

The role of figured worlds when student teachers become teachers

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This short oral reports on a study concerning conflicts emerging when student teachers, Evie and Lisa, engage in a teacher education programme. The theme relates to discursive engagement, where individuals negotiate a range of other past and present social practices. In discursive engagement a text is assembled through different textual units, for example figured worlds. The aim is to illustrate the role figured worlds play in immediate social interaction. A methodological tool, with the aim at uncovering why the speaker produces a particular wording rather than any other in a specific social practice, is used. The main point is that the figured worlds about teaching and learning mathematics are critical because they discursively inform every social practice that Evie and Lisa attend.

Introduction and aim

This short oral reports on a study concerning conflicts emerging when student teachers engage in a teacher education programme. The theme of the presentation relates to language-in-use when students, discursively, negotiate or re-negotiate a range of other past and present social practices related to teaching and learning mathematics. Each of these social practices are ordered, stratified, across time and space which means that it is arranged (in strata) in a series of layers, levels, or gradations in an ordered system. In this study, *discursive* is defined as how a person transforms past experience into the present situation and how a person transforms utterances from one discursive arena to another (Gee, 1999).

I consider text as the outcome of discursive engagement. Any text is assembled through different textual units creating a discursive pattern. Inter-textuality can be viewed as the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts. Discourse Analysis analyse discursive engagement to provides access to the combination of “snatches” with the focus on “how much of a part and what sort of a part discourse plays in the practice”. (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 61) This short oral focuses on one of these so-called “snatches”, the specific “snatch” termed figured worlds, with the aims to illustrate the role figured worlds play in immediate social interaction. The empirical material used relate to how two student teacher, whom I will refer to as Evie and Lisa engage and re-engage in different figured worlds when concluding their vision of teaching and learning mathematics.

Theoretical and methodological direction

There are no significant differences between how different proponents of Discourse Analysis use the notion of intertextuality. However, they term the “snatches” differently. With an interest in student teacher’s participation in a teacher education programme I turn my theoretical interest to Social Practice Theory, more specifically the work by Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain (1998) concerning Cultural Identity. One of the key notions related to Cultural Identity is the notion of figured world. Figured world as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others”. (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52).

Systemic Functional Linguistics, served as a methodological tool with the aims at uncovering, through functional analysis, why the speaker produces a particular wording rather than any other in a specific social practice. Every text reflects that it is about something (ideational meta-function), is addressed to someone (interpersonal meta-function), and uses a particular mode – spoken or written language, for example – to express its meanings (textual meta-function). These meta-functions are used to identify functional aspects in relation to the characteristics of a figured world.

Result and discussion

The figured worlds of (1) performative mathematics, (2) traditional mathematics teaching and (3) reform-oriented mathematics play a significant role in how Evie and Lisa articulate tales of themselves as teachers-to-be. The main point is that the figured worlds about teaching and learning mathematics in this study are critical because they discursively inform every social practice that Evie and Lisa attend. This study highlights figured worlds as legitimate cultural worlds that need to be recognised because engagement in social practices seems always to take place in relation to something else. Explanations of the three figured worlds together with empirical examples will be included in the short oral presentation.

References

- Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.
- Gee, P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: theory and method*. New York: Routledge.
- Holland, D., Skinner, D., Lachicotte, W., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.