



Faculty of Education
and Social Work

Future Directions in Literacy Conference and Certificate of Primary Literacy Education

2006



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The University of Sydney



Proceedings of the National Conference on Future Directions in Literacy

Editor: Alyson Simpson

ISBN: 1 86487 839 8

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The conference was held at the University of Sydney, Australia on 3rd and 4th of March 2006. Special thanks are extended to Margaret Day, Maxine Moore and Adam Jessup for their assistance with the publication of the conference proceedings.

Published by:
University of Sydney
Division of Professional Learning Faculty of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Education & Social Work: A35.611, University of Sydney
NSW 2006

May 2006

ISBN: 1 86487 839 8

Literacy and equality in the classroom

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Future Directions in Literacy Conference, University of Sydney, 2006

Abstract

This contribution argues that unequal outcomes of education flow from two key factors. The first is the failure of schools to explicitly teach reading skills required at each stage of education, so that some students are able to tacitly acquire these skills themselves while others remain disadvantaged. A hidden curriculum of reading development is described that underlies the overt curriculum at each stage of schooling. The second factor is the patterns of classroom interactions that create and maintain unequal learner identities on the basis of differing experiences in learning from reading. These patterns are illustrated with classroom interactions, and contrasted with learning interactions outside the school. Finally an alternative approach is described that places reading at the centre of classroom teaching, and redesigns classroom interactions to ensure that all students successfully acquire the skills they need.

Educational outcomes

Biases in the form, content, access and opportunities of education have consequences not only for the economy; these biases can reach down to drain the very springs of affirmation, motivation and imagination.

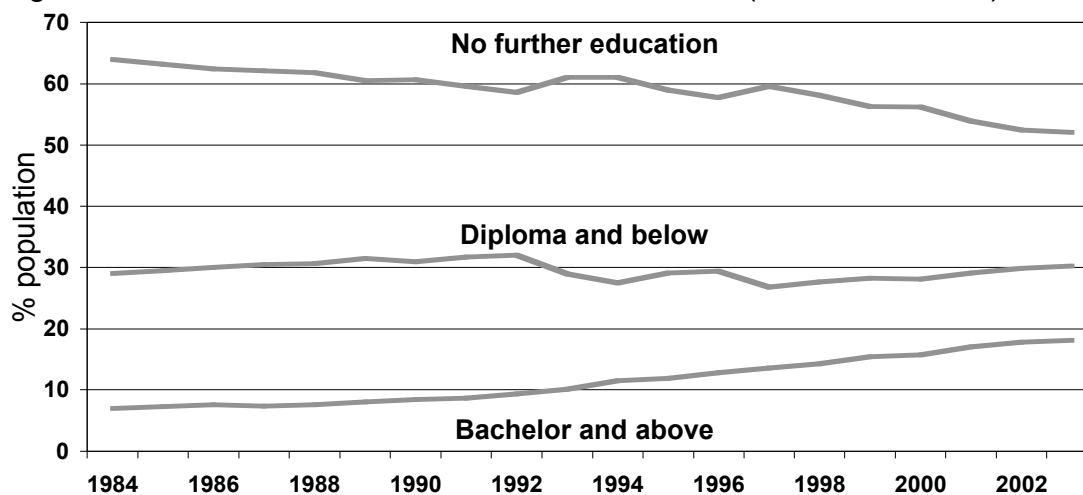
Basil Bernstein 1996:5

The arguments presented in this paper distil findings of a long term action research project with schools and universities across Australia and internationally, known as *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn*. This program trains teachers in strategies for scaffolding reading and writing as an integral part of normal classroom practice, across the curriculum at all levels of education (Martin & Rose 2005, Rose 2004a, 2005a, Rose, Lui-Chivizhe, McKnight & Smith 2004). The strategies have been developed in partnership with teachers, and are grounded in research in social learning theory (Painter 1984, 1998, Vygotsky 1981, Wells 1999), sociology of education (Bernstein 1971-1996), educational linguistics (Halliday 1993, Martin 1999), and discourse analysis (Martin & Rose 2003). They have been repeatedly evaluated as improving the literacy learning of all students at an average of twice expected rates of development, and up to four times the expected rate (Carbines, Wyatt & Robb 2005, Culican 2005, 2006, McRae et al 2000, Rose 2006a). Extensive in-class work and workshop discussions with many hundreds of teachers participating in the program have provided rich opportunities for observing, discussing and analysing teachers' practices, assumptions, expectations, experiences and training.

Underpinning the program is the view that literacy is more than merely an add-on to the core business of teaching, it is the key to successful learning in school and beyond. Reading in particular becomes the primary medium for learning as we progress from primary through high school to university, as writing is the primary medium for demonstrating what we have learnt. Reading in school becomes, in the words of Bernstein 1990:53, "the crucial pedagogic medium and social relation". As access to academic literacy is the key to success in school, so it is also the key to opportunities beyond school. The abilities to learn from reading and to demonstrate our learning in writing, largely determine whether we get access to university or vocational training, or receive no further education after school. Unequal access to further education then shapes our opportunities

in the hierarchy of occupations that make up contemporary societies. These inequalities are graphically illustrated in Figure 1, showing the proportions of school leavers in Australia who have received university, vocational or no further education. Over the past twenty years, these inequalities have narrowed only marginally: university numbers have risen from about 7 to 17% of the population, vocational training has been steady at about 30%, while the majority receiving no further education has fallen from above 60% to above 50%.

Figure 1: Australian education outcomes 1984-2004 (ABS 1994, 2004)



While the proportions may vary, these inequalities in education outcomes reflect the hierarchy of success and failure within the school, and within each classroom in the school. Differences between the successful few, and the average or unsuccessful many are usually attributed to something known as 'ability', which is assumed to originate either in learners' biology, or in their family or cultural backgrounds. To Bernstein 1996:7 attributing failure to 'inborn facilities' or to 'cultural deficits relayed by the family' are myths used by the school to 'individualize failure and legitimize inequalities'. With respect to biology Howe, Davidson & Sloboda 1998:407 find "no evidence of innate attributes operating in the predictable and specific manner implied by the talent account" and that "categorising some children as innately talented is discriminatory...unfair and wasteful". On the other hand there is a very large body of research linking differences in school achievement to family differences, including Bernstein's own research on coding orientations and social class (1971-1990), and research inspired by his models (Cloran 2000, Hasan 2001, Morais, Baillie & Thomas 2001, Muller, Davies & Morais 2004, Williams 2001). But what do we mean by differences in ability, and how are they related to differences in families?

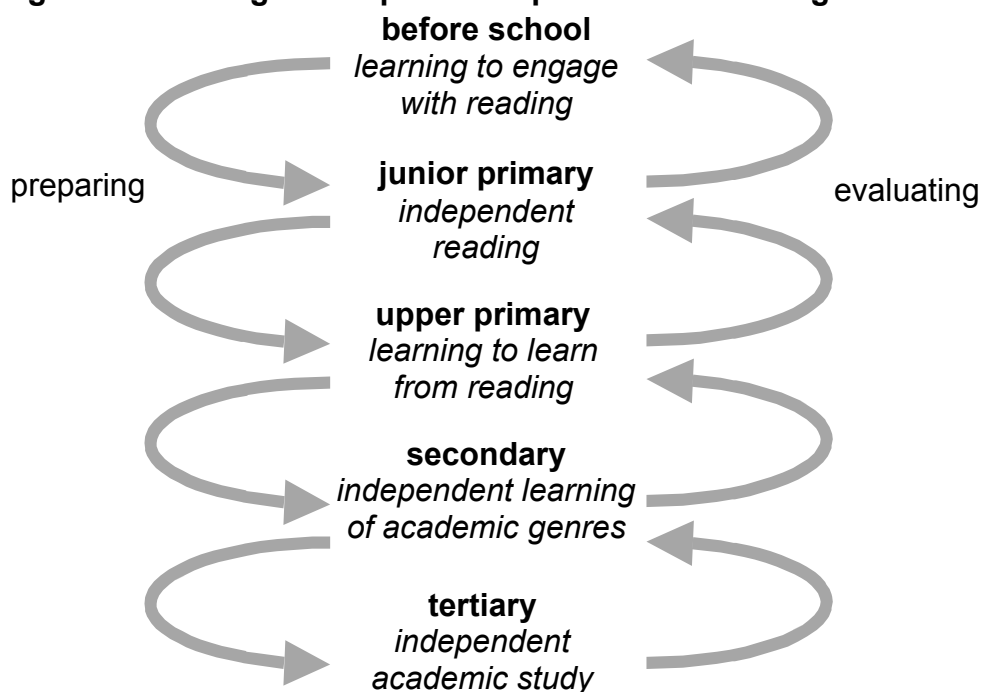
I am going to argue here that differences in educational success flow not from biological differences in children but from their varying abilities to learn from reading, that these variations originate in different orientations to reading in the home, and that the school, far from seriously attempting to bridge these differences, in fact exploits them to widen the gap between learners from different social backgrounds. Like many of us, I consider this function of schooling to be an entirely unnecessary injustice, as teaching reading is straightforward for teachers who are appropriately trained, as the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* program has demonstrated, and that reading can and should be a central component of teaching practice at all levels of education across the curriculum.

The reading development curriculum

As reading is a fundamental mode of learning in formal education, one might expect that it would be a core focus of classroom teaching. Yet after the early primary years, as reading becomes more and more important for learning, it becomes less and less a part of teaching. Almost all secondary teachers and many of the primary teachers participating in the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* program have reported that they had received no previous training in teaching reading. Furthermore few teachers reported that they had been provided with sufficient guidance, by either their training or state syllabi, to integrate reading with their classroom practice. Even in the early years, where teachers do have training in teaching reading, the evidence of state testing (e.g. ACER 1997, MCEETYA 2003) has revealed that the literacy gaps between children from literate middle class families, who may have spent 1000 hours or more reading with their parents before starting school (Bergin 2001), and those who come from less literary family backgrounds, are not effectively addressed by current early years teacher training.

As a result those children who are well prepared by their homes rapidly learn to be independent readers in the early years, and are thus well prepared to start learning from reading in the upper primary years, whereas children without this level of home preparation are less well prepared for upper primary, and may be severely disadvantaged (Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999). By the time they start high school the better prepared students have learnt how to independently read for homework, and so to succeed both in their assignments and in the classroom. Six years of practising independent reading and writing across the curriculum then prepares them for independent academic study at university.

Each stage of this reading development curriculum prepares successful students with the skills they will need for the next stage, but after the early years the reading skills they need are not explicitly taught, but are learnt tacitly by those students who are adequately prepared to do so. The skills needed at each stage are learnt in the preceding stage: skills for independent reading needed in upper primary are not taught in those years, but depend on learning in the early years; skills for reading across the curriculum are not taught in high school but depend on preparation in primary years; and because they are tacitly learnt rather than explicitly taught, skills for academic study require six years of continual practice in high school for successful students to acquire. As each stage prepares successful students for the next stage, what students are evaluated on is the skills they have acquired in the preceding stage. So early years teachers are trained to evaluate children on differences in learning 'abilities' that originate in the home; in the upper primary they are evaluated on reading skills acquired in the early years; and high school students are evaluated on reading and writing skills acquired in primary. This sequence of preparation forward and evaluation back is schematised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Reading development sequence in schooling

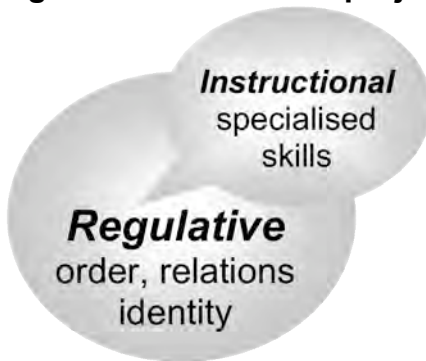
The reading development curriculum underlies the overt content-based curriculum of schooling, and thus achieves two general outcomes. On the one hand it prepares successful students for matriculation and university study, and on the other, its tacit mode of transmission ensures that the majority of less well prepared students will not progress successfully to university entrance. In my view this hidden curriculum is one of two key strategies by which education maintains its internal hierarchy of failure and success, from early primary to school leaving. The other key strategy is the dominant mode of interaction between teachers and students in the classroom, which continually evaluates learners as successful or failing, whether the educational philosophy informing the interaction is ostensibly 'progressive' or 'traditional'. Together, the failure to teach all students the reading skills that are required at each stage of schooling, and the continual evaluation of students on their abilities to read and write and so successfully participate in class, both construct the 'ability' hierarchy in the school, and socialise children into their positions in the hierarchy.

Classroom interaction as a recontextualised discourse

Bernstein regards education as a 'recontextualised discourse', that is the discourse of the classroom and its curriculum are translated from other contexts into the context of schooling. So for example, woodwork in school is different from the economic activity of carpentry - it is recontextualised as a school subject with very different practices and outcomes. The same may be said for science, maths, languages, literature and so on. But the pedagogic discourse of the school is not only concerned with teaching these recontextualised curriculum subjects; underlying the instructional function of teaching curriculum content is the school's regulative function to create a social order, social relations and learner identities. The regulative is the dominant function in Bernstein's 1996 model; we might say the regulative function is the underlying message that is articulated or projected through the instructional discourse of the classroom (Christie 2002, Martin 1999, Martin & Rose 2005), as schematised in Figure 2. The social order of the classroom reflects the social order of the society, which is of course an unequal order; relations

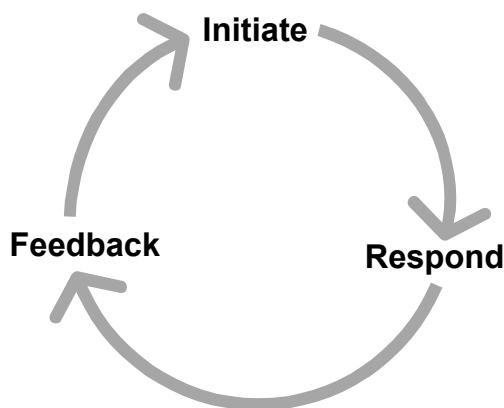
between groups of students are unequal, as are relations between groups in the society; and the learner identities it produces are similarly stratified from successful to failing.

Figure 2: Instructional projected by regulative functions of education



Like the curriculum subjects, the discourse of the classroom is also recontextualised, from contexts of social interaction outside the school. The dominant principle that structures how social interaction becomes classroom discourse is the regulative function of creating and maintaining order, relations and identities. To this end classroom discourse continually evaluates students, indeed according to Bernstein 1996:42 “the key to pedagogic practice is continual evaluation”. The pervasive pattern of classroom discourse, described by a string of researchers (Lemke 1990, Mercer 2000, Nassaji & Wells 2000, Sinclair & Coulthard 1975, Wells 1999), is known as the ‘IRF’ cycle, or ‘Initiate-Respond-Feedback’, illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: IRF cycle



Overwhelmingly the teacher’s initiating move in the IRF cycle is a question, that monitors students’ understanding, asks them to infer connections, or elicits their own experience. Teachers use students’ responses as stepping stones in lesson sequences, to get students to think actively about the subject, and to check that they understand what the teacher is saying. These are the instructional functions of the IRF cycle. But in every classroom in every school, every teacher knows that it is only a minority of students who regularly respond successfully to our questions, that other students sometimes do, and that some students rarely if ever respond successfully. The principal function of the teacher’s feedback move in the IRF cycle is an evaluation of students’ responses, and for this reason it is also often known as the ‘IRE’ cycle. The teacher’s feedback may also have an instructional function, using successful responses as a step forward in the lesson, and this function is often advocated to promote ‘higher order’ learning, inspired by Vygotsky’s social learning theory (Gibbons 2002, Mercer 2000, Wells 1999); but its underlying regulative function is always evaluative (Lemke 1990). This pattern of micro-interactions in

the classroom relentlessly evaluates students on their abilities to answer teacher questions successfully. Successful students are continually affirmed for their responses, but failing students are continually negated, no matter how hard some teachers work to soften the impact of failure. While successful learner identities are shaped by continual teacher affirmations, few options are available to failing students other than to withdraw from active participation as far as they are permitted, or to challenge the teacher's authority.

All teachers participating in *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* report that they have not been trained at this level of micro-interactions, except in discussions of 'questioning techniques'. These may distinguish categories of questions such as 'closed' (yes/no) or 'open' (wh-), but the efficacy of classroom questioning itself is not questioned (Lemke 1990). Rather than being explicitly trained in it, each of us learns this mode of interaction tacitly in our own years of experience as learners in classrooms. As its regulative function is not adequately recognised in teacher training and its prevailing theories, non-participative or disruptive behaviour may be disconnected from its cause, and attributed instead to students' abilities, their personalities or their environments beyond the classroom.

These problems are not attributable to simplistic dichotomies between 'teacher-centred' and 'learner-centred' approaches, that are often drawn by progressivist/constructivist theories (Bernstein 1996, Muller 2000, Rose 1999). In reality all teachers struggle to engage with the wide range of 'ability levels' in a class. Techniques to engage diverse students, that teachers usually develop through experience rather than training, may be more or less supportive, but even the most effective strategies are necessarily realised through the fundamental interactive template of 'IRF'.

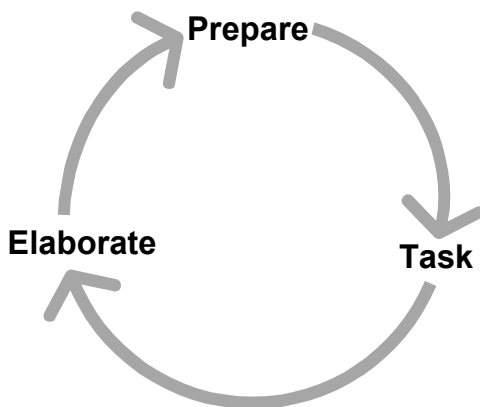
From where does this template originate? It is of course a recontextualised discourse that has evolved with the history of schooling, from the medieval monastic schools and universities, through private colleges and the governess system, to mass education in the nineteenth century. It may have originated in pedagogic interactions in the family, but has been recontextualised over many generations with a different regulative function. While families attempt to raise their children with roughly equivalent competences, schools have evolved with a very different social goal, to produce unequal competences between learners, and pedagogic interactions have been recontextualised into the school to serve that regulative goal.

Scaffolding interactions in the family

In the family the primary instructional function of pedagogic interactions is perhaps teaching language. In cultures as diverse as metropolitan Europe and remote central Australia, families continually model their language for young children, for up to two years before they begin to speak their mother tongue, and continue to do so for years after that, as children gradually acquire the complex resources of the adult language system (Halliday 1993, Kearins 1981, Painter 1984, 1986, 1998, 2004, Rose 2001). A common interaction pattern in such familial pedagogic contexts resembles the IRF pattern, but differs in three significant dimensions. Firstly its function is not to demand a response for evaluation, but to support children to build new communicative skills. Secondly the initiating move is rarely just a question, i.e. demand for information, but rather gives the child information that prepares them to respond successfully. And thirdly the follow-up move is almost always affirming, but also frequently elaborates on the child's response, building on what they have learnt. I have called this type of pattern the *scaffolding interaction cycle* (Rose 2004a, 2005a), as the teacher 'scaffolds' learners into doing a task

that is typically well beyond their independent competence. Most generally it includes the three moves Prepare-Task-Elaborate, illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Scaffolding interaction cycle



The scaffolding interaction cycle is a common pattern in parent-child reading before school, although research has shown significant variation between families in its application (Williams 2001). In an ideal scaffolding interaction cycle, a parent's preparation move supports the child, either to identify an element in the story they are reading, or to select what to read, or a reaction to the story. The elaboration move then extends the child's understanding, in relation either to features of the story or to features of language. These patterns are well illustrated in the following transcript of a mother reading with her 18 month old child.

Exchange 1: Parent-child reading

Child	<i>[Brings the book, sits on her mother's lap, and turns the book so the cover is facing right-side-up.]</i>	Select
Mother	The three little pigs [points to each of the pigs on the cover of the book].	Prepare
Child	<i>[Opens the book and turns several pages while her mother is talking] [points to picture of a tree] Tee [looks up at mother].</i>	Select Identify
Mother	Yes It's a tree.	Affirm Elaborate
Child	<i>[points to another tree in the picture] Tee [looks up at mother again].</i>	Identify
Mother	Um, um [Points to each of the little pigs in the illustrations]. Here are the little pigs. Bye bye mama [waves her hand]. We're going to build a house.	Affirm Prepare
Child	<i>[laughs, waves at the mama pig in the illustration and turns the page]</i>	Identify
Mother	Look, the first pig...	Prepare
Child	<i>[Turns the page].</i>	Select
Mother	Oh, oh, I see that wolf [points to the wolf, eyes get larger as if in fright].	Prepare
Child	<i>[turns page and points to wolf] Oh, oh.</i>	Identify
Mother	Oh, oh. He huffed and puffed [blowing on child] and he blewww that pig away. Very bad, isn't he? [in different tone directed toward child as an	Affirm Elaborate

aside].

At 18 months the child is already thoroughly familiar and engaged in the activity of reading, as she selects the book, and the pages to read, and identifies elements of the text, following her mother's lead in pointing and naming them. Her motivation is clear as she looks to the mother for affirmation, and repeats the activity when she is affirmed. However her mother not only affirms her first response 'Tee', but elaborates it with a complete sentence and pronunciation, using the child's response as an opportunity to extend her experience of language. In the next cycle the mother is able to direct the child's attention to the story, by relating it to her own experience 'Bye bye mama [waves her hand]', so that the child recognises its meaning and responds by laughing and waving. In the last cycle, the mother directs the child's attention to a higher level meaning, the expectation of a problem in the story, by again framing it in terms of a familiar emotional reaction, 'Oh, oh' with widening eyes. Again this enables the child to recognise the meaning of expectancy in a story, and so to turn the page and repeat the emotional reaction 'Oh, oh'. This time the mother affirms and elaborates by first reading the words on the page, and then commenting on the wolf's character, introducing the child to the judgement implicit in the story, a high level meaning indeed for one so young. At no point does the mother ask a question, rather the child responds to her preparations, both here and in the innumerable story readings that they have previously shared. Of course parents do ask questions of their children in such pedagogic contexts, but they are typically asking for information that the child already knows. For example parents commonly ask their children to repeat a task, such as naming something, that the child has already performed successfully. The motivation for both parent and child is the pleasure in the successful mastering of a task (Painter 2004).

Evaluative interactions in the school

The affectionate motivations for parent-child interactions contrast with those for questioning in classroom discourse. A common motivation is the widespread assumption that students will not learn by 'spoon feeding', but only by actively inferring logical connections for themselves. This assumption informs the early primary teacher's questioning in the following lesson transcript, of a Year 1 class 'reading' a wordless picture book about a snowman. The teacher indicates the snowman's nose and asks one student what it is.

Exchange 2: Year 1 reading class

Teacher	What's that he's got, Ben?	Query
Anna & Jody	<i>Carrot!</i>	<i>Identify</i>
Teacher	[makes circular motion on round object in illustration]	Rephrase
Bobby	<i>Meatball! Meatball!</i>	<i>Identify</i>
Kris	<i>Oranges!</i>	<i>Identify</i>
Teacher	Yes, Kris, I think you...That's right!	Affirm
Other child	<i>Meatball! Meatball!</i>	Identify
Anna	<i>They're oranges!</i>	<i>Identify</i>
Jody	<i>Oranges!</i>	<i>Identify</i>
Other child	<i>Tangerine!</i>	<i>Identify</i>
Teacher	Well, it's kind of oval like a tangerine. [makes oval shape with hands]	Qualify

Perhaps in an effort to engage him in the activity, the teacher asks Ben to infer the answer to her question, but unlike the mother above she gives him no preparation to do so, and he

remains silent. Anna and Jody then enthusiastically respond but the teacher rejects their response by rephrasing her question, wordlessly adding more criteria. Bobby enthusiastically proposes 'meatball', which the teacher rejects by ignoring it, but then affirms Kris' choice of 'oranges'. Another child who repeats Bobby's unsuccessful response is also ignored, as are Anna and Jody, who recognise and repeat the successful answer, and the last response is rejected by qualifying it, i.e. it is not affirmed.

Exchanges 1 and 2 are reproduced from McGee 1998, who considers them equivalent reading activities, as they both ostensibly encourage children to infer meanings in texts. This view derives from a popular theory that we learn to read by inferring meanings from our existing experience, so that 'good' teaching practice encourages inferencing. What is invisible in this view is the regulative function of the class reading activity, which is clearly demonstrated here: of those children in the class who do respond to the teacher's initiating question, all but one are rejected; its regulative function is to differentiate students on the correctness of their responses. From this perspective the assumption that students learn by inferring answers to teacher questions has evolved to serve this differentiating function, and the instructional practice of demanding inferences is merely a vehicle for this.

Early years activities like Exchange 1 depend on children bringing their expectations of affirmation from their home experience. It takes time for some children to recognise that they are less likely to be affirmed than others in the classroom, and so begin withdrawing from the IRF game. As years go by and the 'ability gap' widens between students, it becomes harder to engage failing students with IRF questioning. This is illustrated in the following transcript of a Year 5 maths lesson, in which a teacher asks a weaker student to infer a logical connection in a diagram.

Exchange 3: Year 5 maths class - unsuccessful IRF cycle

Teacher	[pointing to the centre of the Venn Diagram in the textbook] So B will go right in the middle there, won't it Hasan? B. Do you see why it will go in the middle there?	Identify Query
Hasan	<i>[no response]</i>	
Teacher	Do you see why it will go in there? Can you explain why?	Repeat Rephrase
Hasan	<i>It's got five faces.</i>	Select
Teacher	Pardon?	Query
Hasan	<i>[louder] It's got five faces.</i>	Select
Teacher	Good, it's got five faces. What else?	Affirm Query
Hasan	<i>[no response] [Top pupils have their hands up]</i>	
Teacher	That's one reason why, that's not the only reason why it can go in the middle, is it? [points to one circle in the Venn Diagram] What's that say there?	Query Prepare
Hasan	<i>[reading from textbook] Red.</i>	Identify
Teacher	[points to another circle in the Venn Diagram] What does that say there?	Prepare
Hasan	<i>[reading from textbook] Has at least one square face.</i>	Identify
Teacher	And that has got a square bottom hasn't it?	Elaborate
Hasan	<i>Yeh.</i>	Concur
Teacher	An' it's red and it's also got five faces, so that's the only shape that will go in the middle, the rest you're gonna have to decide, some might go in between red and has a square face or might go in between red and has five faces, it might not belong in any of them,	Elaborate

in which case you put the letter outside the Venn diagram.

The teacher twice rephrases her question before Hasan can murmur a response, which she is asked to repeat before it is affirmed. Hasan's small success then encourages the teacher to demand another inference which Hasan cannot supply, while other students have their hands up. The teacher's reaction is not to offer Hasan further support, but to simplify the demand to just reading out words in the text. The teacher then uses Hasan's correct responses as a stepping stone to give information to the whole class, information that may have helped Hasan to respond successfully if it had been given initially as a preparation. While the teacher may believe Hasan has benefited from learning to make inferences, to Hasan it has merely confirmed her identity at the bottom of the ability hierarchy. While the IRF pattern is thus dysfunctional for weaker students, it is perpetuated because it works for the successful few, and so for the teacher. This is illustrated in the next transcription, from the same Year 5 maths class.

Exchange 4: Year 5 maths class - successful IRF cycle

Teacher	How would we represent that sort of information? All that information on one graph.	Query
Phillip	<i>You could put them...like the Monday underneath it like that.</i>	Select
Teacher	You could.	Affirm
	You could put Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday at the bottom of your graph.	Elaborate
	That's true.	Affirm
	So let's assume it's going to be just like most graphs – it has a vertical and a horizontal axis and at certain points it has little bits of information.	Elaborate
	And at the bottom Phillip you're suggesting in these boxes at the bottom we put Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday [drawing it on the board].	Affirm

Here the IRF strategy works ideally as the teacher uses a successful student's response to move to the next step in the lesson. In the process Phillip is continually affirmed and re-affirmed, as Hasan was continually negated in the preceding interaction. The IRF pattern is not dysfunctional in this respect, rather it perpetuates because it works in most classrooms most of the time. It works because there are usually enough Phillips in each class that can provide the successful responses to teacher questions, that enable us to move from one step to the next in a lesson, confident that we are engaging at least some of our students.

Exchanges 3 and 4 are reproduced from Black 2004, who explains the inequality between the students using Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital', of which Phillip is said to have more and Hasan to have less. But where does this cultural capital come from? Bourdieu offers only very general suggestions about 'fields of practices' that differ between social groups. But I want to suggest that, with respect to the cultural capital of schooling, the answer is very simple, concrete, easily defined and easily remedied. It comes from reading. Phillip can make a successful suggestion for placing information in the graph because he has sufficient experience in reading such graphs, to recognise their elements and where to place them. Hasan struggles to explain why the elements of the Venn diagram are placed as they are because she has insufficient experience in reading them. Whereas the nature of this problem is invisible to educational theories that are informed by cognitive psychology (or Parisian cultural theory), the teacher perhaps recognises it intuitively, as she attempts to repair the interaction by getting Hasan to simply read the

words she points to, and then explains their significance. Unfortunately the educational theories in which the teacher has been trained give her few tools to systematically support Hasan.

Scaffolding interactions in the classroom

What we need in place of such theories is a model for teaching that purposefully and systematically recontextualises both the instructional and regulative functions of education in new ways (Rose 2005b). Instead of leaving it for successful students to acquire tacitly, learning from reading must be placed at the centre of instructional practice, explicitly integrating reading with classroom teaching at each level of schooling across the curriculum. And instead of ignoring the regulative function of IRF discourse, to create and maintain inequalities between students, micro-interactions in the classroom must be explicitly designed to ensure that all students are continually successful in acquiring the skills they need.

Strategies to achieve these goals have been developed in the *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn* program. They do so by building classroom learning around texts that students need to be reading at their particular stage and curriculum area, and supporting all students to read the texts with high level critical understanding. And what students learn about the fields and language patterns of their reading texts is then used to practise successful writing.

Learning to Read: Reading to Learn applies the scaffolding interaction cycle at various levels of a text, to prepare students to read it with comprehension, and to raise their critical understanding of its contents and language patterns through the elaboration moves. The first level of preparation enables students to follow a text or passage as it is read aloud, by first giving a synopsis of how it will unfold. The next level of preparation enables them to recognise patterns at the level of paragraphs, or phases of meaning in the text. The third level then enables them to read the text themselves with critical understanding, by giving sufficient support for them to read each sentence, or part of a sentence, and then by elaborating on its meaning.

These strategies are briefly illustrated in the following transcript of a history lesson on WWI, with a group of failing Year 8 students. The text has already been read aloud and discussed in general terms. The lesson is now half way through, and the teacher has just briefly explained and read the highly abstract sentence *The romance and heroism associated with cavalry charges and lightning strikes by infantry disappeared with the onslaught of a new kind of warfare*. The teacher starts by preparing the students to read the beginning of the sentence for themselves, by telling them where to look, 'it starts', and what to look for, 'two things that people used to think about war'. This preparation enables all the students to read and understand these abstract words, which two students voice, and the teacher then affirms and elaborates by defining 'heroism'. Its meaning in the context of WWI is then further elaborated in a discussion, in which the teacher prepares the students to critically evaluate its implications.

Exchange 5: Year 8 - scaffolded reading lesson

Teacher	So it starts off by saying two things that people used to think about war. Can you see those two things they used to think?	Prepare
All	[look at text]	
Robert	Romance	Identify
Steven	Heroism	Identify

Teacher	Excellent, Robert. Fantastic Stephen. Romance and heroism. Robert gave us romance and Stephen gave us heroism. Heroism means you think people are heroes.	Affirm
Teacher	Do you think these people are heroes for going off and getting killed?	Elaborate Prepare
Adam	<i>Only if they serve their country.</i>	Select
Robert	<i>Only if they stayed alive.</i>	Select
Teacher	Why wouldn't you call the dead ones heroes?	Prepare
Robert	<i>I don't know.</i>	Select
Steven	<i>Yeh they helped too.</i>	Select
Charles	<i>They shoot enemies too.</i>	Select
Steven	<i>They also fight for their country and died for their country.</i>	Select
Teacher	That's one of the ways that people, the government gets you to go off and get killed, is to say if you die you're going to be a hero.	Elaborate
Steven	<i>Uh hm.</i>	Concur

The teacher's preparation moves enable all students first to read the words, and then to reason about them critically. The time devoted to supporting all students does not disadvantage more successful students, as they benefit equally from the close reading of the text and the elaboration of its meanings. This brief extract cannot do justice to the potential of these scaffolding strategies for engaging, affirming and extending all students in a class, as they learn to read the curriculum. They are more fully described in Martin & Rose 2005, Rose 2004a, 2005a and demonstrated in teacher training DVDs, Rose 2004b,c&d, and the language model applied in them is described in Martin & Rose 2003, Rose 2006b. The point is that the inequities that currently result from not explicitly teaching reading, and not preparing all students to participate successfully in class interactions, can be easily overcome by placing reading at the centre of classroom learning, and careful planning of interactions to support all students.

Conclusion

I have argued that unequal outcomes of education are created and perpetuated by two interrelated factors. The first is the failure to teach reading skills required at each stage of schooling, so that students who are not well-prepared by the home for tacitly acquiring these skills are disadvantaged throughout their school careers. The second is the role of ordinary classroom interactions in creating and maintaining unequal learner identities on the basis of differing experiences in learning from reading. The dominant mode of classroom discourse, known as the IRF cycle or Initiate-Respond-Feedback, recontextualises cycles of pedagogic interaction from outside the school that I have termed the *scaffolding interaction cycle*, or Prepare-Task-Elaborate. Whereas scaffolding interactions prepare learners to perform each task successfully, the IRF cycle has evolved to evaluate rather than prepare learners' responses, and so functions to continually differentiate students on their 'ability' to respond appropriately. I have argued that so-called 'ability levels' in schooling originate in students' differing experiences with reading in the home, and that these differences widen through each stage of schooling, as the demands for learning from reading grow. Underlying the overt content curriculum of schooling is a hidden curriculum of reading development that successful students acquire tacitly, while other students cannot, ensuring their eventual exclusion from further education. Continual affirmation in teacher-class interactions from Year 1 builds positive learner identities for successful students, while lack of affirmation socialises others into identities as average or failing learners.

These inequitable and inefficient practices are historical relics of the rigid class hierarchies in which our education system first evolved, and have remained largely unaddressed by prevailing education theories. As they condemn large sections of our communities to unskilled drudgery or long term unemployment, they have serious consequences not only for the competitiveness of our national economies, but for the personal and social well being of the children we are charged with educating, particularly Indigenous children (Rose 1999, 2004a). There is no longer any need for this waste of human potential, if we put learning from reading at the centre of classroom practice where it belongs, and we learn to redesign our classroom interactions to engage, affirm and extend all our students equally.

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