisen and attained a degree of stability in the society. The second, functionalist perspective is necessary to understand and contextualise the first, interactionist perspective.

Engeström (1999: 25) believes that Anglo-Saxon researchers who adhere to the ideas of Vygotsky have generally tended to avoid history in their work. He believes that one reason may be a reluctance, deriving from humanistic values, to explain cultural differences in cognition, social groups and domains of practice in terms of historical development, grounded in neo-Marxism. To do so might draw accusations of making value judgements about 'other' societies, a serious charge in liberal quarters. Engeström (*ibid.*) believes a second reason could be the difficulties of modelling an activity system. Historical analyses must be based on units of manageable size and if the unit is the culture or the society, the history can become very general or too complex. If the researcher takes the other extreme and the unit is the individual or the individually constructed situation, history becomes reduced to biography. A balance is hard to achieve but Busch's model (1999) in section 4.2 is a good attempt.

Section 4.3 is a departure from the generalised accounts of sections 4.1 and 4.2 and looks at the particular biographies of the six focus learners in the study. This section equates with Layder's (1993) 'self' strand in his research map. This acts as a balance

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to the 'one size fits all' tenor of the earlier part of this chapter and also provides information about the each individual that is important in the interpretation of situated interaction later, in chapter 6. As stated earlier, a person's interactional behaviour has a history that begins before the situated encounter and, according to the tenets of Vygotskyan theory, must be considered part of the context of interaction.

4.1 LEARNING ENGLISH IN JAPAN PRIOR TO UNIVERSITY: A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

This section is a generalised account of interactional settings and pedagogic 'discursive orders' that figure in the prior learning experiences of young Japanese learners before entering university programs and is based on a range of (mostly English language) published accounts of the teaching of English in Japanese primary (elementary) and high schools.

It is not possible to make categorical generalisations about classroom practices across a whole country in a positivist sense (see Beretta, 1990 for a critique of the evaluation of the Bangalore Project) and even collating survey data from multiple sites poses huge problems, as illustrated in the case of Brown and Wada (1998).[1]

The studies to which I refer below are mostly small-scale ethnographic accounts with some statistical data, together with accounts from sociologists and journalists. These have been gathered from a wide range of sources and so this section unavoidably has a 'mosaic' texture. I am not attempting to generalise categorically across all sites, however I believe that it is possible, in the interpretive tradition of humanistic

research, to draw out and comment upon recurring patterns in the texts that I cite (Tuchman 1994), with a view to understanding (*Verstehen*) broad trends in the cultural/interactional practices of state elementary and high school education in Japan.[2]

In Chapter 3, I proposed, as an educational innovation, that the Kanda Curriculum be modelled on what Bernstein (1996) calls a 'competence' model of pedagogy, where discourse is associated with symbolic control on behalf of learners. This stands in contrast with 'performance' models which emphasise transmission pedagogies and structural curricula with clear stipulations about what is to be acquired.

The defining features of this kind of paradigm where learners co-construct the syllabus themselves, are procedural commonalities shared within a group, and social relations (among learners, rather than referenced to the teacher) based on collaboration (Bernstein 1996: 63). It is ironic in a sense that in Chapter 3, I discuss collaborative planning of action in classrooms as an *innovation*, in the context of Japanese education; when we examine accounts of learning in elementary schools, constructivist models of education are seen to dominate.

There is a strong tradition in Japan of collaborative learning and socialisation in the early years of mainstream education, but due to age-related changes in institutional practices this has largely evaporated by the time students are in their mid teens (Yoneyama 1999, *inter alia*). This adds weight to Bernstein's claim that competence models of education are generally found in pre-school and elementary education (1996: 63) and that there is a remarkable similarity in the operation of educational systems around the world (1990: 169).

According to Lessard-Clouston (1998:1) and LoCastro (1996: 48) elementary schools in Japan aim to socialise children into many features of life in Japanese society, and promote egalitarianism and de-emphasise individualism: children are not tracked by ability level and emphasis is placed on learning to work collaboratively with others. Central to the classroom organisation is division into small groups (*han*) which Benjamin (1997: 53) likens to "...a platoon, a squad, a working group." The size of *han* groups depends on the class size and is variously reported at ranging from five to eight children (Benjamin, *ibid.*) or three to five children (Tsuchida and Lewis 1996).

Han groups function as small communities of learners within the class. Teachers will form groups, often on the basis of making heterogenous groupings in terms of personality, ability, friendship patterns and previous groupings. Ideally the group will be able to function effectively across a wide range of activities and the teacher will often address groups rather than address individuals by name. In both academic and social activities students are responsible *as a group* for accomplishing their goals and in this way there is a great deal of interaction *within* groups. Benjamin (1997), a US anthropologist, mentions that Americans invariably ask about freeloading (or non participation) in such a situation. Benjamin used her two children, enrolled as students in a predominantly Japanese elementary school in Japan, as informants and according to her children, freeloading was not a problem. Benjamin concluded that since children spend most of their time with adults who have internalized the notion that participation in group activities is natural, they become convinced of the same thing. However an equally plausible explanation could be that the 'self-reflection' (*hansei*) and isolation required of children who do not cooperate, is an effective way of enforcing conformity.

Stereotypes outside Japan of passive, silent classes are at odds with empirical evidence in several cases. Lee, Graham and Stevenson (1996) conducted a

comparative study of observations of mathematics classes in ten elementary schools in Sendai, with twenty elementary schools in Chicago. The authors came to several interesting conclusions. The first was that Japanese teachers attempted to create *'medaka'* classrooms where the teacher does not attempt to dominate as the sole dispenser of knowledge and arbiter of what is correct. In this way, the authors relate Japanese teaching to Western constructivist approaches to education, where students are expected to be active participants in the construction of their own knowledge. In the classes observed, more Japanese than American students provided answers or explanations to the whole class, but the significant difference lay in small group interaction; there was much more discussion and solving of problems among students themselves, in the Japanese than in the American classrooms.

In a related way, Tsuchida and Lewis (1996) compared ten Japanese and ten U.S. fourth grade classrooms studying science. Acknowledging the small scale of the study, the authors recorded that in nearly half of the Japanese science lessons, but thirteen per cent of the US ones, students worked for all or part of the lesson in cooperative groups. It was common for Japanese students to take turns expressing their original ideas and opinions, and agreeing or disagreeing with others. Significantly, Japanese teachers urged children to disagree with one another in forty percent of classes observed while this occurred very rarely in US classes. Furthermore, Japanese teachers frequently conveyed their expectation that all students would participate, and that boys and girls would participate equally. Compared with US discussions, in which teachers tended to ask most of the questions, Japanese children participated much more actively in the initiation and exchange of ideas and opinions. From the study, which the authors admit to be small and exploratory, several hypotheses are suggested related to learning and responsibility in Japanese elementary school classrooms:

"...that routines and established procedures allow students to manage many aspects of classroom life; that use of small groups, student-led discussion, and class-wide participation further build student responsibility for lessons... and that motivation comes primarily from the interaction of students with subject matter, not primarily from rewards of incentives offered by teachers."

(Tsuchida and Lewis, 1996: 211)

It is difficult to know how representative the authors' observations above are, but the point is that the situation described is a fair approximation of discursive/interactional practices associated with Bernstein's (1996) competence paradigm of pedagogy, that we are attempting to engender in the Kanda Curriculum. The general picture is one of weak 'framing' of discourse by teachers, as borne out by comparisons with US research sites, and generally less-explicit structures of control. Again, using Bernstein's (1996) terms, *classification*, indicating rules whereby legitimate messages may be constructed, is weak in the above accounts, leading to flexibility in learner roles and therefore serves to construct learners as active agents in the construction of curricula.

However, taking a critical perspective on the positive tenor of accounts such as the above, Yoneyama (1999: 21) cites Feinberg's caveat (1993) concerning ideological motivations behind accounts by Western (mostly American) scholars on education in Japan. Feinberg (1993) argues that the English language discourse on Japanese education has been influenced by the hidden agenda that the researcher brings to the analysis. This could be, according to the trend, an account of how best to compete against Japan, to be successful like Japan or how to modernise Japan. The fact that the above accounts have mostly been written in English for English-speaking audiences lends credence to Feinberg's point and this is a necessary

corrective to naïve assumptions that all the above cited texts are politically unmotivated.

The egalitarianism of the elementary school where students are not tracked by ability level and emphasis is placed on learning to work with others, abruptly ends with entry to middle school (Rohlen and LeTendre 1996) - usually at age twelve or thirteen - the time when the study of English generally commences. Concern with group living is replaced with a primary concern for *hierarchy* and organisation, and for the new reality of impending exams to enter high school and university. While observing 103 middle school classes (including but not confined to English), Fukuzawa (1996) found teaching styles and classroom organisation almost as homogenous as the curriculum. All instruction was large-group with no multi-task organisation and very little group-work in academic subjects. Digressions and discussion did not impede the efficient transmission of material and practical examples to make classes more relevant were rare. Fukuzawa (1996: 298) concludes that teachers are

"...under pressure to provide 'equal' education geared to the most efficient *transmission* (emphasis added) of material for entrance exam preparation. Consequently, most classes were text-centred lectures."

Student participation in such lecture classes is generally limited to teachers stopping to briefly probe students for answers, opinions or reiterations; in other words, the typical IRF sequence (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). This applies as much to the study of English (through L1) as much as to other academic subjects. The contrast with the discursive practices cited from elementary class observations is clear: there has been a shift from a discourse structure which is often genuinely open to topic initiation, requests for clarification, extension and topic change by participants, to one of highly

asymmetrical participation, pseudo-communication, and in Habermas' (1974) terms, systematically distorted communication. The participation structure is the realisation of hierarchical roles enacted by participants, 'objectified' knowledge is transmitted by the knower and recipients of the message are probed to test understanding. The role of language here is a prime example of Reddy's (1977) conduit metaphor where propositions are to be transmitted and decoded by listeners.

LoCastro (1996) provides another thorough account of interactional patterns in English classrooms in public (middle and high) schools in Japan. She bases her observations on some thirty classroom observations over a three year period and on unstructured interviews with teachers and colleagues. She describes an average of 47 students per class, sitting in six rows with individual desks and chairs with the teacher (sometimes with a microphone) on a raised podium at the front. In terms of methodology the grammar-translation approach is by far the most common, and a typical lesson consists of the teacher checking the learners' sentence-by-sentence translations of a text assigned for homework.

There is much choral reading aloud of the sentence in English, and checking of other homework through the medium of Japanese. Despite much repetition and reading aloud by students there is little evidence of understanding and there are lengthy explanations, translations and commentary, believed to be necessary for the learners to understand English. What writing occurs is usually in the form of single sentences translated from Japanese.

LoCastro (*ibid.*) concurs with Fukuzawa (1996) that classroom interaction generally takes the format of a lecture by the teacher in Japanese about English as a system of usage, but in several instances she observes a very interesting interactional pattern.

LoCastro identies (1996: 52), as a variation on the three part structure of the IRF pattern, a four part pattern:

A: solicit

B: response

C: assessment

D: acknowledgement

Here the teacher plays all four roles: asking a question, answering it, making a comment on the answer, and then making a common listener response like *"Hai, so desu"* (Yes, that is so). This is like the *'benshi'*, a figure of early Japanese silent movies who would provide a running commentary on the plot and play the characters as well: an extreme case of monologism! LoCastro contrasts this highly unusual pattern with the usual two-part adjacency pair structure, commonly discussed in literature on conversational analysis and interprets such teacher behaviour in sociocultural terms. She concludes that this effectively monologic format is an expression of the hierarchy referred to earlier, with responsibility for comprehension lying with the listener. The context of LoCastro's article is an evaluation of the likely outcomes of Ministry of Education guidelines (1993, 1994) for more communicative practices in ELT and LoCastro interprets the tension between the content of these guidelines and the sociocultural context of Japanese education as follows:

"...language classrooms, as part of the overall educational system, may be the context for the learning of other things, and that ELT is subordinate to the learning of culturally valued, normative behaviour."

(1996: 54)

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In sum, the general picture of interactive practices in the target language in Japanese high school English classes is one where the priority is that of oral evaluation, generally in L1, and surveillance of learners. The primacy of the IRF pattern in classes observed above reflects the power of the teacher to impose reception. In general the right to initiate an exchange rests with the teacher as does the right to select individual learners at will to respond; this is a useful technique for enforcing passive participation. Learners will not know who is going to receive the next question and so it is dangerous to lose the drift of the teacher's talk. The situation described here is of course, far from being unique to Japan, and while it is utterly inadequate in terms of development of communicative competence, it may well serve the purpose of providing a structure whereby teachers can 'get through' a syllabus containing pre-selected linguistic items, often with very large classes.[3]

The problems of interacting in the target language, having graduated from a classroom culture geared towards tests of usage described above, should not be underestimated. Foucault (1972) believed that each enunciative modality (or 'type of discursive activity') has its own associated subject position. So those who participate in the activity of teaching become positioned as 'teachers' or 'students' in terms of discursive role, according to how the larger community constructs these roles. Admittedly, this highly structural analysis is simplistic since it ignores the possibility of resistance or the re-negotiation of such roles by participants (Norton 2000; Breen 2001); however, in broad terms the concept is very useful. The subject (in this case language learner) is constituted, reproduced and transformed through the discursive practices in which s/he participates. The kind of interaction in L2 classes described above fits with a strong version of what Bowers and Flinders (1990) call the 'classroom management paradigm' which stresses (In Foucault's 1979 terms) 'normalising practices': a hierarchical set of social relationships, a transmission model

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of learning, use of constant surveillance to detect and punish inappropriate behaviour, and systematic pre-planning of all classroom activities.

Using Bourdieu's (1977) insightful metaphor of a linguistic market, we can say that all particular linguistic transactions (or moves, in a pragmatic sense) depend upon the linguistic field, which is itself an expression of the structure of power relations between participants: who has the right to speak, the right to impose reception, the right not to speak or to ignore questions, etc. In the social hierarchy of the classroom culture described above, learners are positioned in such a way that they have no *'investment'* (Bourdieu 1977, Peirce 1995, Norton 1997, 2000) in the target language-as-communication. They do not establish any social identity through the L2: therefore they are not 'legitimate' speakers and may have difficulties in adjusting to a classroom culture where active participation in talk is expected.

The notion of embodied dispositions, as described above, accumulated along a trajectory of interactions within a community, is expressed in Bourdieu's (1990, 1991) notion of a habitus. It is important to understand that Bourdieu does not see all behaviour as being governed by habitus (Swartz 1997: 113), instead the concept is most useful for explaining behavioural patterns in situations that are unfamiliar or where normative roles are not explicit. Such might well be the case where Kanda learners are expected to take up discursive roles which are more 'autonomous' than they are used to. Swartz (1997: 212) conceives of habitus as a mediating concept between practices and structures rather than a structurally determined construct and this is a very useful concept for interpreting the silence and inactivity often associated with Japanese university students in foreign language classrooms (Anderson 1993, *inter alia*).

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The evaluative mode of the pedagogic discourse discussed above leads to a general reluctance to speak out or 'perform' in L2. This kind of disposition in Japanese high school students is associated with, in extreme cases, what teachers call 'humans waiting for their instructions' (*shijimachi ningen*), possibly best rendered in English as 'automatons' (Yoneyama 1999: 9). Ashizawa (1997) claims that the increase in such *shijimachi ningen* is the is the most notable change in the profile of high school students in recent years and such people are *'botsu shutai'* (void of subjectivity); apathetic, passive, bored, low in energy and unwilling to think, make decisions or initiate any action. However, they are capable of appropriate action when the recognised stimuli (questioning by the teacher) are applied (Ashizawa, *ibid.*).

The micro-structures of typical classroom interaction in the learning of English in Japanese high schools which have been discussed here are only one part of what Yoneyama (1999: 14) calls the 'control-based paradigm of education'. This account has broadly focused on the ways in which principles of power and control translate into modalities of communication in the classroom, and the way this tends to regulate the consciousness of the learner (Bernstein 1996: 18). In the following section I turn to a macro analysis, the sociohistorical context of the practices described here, to explore the underlying culture of high school L2 pedagogy in Japan.

4.2   LEARNING ENGLISH IN JAPAN PRIOR TO UNIVERSITY: A SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

As summarised earlier in this chapter, Layder (1993:7) has argued for a 'textured' or interwoven modelling of macro and micro levels of social reality and sees the two as inherently related though they operate on different time scales. In a similar way, I

have summarised the views of Engeström and Miettinen (1999) which relate sociocultural and sociohistorical aspects of work derived from the three Soviet psychologists: Vygotsky, Leontiev and Luria. This part of the study analyses macro and sociohistorical aspects of English language education in Japan, with particular reference to the 'washback' effects on foreign language pedagogy from the university examination system. Later in this section, this sociohistorical context is modelled as an 'activity system' in the tradition of Engeström's cultural historical activity theory (Cole & Engeström 1993; Engeström 1990, 1991; 1992), which serves to explain the remarkable stability of 'traditional' L2 examination practices in Japan, as well as the effect on pedagogy in high schools.

The inadequacy of the stereotypical transmission curricula discussed in the previous section, for the fostering of communicative proficiency in L2 in Japanese high schools, is actually well understood within Japan. In 1981 Imamura wrote in condemnatory tones that English classes in Japan were conducted in exactly the same way as thirty or possibly even eighty years earlier, and LoCastro (1996) summarises more recent criticisms about the persistence of pedagogies that are antithetical to communicating in foreign languages.

In the spirit of reform, the Ministry of Education (1993, 1994) has devised guidelines for new courses of study which are supposed to engender a more effective focus on communication in foreign languages in Japanese high schools. One of the primary aims of the new curricula is to require teachers to attend to speaking and listening skills in the class, placing greater emphasis on communicative language ability than before. However, LoCastro (1996) has reviewed the ministry guidelines and found them to be optimistic and clearly at odds with much current practice.

It is important to go back to the original function of English language education in Japan in order to understand more contemporary practices. Examining the historical role of English language education within colleges and universities in Japan, Koike and Tanaka (1995) write that foreign language studies during the Meiji Period (1868 – 1912) stressed translation since the primary goal was not communication with foreigners at all. The perceived need was that of assimilation of Western technological and scientific knowledge through translation; understanding and partly assimilating foreign culture in a written form was the main means of transforming Japanese culture into that of a modern state. Koike and Tanaka (*ibid.*) continue that in the 1950s and 1960s the audio-lingual approach became widespread among middle schools in Japan. However, high school teachers and students were not receptive to the new method since university examinations tended to neglect listening and speaking, for reasons that are discussed later in this section.

In this way, the washback effect on the university entrance exams has meant that there have been few substantial changes since the pre-war era. Indeed the results of the General Survey of English Language Teaching in Japan (Koike *et al.*: 1990) showed that 74.9% of college graduates evaluated their English instruction in Japan negatively, while most of the college graduates (78.3%) felt that much stronger emphasis should be given to communication at the high school level.

It is difficult to over-emphasise the role of examinations within Japanese society. According to Rohlen (1983) and supported by educational sociologists with comparative experience such as Kariya and Rosenbaum (1987), Kariya (1995) and Takeuchi (1995), Japan is far from being the world's only examination-driven educational meritocracy but approaches the ideal probably more than any other. According to Yoneyama (1999: 46) Japan's 'super-meritocracy' or 'mass education society' (Kariya 1995: 12) depends on a massive number of students remaining for a

long time in formal education. In the 1990s around 95% of school students advanced to senior high school, with about 30% of this age cohort going to university and another 30% to other kinds of post-secondary institutions. At the age of twenty, six out of ten people were still in some kind of educational institution (Yoneyama 1999: 46).

Japan's 'super meritocracy' is underpinned by the ranking of all senior high schools and universities based on standard deviation scores (*hensachi*) (Takeuchi 1995). Universities are ranked nationwide and senior high schools are ranked because there is a formal examination to enter these, from junior high schools. This system of mass education, with high stakes examinations at the point of entering and graduating from senior high schools, is characterised by an 'overheat' in competition. The level of competition seems to be increasing rather than diminishing and a Ministry of Education survey revealed that in grade 9 in 1993, 67% of students attended after-hours coaching schools (*juku*), up from 27% in 1976 (Takeuchi 1995).

As far as public perceptions are concerned, Kariya's (1995) depiction of Japanese society as a 'mass education society' or Takeuchi's (1995) 'meritocratic society' are the antithesis of a class society, where clear stratification by parents' socio-economic status correlates closely with children's educational success. Both scholars produce data to suggest that many Japanese believe that irrespective of socio-economic background, there is no other means to success in life other than through academic credentials. Both authors hold that as far as the consciousness of the people is concerned, Japan is a classless society and education plays the crucial role in making people see things that way. This idea intersects with the proposition of *Nihonjinron* (studies that dwell on issues and definitions of 'Japaneseness') that Japan is a

uniquely homogenous and egalitarian society with low class-differentiation (Sugimoto 1997).

When Japan is described as being a 'meritocracy', this actually refers to the 'highly developed examination system' (Yoneyama 1999: 45), involving nearly all students, which is sometimes officially understood as a synonym for the Japanese education system itself (*Asahi Shinbun* newspaper 19th December 1990; cited in Yoneyama 1999: 45). Given this context where examinations serve a crucial function as probably the most important sorting mechanism for social and economic stratification, it is not surprising that transmission-style pedagogies predominate in foreign language education along with other subjects.

Bernstein (1996) has summarised the characteristics of 'performance' models (see section 2.3 earlier) of pedagogy (including but not equating with 'transmission' modes) and makes several observations that relate directly to the context of high school English classes, described in the previous section (Fukuzawa 1996) of a remarkably standardised curriculum, teaching style and classroom organisation. In 'performance' models, teaching performance and learner's performance are both subject to external curriculum regulation of the selection, sequence, pacing and criteria of transmission. The professionalism of the teacher centres on the effective transmission of the syllabus and in managing grading procedures; individualised modes of communication with learners are not feasible since these involve negotiation.

The 'costs' of a performance pedagogy are generally far less than those of a competence pedagogy since transmitting pre-prepared or mass-produced materials of a standardised curriculum are usually simpler than the training, planning and monitoring of a competence-based curriculum (Bernstein 1996: 60 – 64). In this way,

we can say that examinations for universities in Japan function as societal artifacts or tools in the stratifying and ordering of the society within the context of very high participation levels in mass education.

Busch (1999) has used Engeström's complex triangular model (Diagram 4.1) representing human activity to model the washback effect of university examinations on foreign language pedagogy in high schools: as *activity systems* of Japanese corporations (Diagram 4.2) and Japanese universities (Diagram 4.3), respectively. Early published reports employing the notion of washback in L2 testing include Alderson and Wall (1993a, 1993b) and since then other studies discussing washback have been published, including: Alderson and Hamp-Lyons 1996; Cheng 1996; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt et al. 1996; and Watanabe 1992, 1996. Essentially, washback means the 'connection between testing and learning' (Shohamy *et al.* 1996: 298) and Messick (1996: 241) defines washback as 'the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do to promote or inhibit language learning.'

Table 4.1: Japan's participants in the university entrance exams

---
Participants

Japanese Society

Corporations

Ministry of Education

University administrators

University test developers

Professors

High school administrators

High school teachers

Private cram schools

Educational publishers

Students

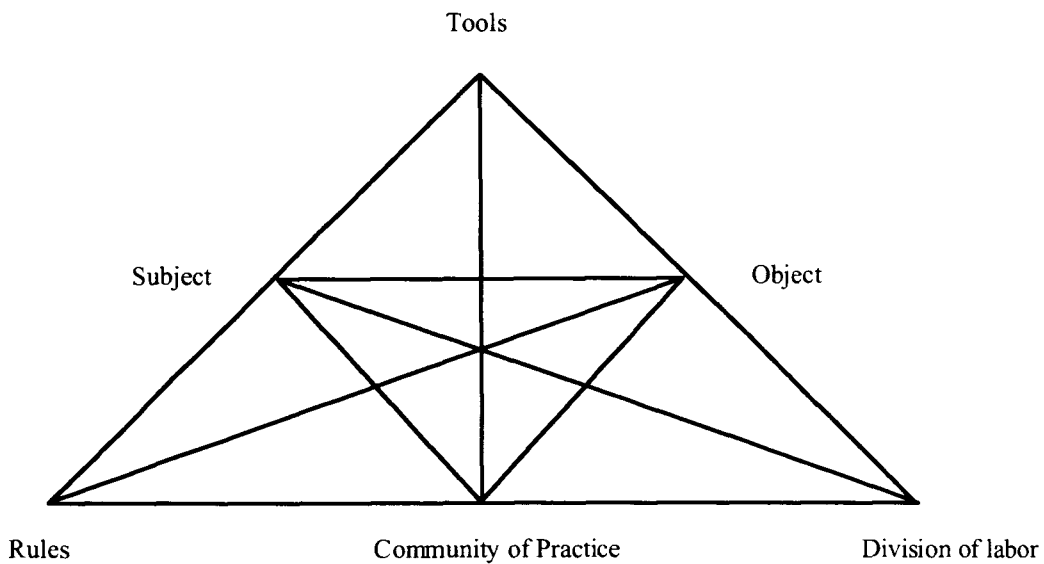**Diagram 4.1:** Engeström's model of human activity

Tools

Subject

Object

Rules

Community of Practice

Division of labor

Diagram 4.2: The activity system of Japanese corporations

Tools
University entrance exams

Subject
Japanese
Corporations

Object
Disciplined and
technically trained
employees

Rules   Community of Practice   Division of labor
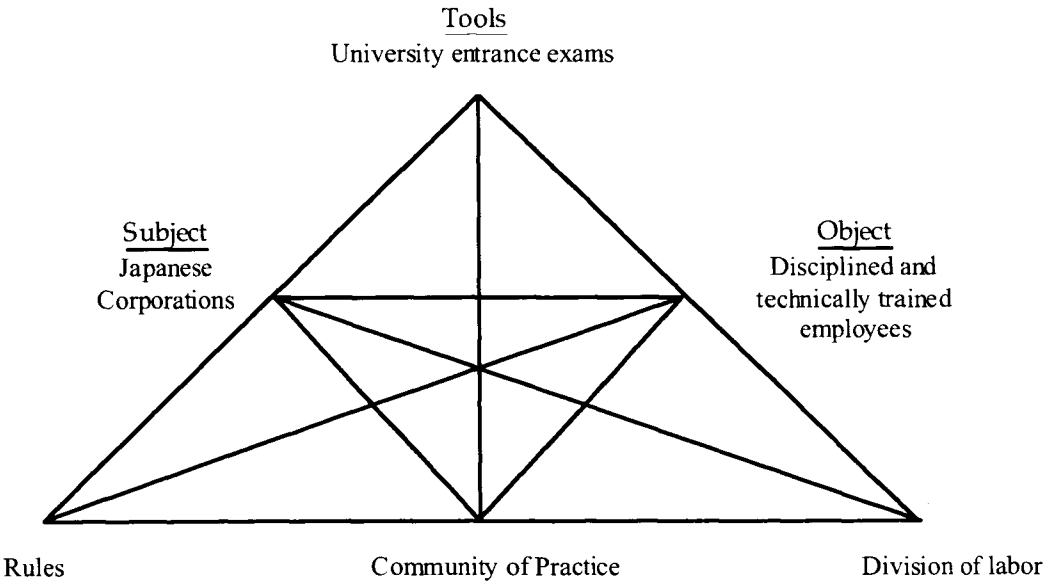
Diagram 4.3: Activity system of Japanese universities

Tools
Entrance exams, exam fee,
practice exams, application
packet, promotional events

Subject
Universities

Object
Financial gain

Rules
Ministry of Education rules,
national curriculum

Community of Practice

Division of labor
Faculty exam
committee

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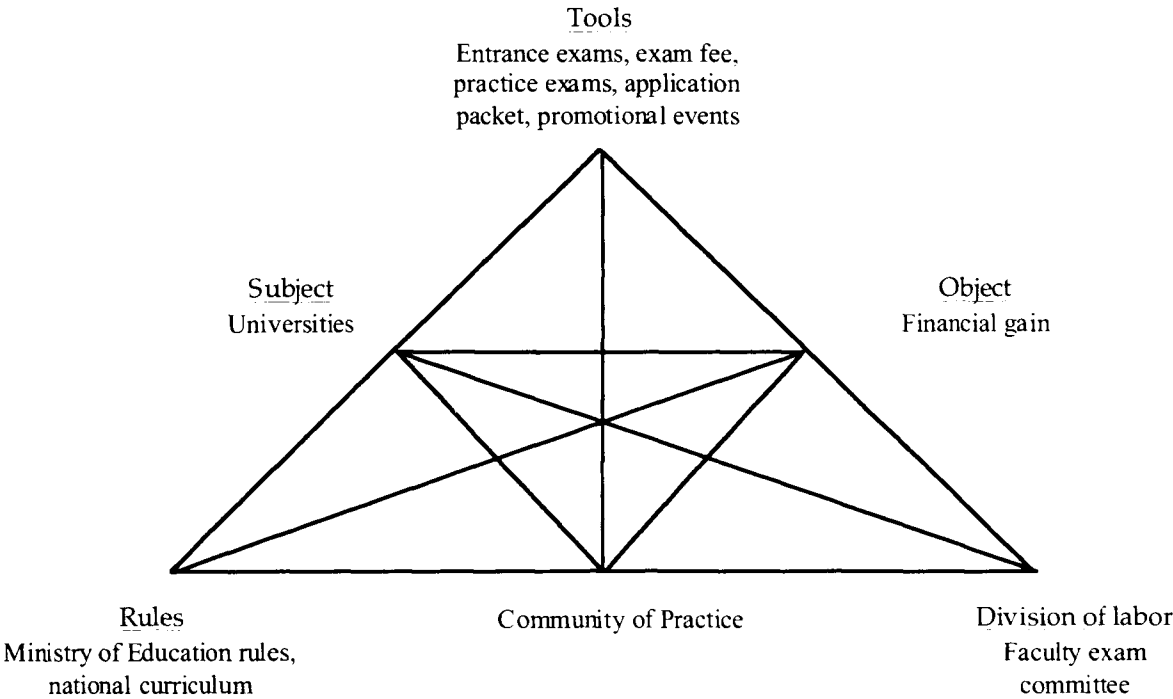
Busch points out (1999: 4) that the above studies have mostly used a quasi-experimental methodology in order to uncover causal factors and 'mechanisms' of washback and he criticises positivist approaches for their failure to account for the wider social context in which language testing occurs. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996: 295) conclude at the end of a study of washback in TOEFL preparation: 'It is tempting to conclude that the TOEFL alone does not cause washback, but that it is the administrators, materials writers, and teachers themselves who cause the washback we have observed'; and in a related vein, from Alderson and Wall (1993a: 116): 'It is surely conceivable that other forces exist within society, education and schools that might prevent washback from appearing, or that might affect the nature of washback despite the communicative quality of a test' (both cited in Busch 1999). In this way, Busch (*ibid.*) argues for the foregrounding of the *joint interaction* of participants, who contribute to the development, use and impact of testing, instead of focusing on teachers and learners in isolation.

This point is very apt in the context of Japan's mass education system. If we model the examination industry as a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991) with participants who have different roles but are pursuing broadly the same object (see diagrams, following) then these participants are all *stakeholders* in the status quo. This explains the extremely slow pace of reform of English language pedagogy in Japanese government schools. Despite widespread discussion of problems of studying usage over use (Widdowson 1978), of transmission pedagogies, excessive monitoring of scores on normative tests and structural, inflexible curricula (Yoneyama 1999); these are in fact the very conditions engendered and maintained by the examination industry.

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Engeström's model is well-suited to representing the washback effects of university entrance examinations as it graphically links participants in the common pursuit of goals. Busch's (1999) paper is a detailed study using Engeström's model and I summarise the main points below. Diagram 4.1 shows Engeström's paradigm model of human activity which is a system of social relations (Leontiev 1981). The components of the model can be glossed as follows:

Subject (also known as participant, actor or agent).
Refers to those who are involved in purposeful activity.

Object. Refers to the goal of the activity. All human acts
are goal-oriented and like subjects, objects are usually
multiple in number.

Tools. Socially mediated artifacts used in the process of
achieving goals. Tools are mediational in that they mediate
the actions of the subject on the object. Tools regulate the
activity and can be either material or semiotic in nature.

Rules. The norms and sanctions that specify and regulate
procedures among the participants.

Division of labour. The continuously negotiated
distribution of tasks, powers and responsibilities among the
participants in the activity system.

The model (Diagram 4.1) may give the impression of being static but in fact activity systems are dynamic and in a state of flux and over a period of time shifts occur in all

components. Another point that the diagram cannot express adequately is the complexity of the notion; activity systems are multiple and interdependent and one system actually consists of many other systems. Diagram 4.1 shows Engeström's paradigm model whereas Diagram 4.2 shows how university entrance exams (tools) function to select desireable employees to serve the higher levels of Japan's corporate and bureaucratic elites.

Busch's (1999) discussion of Diagram 4.2 is detailed and there is room here only for an outline summary and analysis of his ideas. Exam preparation (Diagram 4.2: rules) is perceived to foster the development of diligence, attention to detail and consistency, in candidate employees (Diagram 4.2: object). These are all highly valued traits within bureaucratic cultures. Admission to prestigious universities enhances the chance of being hired by major bureaucratic corporations: the goal of most young people on entering the workforce (Amano 1997). Lebra wrote in 1976 that Japan's social structure is of a vertical nature and education offers an opportunity for advancement, with university entrance examinations (Diagram 4.2: tool) serving as a sorting device; these comments are probably very valid today. In addition, the perceived meritocratic qualities of the university examination system serve to legitimise bureaucratic hierarchies (Diagram 4.2: division of labour) and socialise individuals into accepting their role within them (Rohlen 1983).

Diagram 4.3 models an activity system with the entrance examinations (this time, analysed in more complexity into component aspects) as tools, the universities themselves as subject and financial gain as the object. In the 1950s there was a rapid expansion of universities in Japan although there were limited funds since the nation was still recovering from the effects of World War II (Busch 1999). Universities were forced to find ways of raising revenue (Diagram 4.3: object) in an austere economic climate and examination fees (Diagram 4.3: tool) charged to students became a

lucrative source of funding. The Ministry of Education supported this practice by establishing an admissions system (Diagram 4.3: rule) in which students had to sit the exam designed specifically by that university. However, a national standardised exam does exist for the country's publicly funded universities but since competition for these is severe (tuition fees being about 65% of those of private institutions), most successful university applicants attend one of Japan's private institutions, which comprise 75% of the country's total.

In practice, students generally sit examinations for more than one institution to increase their chances of success and Redfield (1993) reports that his university expected to gross over 5 billion yen in 1992 (US $43.4 million; US $1.00 = ¥115) from examination fees (cited in Busch 1999). Most universities are now lowering expectations since students are tending to sit fewer entrance examinations with the slowdown in the Japanese economy since the early 1990s. This is not surprising, given that the fee to sit one university entrance exam generally ranges from 20,000 to 30,000 yen (US $173 to US $260; US $1.00 = ¥115).

As interdependent and embedded communities of practice to that modelled in Diagram 4.3, educational services and the publishing industry are significant participants (subjects) in the object of financial gain from university entrance examinations. In particular, students who have failed university entrance exams (the students are known as *ronin*) enroll in cram schools (*yobiko*) where they practice for the following year's tests. A substantial amount enroll for one full year before taking the test again and in 1996 there were 239,904 such *ronin* registered in Japan (Busch 1999: 14). Educational publishing is a huge industry in Japan; self-study books are published on a wide range of subjects and are available generally in bookstores throughout the country (Busch 1999). In particular, practice tests from each university are published separately because private universities set their own

examinations, and potential examination candidates must familiarise themselves with copies of past tests of the faculties and universities which they wish to enter.

In this section I have discussed Japan's educational system as a super-meritocracy, with educational credentials and hence university entrance examinations as a crucial sorting artifact in socio-economic stratification. This mass-system is characterised by very high levels of participation (by international standards) and hence intense competition for limited places at elite institutions. The 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1994) accruing from graduation from a leading university is valued by large corporations and public service bureaucracies, and in this way the prestige of a university entrance examination will be reflected in the number of applicants it attracts and its degree of difficulty.

The simplest way of devising and administering tests to sort and stratify large numbers of candidates through university examinations, is through a primary stress on grammar/translation, with the apparent advantages that this lends to 'objective' assessment, in the context of a structurally-based national curriculum. The washback effect of this is that English language pedagogy is generally geared towards preparing large classes of students for exams which focus more on structural and rule-based knowledge than on procedural skills of communicative proficiency. This is the 'activity' within which the pedagogy of high school English functions; the goal is success in such examinations.

Clark (2001), president of Tama University and a member of Japan's National Conference on Education Reform, has painted a pessimistic picture of the pace of reform to Japan's university testing industry. Recommendations to adopt a provisional entry scheme for first year students, based on Western publicly-funded universities which accept high numbers of first year students and weed out

unsuitable candidates at the end of the first year, have been ignored (Clark 2001). Despite complaints from the Ministry of Education regarding the lack of academic excellence in Japan, suggestions for far-reaching reform are rarely heeded. According to Clark *(ibid.)*, attempts to put more emphasis on high school recommendations, interviews and general knowledge as criteria by which candidates can be admitted into university courses, have largely failed. The pressures to enter name universities has not diminished at all and although public schools have been forced to ignore entrance exam requirements, the result has been that more parents have enrolled their children in private schools and prep schools *(juku)* that do focus on university exams.

While there are trends towards including more listening segments into entrance examinations, and spoken interviews in some cases, the functional advantages of maintaining the status quo should not be underestimated. It would be naïve to see the current university examination system as a 'pyramid of rigid structures dependent on a single centre of power', i.e. the Ministry of Education; instead it is probably best understood as a 'multilayered network of interconnected activity systems' (Engeström 1999: 36), where participants at all levels are stakeholders in the activity. For these reasons, the views of LoCastro (1996) and (especially) Clark (2001) that significant changes in foreign language pedagogy in Japanese high schools, with a strong shift away from a focus on language *usage* to one of language *use* (Widdowson 1978: 3) are unlikely in the near future, are depressingly convincing.

4.3 THE FOCUS LEARNERS: BIOGRAPHIES

In this section I shift discussion from the broad macro context of institutional foreign language learning in Japan, to the particulars of the focus learners who participated in the study: their biographies and prior experience of English language learning and why they were included in the focus groups.

The research design for the evaluation of the Kanda Curriculum was built around a case study (discussed in Chapter 5 following; especially section 5.5.1) and it was decided to select two small focus groups of learners. I felt that monitoring only one group would be too narrow and I expected that two groups would still be manageable and might show up very different interactional patterns and group dynamics (this did eventuate, as discussed throughout Chapter 6). Following Eggins (2000), discussed earlier in Chapter 3.6, groups of three persons were the preferred format since this is the minimum number for multiparty conversation or 'multilogue'. Numbers greater than three are not as useful since speaker transition can be difficult to manage; selecting speaker by gaze and acknowledging backchannel markers can be difficult in larger groups (van Lier 1988).

Since the research site was a mixed gender institution, I decided to form two focus groups consisting of males and females together: one with two males (and one female) and the other with two females (and one male). It was expected that the learners *might* display greater same-sex affiliation in interaction (owing to gender-based socialization in most high schools in Japan: Yoneyama 1999) or that (less likely) the opposite gender-based participation pattern might emerge. Since classes at the institution in question operate on a mixed gender basis, it seemed logical that this should be reflected in the focus groups. Rather than select two groups within

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one class (where a class usually consists of around thirty learners), the two focus groups came from two different classes. Since teachers and learners will tend to co-construct a class 'culture' in terms of collective norms (Breen 1985) that are constantly changing but different from others, the focus learners were 'recruited' from classes belonging to two different teachers. The two teachers were felt to be among the most flexible and experienced on the staff, and were both confident and willing to work in an innovative curriculum. These details are discussed further in Chapter 5.5.2 and at the start of Chapter 6.

The two class teachers (here given the pseudonyms of 'Mark' and 'Kevin') were asked to observe the learners in their classes for the first week of the new academic year and then approach individuals for participation in the research project who were clearly interested in participating actively, rather than minimally fulfilling attendance requirements. The two teachers were asked not to simply 'skim off' those who were judged to have the highest proficiency but to approach three learners of ability ranging from (relative to their peers) lower intermediate to advanced proficiency.

The two teachers each assembled a trio of learners (mixed gender) to whom I was introduced. The learners were given forms in Japanese explaining that a researcher (myself) wanted to monitor interaction in the trialling of the new curriculum, by sometimes audio-recording and filming the group in class, along with occasional interviews (which were actually conducted on five different occasions). Each learner was to be paid ¥500 [US $1.00 = approximately ¥115] per recording of class work and in return, they were to be responsible for setting up the video and audio equipment. They would each receive ¥1000 per interview. The form explained that their participation or non-participation would not influence their grade and if they started to participate, they were free to opt out later, if they so chose. Transcripts of the

data would be made and possibly published and if they wished, they could view the data at any time. The identities of the learners were to be protected through code numbers (below). The learners would be expected to function in the group of three that the class teacher had arranged, for most of the time but there would also be chances to work in groups with different people. The learners were told to think about it for one day and then tell their class teacher what they had decided on the following day. All agreed to participate and signed pre-prepared consent forms.

Briefly, I present some information below about each of the learners. I conducted a group interview at the end of the first cycle of the syllabus, four weeks after the start of the course, and selected comments from the learners that provide insight into their previous experience and initial reactions to the course, are included here. The key to the transcription convention is given later, in Chapter 5.5.3. Other information about the learners, besides interview data, comes from focus worksheets that the learners were given a few days before each interview. The purpose of this was not only to gain insights into their feelings about the curriculum but also to encourage them to reflect on questions that they would be asked in the interview. Data below consists of excerpts from learners' worksheets and comments made during the interview.

The identities of the learners are coded in the following way:

Group 1: F1, F2 and M1

Group 2: F3, M2 and M3

[M = male; F = female]

*GROUP 1

F1

F1 generally had the highest proficiency of the six focus learners, in terms of oral and aural skills, and also tended to take initiative in the intra-group interaction (Chapter 6, later), but did this not in a 'hectoring' sense; she usually made efforts to scaffold difficult activities for the other two learners and she generally sought consensus in matters of procedural action (the same was not always so of M2, who tended to dominate interaction in Group 2). She had earlier spent six years in the Republic of South Africa where her father was working for a multinational company and she had attended Japanese schools there, until the end of primary (elementary) school, when the family returned to Japan.

During her time in RSA the language of instruction and also the home was Japanese but F1 also studied and interacted in English (inside and outside of school) while there. F1 had not had any experience of communicating with others in English since returning to Japan six years earlier. Generally, F1 was the most sophisticated of the six informants and this was not just a function of her higher English proficiency; she appeared to have a greater critical awareness of the learning process than the others; this could have been because she was the only one with the experience of being part of an ethno-linguistic minority for an extended period of time in her childhood. During the interviews, which included three learners from the same group together in a recorded discussion with me, F1 was consistently the most talkative and was the only one to respond with extended utterances.

F1 described her experience of high school English as follows:

> erm.. before, we were just sitting in the class.. and be quiet and listen to what the teacher is saying/ ..and even if we were quiet.. we can.. we were just very quiet/...during the class, the teacher say your name and.. we have to.. if the teacher says me.. err.. we stand up and answer in japanese/

She was forthright and positive about her first experience with the Kanda Curriculum:

> through communicating with our friends.. we.. I think we can.. think in
>
> english and.. and speak in english/ ..so.. we hear english so.. we can .. its..
>
> we are (   ) in english/ so I think we can improve our english/ ..but I
>
> think umm.. the group work is very difficult.. we always talk to each other..
>
> but if I.. we.. speak… we can speak nothing so we are silent/ … but teacher..
>
> teacher always say.. says..keep..keep speaking in english/

When asked which activity or activities she thought were the most useful, F1 had the clearest critical evaluation of the six learners:

> its difficult to say whats most…erm useful because I think… every activity is
>
> very useful for me/ but I think the presentation is the most/ … erm… err we
>
> talk each other.. we talk to each other in groups and we.. so we
>
> communicate and we think one.. think of one thing and we… and we must do
>
> it in front of everyone/ so.. I think presentation is the most..

When asked to clarify whether she meant preparing for presentations (stage 2 in the syllabus cycle: Diagram 3.1) or public performance (stage 3 in the syllabus cycle: Diagram 3.1):

> preparing it/ ..I think so.. preparing//

This was an opinion that she once again expressed clearly at the end of the course (Chapter 7.1.2, later); this was evidence that she not only well understood the goals of the course but she also very much supported them.

F2

F2 was the least proficient in the group, had not lived outside Japan and had had no experience of sustained communication in English before. During the course of the

recording of classroom interaction (analysed in Chapter 6) she got along very well with both of her classmates in the group. With F1, she often took a responsive and shadowing role and in this sense, F1 acted as a kind of mentor, with M1 sometimes on the periphery. However at other times, F2 aligned herself with M1 in teasing sequences (sometimes to the annoyance of F1; see Chapter 6.4.1, later) and the class teacher reported that these two seemed to be good friends outside of class and were often seen together. Generally F2 stayed within simple discourse roles in the data of interaction in Chapter 6; F1 often took an instructive role and F2 rarely took an initiating or contrary position in intra-group negotiation.

In contrast with F1, F2 seemed to be less sophisticated in terms of critical reaction to the curriculum; in detail, she had little comment to make beyond expressing a general satisfaction and during later interviews, seemed annoyed by persistent questions as to her goals, likes and dislikes. This could have been caused, at least in part, by the difficulty of functioning in English (this possible weakness in the methodology is discussed in Chapter 7.1.2) but in the written focus worksheets also, she generally had little to say. F2 was usually reticent in the group interview discussions and the following excerpts are taken from her completed worksheet filled out prior to the interview discussion.

Concerning her prior learning experience, F2 wrote that students:

> '...learned by rote for the term end or midterm exam, not for the
>
> practical English.'

Sounding very like the discussion of the IRF sequence (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) and surveillance of learners in 'performance' models of pedagogy (Bernstein 1996) in section 4.1 above, according to F2, her teachers' principal role in high school English was such that:

'...all teachers have to do was to get the correct answer only'.

When asked about the most useful activity, she wrote:

'I think that the presentation is very good. The presentation is a group

work, so we need to help each other, think over and co-operate, using in

English. I will be able to speak in English in public unashamedly. I want

to insist on my opinion for freshman year.'

Seemingly, F2 was referring to the collaborative group work of Stage 2 of the syllabus cycle: preparing for the presentation and also Stage 3: the public performance. The final sentence above is very interesting: she is apparently stating that she wishes to share her own views and opinions with her classmates; the class for her is not significant only in terms of improving in L2 'proficiency'. She seems to be giving voice to issues of self-determination (Deci and Ryan 1985), Habermas' (1970) *Diskurs*, or creative or critical negotiation of value by learners, and Norton's (2000) 'investment'.

M1

M1 was the only male in this group and had not been outside Japan for any extended period. Like F2, he had no previous experience of sustained communication in English and like all the other focus learners in the two groups except M2, had come to the university straight from high school. M1's general oral and aural proficiency seemed to be midway between that of F1 and F2. Unlike F2 he engaged in more complex speech acts with F1, especially when attempting to repair semantic misunderstandings of complex dictated texts in Chapter 6.1.1, and when negotiating for consensus over assessment scores, from a position of disagreement, as in Chapter 6.4.1.

Generally, as is re-iterated several times in the data analysis of Chapter 6, the tenor of interaction between the three teenagers in this group was very warm. Broadly, two patterns of alignment were evident in the data of interaction in Chapter 6. For much of the time, there was little overt participation from M1 as the two females (especially F1) held the floor; however, video recordings show that M1 was not detached and was monitoring closely. This situation did not appear to be one of 'exclusion', rather it was a case of a warm same-sex alignment between the two females, which M1 accepted good-naturedly. On other occasions and less frequently, the alignment would switch and there would be extended episodes of joking and teasing between F2 and M1. These seemed to be resented by F1 (Chapter 6.2.1), possibly because she saw them as being frivolous.

Regarding the differences between his experience of English in high school and his present situation, M1's account parallels the experience of F1 and F2:

'In high school, student roles is just listening teachers lecture silently. But in this class student can speak loudly in English and can do many task. This point is very different from high school.'

When asked about the most useful activities in class M1, contrary to my intention, did not differentiate between the various stages of the syllabus cycle, as in Diagram 3.1. Instead he wrote about 'communication' in general terms; by this he seemed to mean group work:

'The most useful activities is communication in this class because we can improve out talking skill and we can interact through communication.'

Following from the above, M1 wrote one more thing which was very revealing:

'If we can communicate well we can make good friendship.'

He seems to be stating here that the purpose of interaction in the curriculum is not restricted to development in some kind of 'asocial' psycholinguistic sense (though no doubt psycholinguistic development is extremely important). He is saying that he is interacting with others to get to know them; there are interpersonal and affective factors at play, not just cognitive ones (see Breen 2001c). This resonates with F2's comment above, that she '...want(s) to insist on (her) opinion for freshman year.' These kinds of comments were very common in the learner worksheets and demonstrate that these were significant issues for learners. Going back to Breen's seminal paper of 1985, it is important to conceive of the class as a 'culture' in the sense of a social collective, rather than a more restricted notion of the class as a laboratory (see Chapter 2.1).

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*GROUP 2

M2

M2 was the oldest of the six learners and had deferred entry to the university by going to Australia for nine months, on a working holiday visa, after finishing high school in Japan. He had enrolled for three months in an English school on the Gold Coast in Queensland but had apparently dropped out after a few weeks to work in a Duty Free store, instead. His colleagues there were all Japanese and he was involved in selling to mostly Japanese tourists; he lived within a Japanese community and had limited interaction in English. According to his placement test when enrolling in the university, his proficiency level was not sufficient to justify exemption from the first year proficiency class: the Kanda Curriculum.

M2 was generally the most proficient in Group 2. His aural comprehension was better than the other two when listening to complex texts (Chapter 6.1.3) though M3 was not far behind. In terms of oral skills, the range of ability between the learners

was less than in Group 1 but M2 was the most 'effective' speaker. Textually, his speech was very taciturn, showing much modality reduction and a sometimes poor level of accuracy but, possibly as a result of his experience using some English overseas, he displayed a good deal of 'procedural confidence' in initiating and scaffolding activities for his more hesitant partners.

In an affective sense, the group functioned well in terms of the two males but over the period of recording and collecting data of interaction, it became apparent that F3 often became marginalised within the group. My interpretation was that M2's rather overbearing nature was acceptable to M3 but F3 tended to be squeezed out by the male 'same sex' alignment when the three were together. On several occasions in the data there is evidence of M2 being dictatorial (especially in Chapter 6.2.3) rather than seeking consensus over procedural problems (the latter being the implicit goal of all group work) while at other times (Chapter 6.1.3) he tried hard to scaffold the other two into participating when the complexity of the text they were attempting to re-construct was highly difficult.

M2 was the only one of the six who was nonplussed by the (learner) group-centred nature of classwork; in the interview he said:

> yeah/ start of class was... is similar to what I had/ ..so I wasn't embarrassed,
>
> because I got used to it//

Again, during the interview, the learners were asked about what they considered the most important activity. M2 said:

> aah/ ..I think english only/ ..the rule.. that is most useful/without
>
> using english I cant, ..we cant improve english anyway//

And on his worksheet:

'Discussion because we can learn how to speak and listen at the
same time it is very important to make yourself understood so we
should learn the way of inform our opinions.'

Finally, the learners were asked on their worksheets about the biggest difficulties in the class so far. The most common answer was inadequate listening comprehension but interestingly, M2's answer was more concerned with affect (Breen 2001c) than cognition:

'To find a partner because I'm shy.'

Here, he seems to be referring to occasions when learners are told to stand up and mingle and sort themselves into new groups of three for certain class activities. This again demonstrates that in several instances, different learners show that they conceive of the class very much as a social setting and not solely as a 'laboratory'.

M3

M3 had entered the program directly from high school and had no previous experience of sustained communication in English. Despite this, he managed extended interaction, mostly with M2 rather than F3, in many of the transcripts in Chapter 6. Probably, M3 was the third most 'effective' communicator out of the six learners, in terms of the speech acts he participated in, after F1 (Group 1) and M2.

It would be wrong to assess M3's 'proficiency' solely in individual terms; a good part of the reason that he was able to co-construct complex speech events was an excellent personal relationship with M2. The two got along very well and, as one example, were able to 'bootstrap' off each other to develop on-line, a highly imaginative (and ludicrous) scenario for an imaginary news bulletin, as a role-play presentation, in Chapter 6.2.2. The interaction between them was probably the most

symmetrical of any two learners in the focus groups and when they were working together there was always much laughter and joking.

On his worksheet before the interview, M3 contrasted his experience at high school with his present situation as follows:

> 'In English class of my high school, the English teachers taught us in
> Japanese, and they just read the textbook, then we just interpret it into
> Japanese. In freshman class, teachers ask us a question or give us a title,
> and let students do the work. Teachers give us a help whenever we need.'

Concerning the most difficult part of the first month of the freshman class, M3 wrote:

> 'At first time, "using English only" was so difficult that I sometimes used
> Japanese. But gradually, I became to be used to spoken English and
> speaking English. It became easier to communicate in English.'

Regarding the most useful activity in class, he felt that this involved the public performance stage of the syllabus, presentations:

> 'Presentations. I could learn how to interest people, make them understand
> what I say, and perform in public.'

Here, he seems to be stressing the affective and creative aspect ('…I could learn how to interest people…') of public performance while I have stressed psycholinguistic aspects (Skehan 1996, 1998; Skehan and Foster 1997; Foster and Skehan 1999) in Chapter 3.4, earlier.

F3

Along with F2 in the other group (above), F3 had the lowest proficiency score for listening and speaking in the placement test for the first year students. While in

'monological' terms (Chapter 1.4), F3 and F2 were the most limited of the six learners, their cases are very different. F3 was marginal to a lot of the interaction in Group 2 and was not 'scaffolded' to the same extent as F2 in Group 1. This was apparent in the transcripts of interaction in Chapter 6 and was also commented on by her class teacher. Towards the end of the period over which recordings were made, she was sometimes absent when she knew she was to be grouped with M2 and M3 and she is absent on two of the transcripts of Group 2's interaction, in Chapter 6, later.

There seemed to be no animosity between F3 and either of the other learners; otherwise we would assume that she would have requested a change to another group. However, in most cases, F3 was largely left out by M2 and M3 and not involved to the same extent as F2 in the other group. Whether the cause of this was a certain insensitivity by the two males, arising from an excluding male camaraderie, or whether F3 also contributed by being aloof and stand-offish, is not clear. Whatever the reason, the class teacher noted towards the end of the recording period that F3 looked less comfortable in the group than at the beginning of the freshman year and appeared more animated with female friends in other groups. As I often repeat in the data analysis of classroom interaction in Chapter 6 (later), cases like this demonstrate the need to consider social factors and affect, instead of viewing situated interaction (outside of controlled tasks in experimental situations) in solely cognitive terms.

F3 was largely quiet in the focus interview and her worksheet comments were brief and rather simple. I feel that this was largely owing to a lack of sophistication rather than an inability to express complex thoughts in English. As Ellis (1985: 101) reports, introspection by subjects can only access factors of which the subject is consciously

aware, and the reflections of sophisticated learners will tend to supply the most sophisticated data.

Concerning the transition from high school English to the Kanda Curriculum she wrote:

> 'In my junior high school and high school I only read text books aloud and
> answered my teacher's questions. But now, I talk to my teacher and
> classmates in English.'

When asked what were the most useful activities in class, she wrote:

> 'Presentation was also useful for me. Because I learned importance of
> co-operation with each other and I can get used to speaking English in
> public.'

Once again, it is probably mistaken to see F3's minimal participation solely in monological terms (Chapter 1.4). In the classroom interaction, her marginal status was, at least in part, something that was co-constructed with the other two. The class teacher approached her on one occasion and asked if she felt there were problems with the group but she indicated that this was not the case. Whatever the truth may have been, she was not totally inactive at all times, as the transcripts in Chapter 6, later show.

4.4   CODA

A person's interactional behaviour has a history that starts long before the singular encounter (Linell 1998: 47) and in this chapter I have traced the institutional (schooling) practices responsible for the development of the stereotypical freshman Kanda learner, as discursive practitioner. Section 4.1 discussed situated accounts of

the micro-structures of pedagogic interaction in high school settings, focusing on semiotic and interactional aspects and this was linked with the social division of labour (Bernstein 1996), defining the limits and possibilities of social relations within the classroom. Central to this division of labour is the way that control is systematically achieved through the local organization of discourse and how these 'disciplinary routines' (Foucault 1977) regulate the consciousness of docile pedagogic subjects.

We may use the Bourdieu's (1991) metaphor of an 'economy' to best understand how the value of a discursive 'product' is set against legitimate norms; these 'products' have value in the same way that market products have value (Grenfell 1998) and learners are socialized, through the regimentation of compulsory education, to internalize these values and comply with appropriate discursive roles.

Collective social (and discursive) practices are not reducible to the sum of individuals' actions and section 4.2 provides an account of how and why particular language practices have arisen and attained a degree of stability in the broader society. Another metaphor (see Breen 2001a: xxi, for discussion): an ecology, is useful here to demonstrate the embedding of (micro) local and situated practices within the (macro) overarching social formation. Such an understanding is aptly captured by Cicourel's (1992) appraisal and we may link the two metaphors above by observing that an ecology *drives* an economy. This logically connects the macro-social setting and micro-structures or interaction (Layder 1993) that were discussed in Chapter 1.1 at the start of the study.

Finally, section 4.3 presents the biographies of the six focus learners and discusses some of their initial reactions to the 'transformation of discursive practice' that is the central pedagogic aim of the curriculum. The intended change from a docile

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pedagogic subject to a new identity constructed through changed discursive practice is not merely achieved through 'empowering' learners by *allowing* them to take control. This would be a naïve 'volunteerist' fallacy that disregards the accumulated dispositions (habitus) that have been discussed above. It is more helpful I believe, to understand the shift from strong to weak 'framing' (discussed earlier in Chapter 2.3) as being driven by systemic change in the *economy*, or value of different kinds of contributions. This is brought about largely by sensitising learners to the new criteria underpinning learner roles in the new curriculum, through self-assessment (where the criteria are explicit and pre-written) procedures. This was discussed in Chapter 3.5 earlier and learner interaction in collaborative self-assessment is empirically described and analysed later in Chapter 6.4.

This concludes the part of the study concerned with theorising the learner as discursive subject; the following chapter shifts the focus to issues of research.

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[1] These authors attempted to develop baseline quantitative data about Japanese high school teachers, by mailing out a 26-question survey to approximately 1200 colleges and schools, in the Chiba area of Japan. The overall return rate was about 19% which meant that the authors had to give up on their intended research question.

[2] Much of the literature interpreting English learning practices in Japan, has been conducted by Westerners (see references in this section), the huge majority of whom, like myself, have worked in but are not themselves products of the Japanese education system and are far from being bilinguals in the Japanese language. We

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cannot therefore claim to be 'savants' of the system we are interpreting. This lays Western observers open to the charges, articulated by Susser (1998) of *stereotyping* (Finkelstein *et al.* 1991), *othering* (Biesecker and McDaniel, 1996; Kapila, 1997; Macy, 1996) and *essentialising* (Bullock and Trombley, 1988) Japanese educational practices. Therefore, in order to verify the reliability of my account, the only thing I can do is to check with Japanese informants who have expertise in the area of L2 (English) education for constructive criticism. For reasons that I do not fully understand, there is a paucity of critical accounts of L2 pedagogy in Japan, published in Japanese by Japanese authors. This is why I have not drawn more on Japanese source materials. I am grateful to Emi Otsuji, Ikuko Nakane and Rie Konno for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

[3] Increasing numbers of students have experience of communication in English through travel or having lived overseas (both having increased along with the overseas expansion of the Japanese economy in the 1980s), private English conversation schools in Japan, contact with JET (young 'native-speakers' of English working in high schools) assistants and / or English conversation clubs in (mostly private) high schools. Ultimately however, substantial experience of communication in English remains the exception rather than the rule in the case of students entering their first year of university (major or speciality) English studies. For the reasons stated above such learners generally are interactive novices.