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Interrogating Policy Contradictions in Literacy Reforms about Persuasive Texts

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Objectives

Our overarching objective is to demonstrate the political contradictions about how persuasive texts should be taught in the middle years of schooling, analysing two contradictory Australian wide educational reforms. We consider the complexities of power and access to literacy for students in relation to these reforms about the privileged genre of persuasion. Our work is framed by our appreciation of literacy as a social justice issue, and the notion of students' pedagogic rights (Bernstein, 2000). Specifically, we introduce and analyse the knowledge and skills about persuasive text sanctioned by the Australian high-stakes test, the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), for students in the middle years of schooling (ACARA, 2013). We compare this to the contemporary emphasis on multimodal persuasive texts sanctioned by the recently released Australian Curriculum English (ACARA, 2014). We conclude our analysis by identifying biases in the structure of particular knowledges and the inherent threats to democracy.

Theoretical framework

Our theoretical work on social justice is framed by Bernstein's (2000) theorisation that three pedagogic rights are required if education is to contribute to developing the minimal conditions of democracy: the right to individual enhancement, the right to social inclusion and the right to political participation. The institution of each of these rights, according to Bernstein (2000), makes available the following three conditions: the condition of *confidence* to take democratic action, the condition of the *communitas* of democratic society, and the condition of democratic *civic discourse*.

We then examine the knowledge about persuasive text made available via these two contradictory Australian wide educational reforms. To theorise the knowledges, we draw on linguistic theory (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 29-30) that describes the three basic functions of texts: ‘to make sense of our experience’, ‘act out our social relationship’ and ‘to construct a text’. Technically speaking, the design elements inherent in texts simultaneously construe experience through the *ideational metafunction* and enact social relationships through the *interpersonal metafunction*. These metafunctions are organised through the cohesion and continuity of a third metafunction, the *textual metafunction*.

To think about grammar as a resource for analysing the form of persuasive text knowledge, it is necessary to explore how each of these metafunctions contribute to meaning making through each of the design elements detailed by the New London Group (2000) and added to by recent work on ‘touch’ by Bezemer and Kress (2014). Semiotic theory, such as that advanced by Kress (2000), identifies that dealing with the design elements at a more specific level needs to draw on terms and descriptions that pertain to the disparate elements. Thus, as Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) advance, the three metafunctions of auditory, visual, gestural and spatial design and Bezemer and Kress’s (2014) notion of ‘touch’ are interpreted as representational, interactive, and textual choices.

Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry

The research method occurs in two parts. The first part involves a qualitative semiotic analysis of the knowledges inherent in the persuasive text structures sanctioned by each of the two educational reforms. The second part involves a qualitative analysis of what each form of knowledge makes available in terms of students’ pedagogic rights. Specifically, this phase of analysis will examine:

- the right to individual *enhancement* via the acquisition of the esoteric knowledge that is a means of critical understanding and new possibilities;

- the right to social *inclusion* via a consideration of autonomy;
- the right to political *participation* via involvement in practice through which the social order is constructed, maintained or changed.

In so doing, the analysis will lead to conclusions about what is made available to students in terms of persuasive text and thus in terms of the condition of *confidence* to take democratic action, the condition of the *communitas* of democratic society and the condition of democratic *civic discourse*.

Data sources, evidence, objects, or materials

Data will be drawn from the analysis of the structure of persuasive text knowledge inherent in each of the two educational reforms. The first set of data is from the writing component of the high stakes Australian National Assessment Program for students in the middle years of schooling. This writing assessment task requires a persuasive text to be planned, written and edited within 40 minutes in response to an unseen common prompt (ACARA, 2013). To assist in preparing for this on-demand writing task, teachers and a plethora of privately engaged tutors across the nation drilled students of all ages to reproduce the prototypical staging features of persuasive texts sanctioned by ACARA (2013, p. 5):

- ‘Start with an introduction. An introduction lets a reader know what you are going to write about.
- Write your opinion on this topic. Give reasons for your opinion. Explain your reasons for your opinion.
- Finish with a conclusion. A conclusion sums up your reasons so that a reader is convinced of your opinion.’

The second stimulus text is typical of the multimodal persuasive texts sanctioned by the Australian Curriculum English (ACARA, 2014). We use a short computer animated clip

from *Animalia*, a cartoon series produced by the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF, 2011) and distributed globally for television and DVD viewing. At its most general, each episode of *Animalia* can be described as a narrative in that the generic pattern unfolds as orientation/s, complication/s, resolution/s and coda/s (Martin & Rose, 2008). However, in real world texts, stages of genre are not always mutually exclusive. As our analysis documents, various stages of the narrative take on a decisively different social function other than orientation, complication, resolution and/or code. We refer to these additional surges of meaning as elemental genres. We are particularly interested in the 8 turns of talk that fulfil the social purpose of persuasion. As television talk was never intended to be understood by words alone, and for the sake of readability, we have provided both the dialogue and what we call the accompanying 'crescendo frame' of the visual image as well as a description of the audio, gestural and spatial design and their integration as well as evidence of 'touch' as a resource for meaning making (Bezemer & Kress, 2014).

Conclusions

Our analysis of the knowledges sanctioned in the high stakes Australian National Assessment Program writing task found that the Toulmin (2003) model is privileged over all other models of persuasive text. Skilling students into the prototypical staging of genre as articulated by members of the 'Sydney School' of systemic functional linguistics (see Martin & Rose, 2008) is not without its merits. Without knowledge of the conventional goal-directed, staged activities of text structures used to configure the meanings of language and culture into whole texts, it would be nigh on impossible to communicate effectively. Adhering to the generic blueprint of the prototypical staging features of a genre is also efficient for those new to a particular social purpose for communicating.

In their publication, *Genre Relations: Mapping Culture*, Martin and Rose (2008) document a set of specialised disciplinary texts to reveal three points that are of interest to this discussion on prototypical staging of genre.

1. Specialised disciplinary fields do not so much employ the prototypical stages of genre, but multiple variations thereof. For example, in science lessons students are required to consume and produce reports and explanations. However, a more delicate analysis of the reports and explanations used and produced in science lessons reveal a range of texts that serve the social purpose of construing classification and composition, such as descriptive reports, classifying reports and compositional reports, and a range of texts that serve the social purpose of construing sequences of activities over time, such as sequential explanations, factorial explanations, consequential explanations, conditional explanations and technological explanations (Martin & Rose, 2008). The points of difference between the range of texts that share the same social function are not made through the creation of entirely new structures but through bringing into prominence ‘structures which already existed but were rather specialised or rare’ (Halliday, 1978, p. 197).
2. Many genres, including recounts, anecdotes, exemplum, observations, narrative, news stories, biographical recounts, historical recounts, historical accounts, historical explanations, expositions, reports, explanations, and procedural recounts, are rarely presented without accompanying illustrations, diagrams, charts, photographs, line drawings and/or maps. All of these images draw on a specialised grammar of design construing particular forms of disciplinary meaning not accounted for in the high stakes Australian National Assessment Program writing task.

3. Real world texts that conform to a prototypical staging of genre tend to be, relatively speaking, rather short. Multiple elemental genres are more often put together to make up larger pieces of text which Martin and Rose (2008, p. 218) call ‘macrogenres’. As a case in point, a geography text book draws on reports, explanations, procedures, procedural recounts and expositions to ‘apprentice students into a hierarchy of knowledge and specialised activities that could eventually give them the power to participate in controlling the natural and social worlds’ (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 225).

Genre should be considered as a working approximation of the text structure possible within a culture and not non-negotiable prescriptions or final statements. Proponents of the ‘Sydney School’ of linguistics advocate that once students have control over the prototypical staging of genre (Martin & Rose, 2008), they need to also develop an appreciation of text difference by being exposed to contexts in which the global text descriptions can be either adapted, challenged, combined, layered or even newly conceived. However, not all students move easily through the various developmental phases from working with prototypical genres to being successfully independent writers with the text types of the real and future worlds.

The importance of a highly skilled teacher with a substantive knowledge base about written language and phases of learning to control the written code, who is also well-practiced in devising clear goals for directing the various learning activities, cannot be overestimated. The assertion is that teaching and learning about more complex understandings of genre and working with real world texts must not remain tacit. The teaching and learning focus needs to provide students with a wide range of tools to analyse the configuration of meanings across the modalities of use.

Scholarly significance of the study

Failing to provide access to the privileged genres of modern institutions such as education, health care, law, finance, science and governance denies individuals access to the power and control mechanisms of society. As Janks (2010, p. 12) documents, issues of access 'are tied to issues of power; to questions of domination and subordination; to processes of legitimation and negation, of inclusion and exclusion'. In the current era of 'knowledge societies', an individual's control over genres of power implicates their social ranking, claim to authority and prominence in civic life. Within specific social situations, access to genre translates into options 'to dominate or defer, to assert or concede authority, and to command attention or pay attention to others' (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 19). Thus, what is included or excluded in teaching and learning in schools is a very real social justice issue for students and their future life choices and life chances, and as such, should be a fundamental concern of teachers.

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Learn more about clone URLs. Download ZIP. #File_processing 7.1 Write a program that prompts for a file name, then opens that file and reads through the file, and print the contents of the file in upper case. Use the file words.txt to produce the output below. You can download the sample data at <http://www.py4e.com/code3/words.txt>. Raw. 7.1.py. Question: Portable Water-filled Barriers (PWFB) (<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/53562> Are Temporary Roadside Appurtenances Used To Keep Errant Vehicles From Penetrating Into Temporary Work Zones On Roadways, As Shown In Fig 1 And Fig 2. Unfilled PWFB Are Lightweight And Easily Transported And Moved. Once An Array Of Road Barriers Is Assembled, They Are Filled With This problem has been solved! Fig 1 Examples of Portable water-filled barriers Figure 2 Vehicle-barrier chain impact (from paper by Izzat and YT) To simplify the study, 1) we consider the impact on 2D plane, as shown in Fig 3; 2) all friction is ignored, meaning the barrier is free to slide on the ground; 3) the vehicle is simplified as a rectangular rigid body. Full-text downloads displays the total number of times this work's files (e.g., a PDF) have been downloaded from QUT ePrints as well as the number of downloads in the previous 365 days. The count includes downloads for all files if a work has more than one. More statistics ID Code If you believe that this work infringes copyright please provide details by email to qut.copyright@qut.edu.au. Deposited On: 21 Apr 2021 02:00.