

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE UTILITY OF CLASSIFICATION AND FRAMING FOR ANALYSING CLASSROOM PRACTICES WITH A FOCUS ON CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Bernsteinian concepts of classification and framing are proposed for the analysis of the inclusive practices involved in the organisation and communication in classrooms. The assumption is that the processes of construction of shared understanding and communication between teacher/students with SEN and students/students with SEN may vary as a function of the different structure and organisation of schools. Structural and interactional descriptions of classrooms – as an analysis on micro-level - may provide a description and exploration of the consequences for students with special educational needs based on different forms of social organisation.

KEY WORDS: Bernstein, Structure, Pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Several studies (Valas, 1999; Ayres et al, 1990; Chapman, 1988; Cooley & Ayres, 1988; Gans et al, 2003) tend to highlight the problems that students with special educational needs may encounter in mainstream schools. These studies investigate the academic and socio-emotional functioning of students with special educational needs (Ruijs et al., 2010) and whether labelled students experience low academic achievement, poor peer acceptance, loneliness, low self-confidence, and depression (Valas, 1999; Kistner et al, 1987; Ayres et al, 1990; Durrant et al, 1990; Chapman, 1988; Mayberry, 1989; Grolnick et al, 1990; Cooley & Ayres, 1988; Bakker et al, 2007; Gans et al, 2003). It will be interesting to look into how learning based differences and school's pedagogic practices affect students with special educational needs in specific pedagogic modes. Although considering Vygotsky's theory (1978) on how close are the developmental processes to the ways children formulate their thinking and speech about the reality around them and how they socialise their thinking, the theoretical framework discussed here highlights the role of and speciality of a context in Bernstein's pedagogic modes and practices (1990, 2000). Bernstein's theory could shed light on how symbolic control and its relation to the social organisation of the classroom in terms of the material culture and practices mediate the assumptions of the school so as to position students differentially according to their level of ability. It would be interesting to examine how principles of control over the organisation of classroom and differentiation of pedagogic modes could produce variations in the communication of students with special educational needs and their peers through classification and framing values. The understanding of the different effects on students with special educational needs in the educational context requires an analysis of Bernstein's pedagogic modes.

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Bernstein and Special Educational Needs

Bernstein's theory of classification and framing is essential for exploring the experiences of students with special educational needs in classrooms with different pedagogic modes. Bernstein (1990) describes schools as structured agencies of cultural transmission with ways in which pedagogic structures are generated according to schools' organising principles. The assumption is that the processes of construction of shared understanding and communication between students with special educational needs and their peers may vary as a function of the different structure and organisation of schools. Structural and interactional descriptions of classrooms may provide an investigation of the consequences for students with special educational needs based on different forms of social organisation. In this respect, Bernstein (1975) examined the differences between two pedagogies the visible and the invisible and the differences in the values of classification and framing of each pedagogic practice. Bernstein's analysis of strong and weak classification and framing clearly demonstrates how knowledge is organised and transmitted through different pedagogic practices inside schools and the consequences of these practices on the acquirers of knowledge. Bernstein offers a theoretical framework for investigating the characteristics of pedagogic modes with strong or weak values of classification and framing and analyses relations of power and control at the micro level of the classroom.

General Model of Cultural Transmission

Bernstein's (1990) model of cultural transmission describes schools as structured agencies of cultural transmission with ways in which pedagogic structures are generated according to schools' organising principles. The distinction made by Bernstein refers to 'instructional' and 'regulative' discourse and both these aspects of pedagogic discourse are described in terms of strong/weak classification and framing concepts (Moore et al., 2006).

The assumption is that the processes of construction of shared understanding and communication between teacher/SEN students and SEN students/students may vary as a function of the different structure and organisation of schools. Structural and interactional descriptions of classrooms – as an analysis on micro- ‘interactional level’ (Daniels, 2006) - may provide a description and exploration of the consequences for SEN students based on different forms of social organisation. Bernstein’s model suggests that semiotic signs play a vital role in structuring both pedagogic practices and the perceptions of students and teachers that involve in those practices. Bernstein’s principles of cultural transmission incorporate in the structure of the different modes of pedagogic practices. It is essential to investigate the mechanisms by which schools/classrooms send messages to teachers and students and how both incorporate these messages to their perceptions, behaviours and social practices. These underlying messages /principles are important in all forms of pedagogic practice. The role of these messages in mediating the different constructions of linguistic and non-linguistic communication in the classroom becomes possible to see through the distribution of control and principles of control in schools as structured agencies of cultural transmission.

More specifically, Bernstein (1990) examines the distribution of power at the organisational level and the principles of control it produces at the interactional level managing the relations within agencies and between agencies. The distribution of power at the organisational level determines the relations between categories of agencies in terms of the degree of insulation from each other and develops the speciality of the context. The interactional level is explored in terms of the category relations within an agency, i.e. between transmitters and acquirers, between transmitters and between acquirers, which refers to the development of the specialised relationships within a context. The distribution of power and the principles of control are related to the different types of codes that regulate the relationships between and within contexts. Recognition rules is a function of power relations between contexts in order to differentiate between contexts and realization rules is a function of control principles within a context for regulating the development of specialised relations within a context. This analysis attempts to show the distribution of power into classificatory values which control recognition rules and the assimilation of principles of control into framing values which control realization rules.

Bernstein (1975) explains that any changes in the distribution of power and procedures of control associate with the degree of how strong or weak the principles of classification and framing become. Any changes in the distribution of power produce differentiation in the degree of how strong or weak are the boundaries between the categories of classification. Modified procedures of control produce changes in the social relations of pedagogic practices and different degrees of control over the rules of communication between transmitters and acquirers. Bernstein uses the principle of classification to explain the social division of labour and the principle of framing to analyse the relations between its positions and categories as given by the degree of insulation. The degree of insulation maintains social order at the level of agencies i.e. school, family, and state and agents, i.e. transmitters, acquirers. In the case of school, the social division of labour refers to the social division

of teachers, students, discourses and practices and furthermore, to the social division of pedagogic practices between the school and the family. Bernstein (1990:13) considers that any position in the social division of labour associates with the degree of insulation and specialisation between positions. Strongly insulated relations between positions develop specialised practices, clearly marked boundaries and fixed identities as opposed to weak insulation where practices are integrated, boundaries are open and identities are less indistinct and hierarchical in character.

Classification and Framing Rules of Pedagogic Practices

Bernstein (1981) explains the principle of classification as the degree of boundary in the relations between categories and the nature of the differentiation between categories. Strong classification exists when categories are well insulated from each other as opposed to the reduced insulation between categories and its translation to weak classification. Bernstein (1990:100) provides boundary strength as the distinctive characteristic of the division of labour into the classificatory principle and frame as a function that regulates the development of specialised relationships between categories, i.e. teachers, students, contexts, discourses and practices. Social relations between categories are subject to framing and its principles of control over the selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria of the communicative practices (Bernstein, 1975:89). Where framing is strong, the transmitter possesses more control over the criteria which regulate the communicative practices in the pedagogic relationship. Where framing is weak, the acquirer possesses explicit control over the organisation and the selection of criteria in the pedagogic relationship.

Bernstein (1975) explains that in the pedagogical relationship of transmitter and acquirer, framing is concerned with the context in which knowledge is transmitted through pedagogic practices whereas classification refers to the organisation of knowledge into curriculum. Furthermore, strong degree of framing refers to clear boundaries over the degree of control teacher and student own over the knowledge transmitted and weak framing relates to indistinct boundaries in the control of the knowledge transmitted. It is possible to see that distribution of power in classificatory values and principles of control in framing values could investigate what counts as educational practices in the organisational and interactional level of school. As Bernstein (1973b) suggests, curriculum and pedagogy are message systems which constitute the organisation and practices of school knowledge and the strength of their classificatory and framing values may vary independently of each other.

The principles of classification and framing can be referred to the effects of the mechanisms of power and control over the identities students with special educational needs construct as subjects to particular pedagogic practices exercised by students and teachers. Stratifying practices of transmission for students with special educational needs in mainstream schools may produce explicit stratifying differences between students which may result to the hierarchic ordering of students in the classroom. The hierarchic ordering of students with special educational needs in the classroom may become explicit by special educational resources, individual educational plans,

statement of special needs, teaching assistants, rigidity in the organisation of teaching groups and special provision for their emotional and social functioning. These principles of control and power incorporate in implicit or explicit devices of communication which create specific educational identities, categorise students with special educational needs in specific group abilities developing particular competences and behaving in particular ways. The pedagogic practices that promote a rigid, clearly bounded, hierarchical education with fixed educational identities, marked skills and specified levels of ability relate to structurally determined power relations and through which students with special educational needs are positioned and identified in visible and invisible pedagogies.

Pedagogic Practices: Visible and Invisible

Bernstein (1990) distinguishes between dichotomous pedagogic practices, the visible pedagogies with stratifying differences of knowledge transmission and explicit hierarchical, pacing and criterial rules and conversely, invisible pedagogies with no standardised criteria of diagnosis, evaluation and categorisation of students. Visible pedagogies are concerned to produce explicit criteria for emphasising differences upon the academic performance of students. Thus, the status in a visible pedagogy is made explicit by streaming, examining and grading students to the extent that they meet the criteria. There are explicit hierarchical, sequencing, criterial and evaluation rules that produce comparisons between students, classify them in fixed ability groups and determine 'what is considered a communication, a social relation, and a legitimate or illegitimate position' (Morais, 2002:562). Each student's profile is established through an explicit measurement of performance and competencies and is compared to normal standards of ability.

The evaluation of students with special educational needs in a visible pedagogy would be ritualised and strongly classified and would make their needs more visible in the classroom. The hierarchical rules are explicit and the power relations in the relationship of teacher/student are apparent. In this case, teacher has maximal control or surveillance over the hierarchical placement of students in the class and differentiation of students with special educational needs upon all school subjects exist. Where sequencing rules are visible, students are expected to develop particular skills and to behave in standardised ways. These rules are inscribed in curricula, syllabi, rules of punishment and reward and permit considerable differences in teaching practices and examining styles of students. The rules of social order are clearly defined and students need to obey to explicit rules of control. Practices of exclusion and punishment operate as procedures of control necessary to sustain clearly marked boundaries in the educational relationship. Explicit regulative and discursive rules form an authority relationship between the teacher and student and the identification and placement of students with special educational needs in the classroom becomes clearly marked.

The power and control upon the description, diagnosis and transferability in visible pedagogies is part of a standardised education with a hierarchical structure of knowledge and stratifying procedures of transmission and acquisition of knowledge for different groups of students.

Where visible pedagogies emphasise procedures of transmission and performance, invisible pedagogies highlight practices of acquisition and competence of acquirers. In invisible pedagogies emphasis is given on the progression of a person (Bernstein, 1975:130) where less value is placed on academic achievement and more on the personal and emotional development of students with special educational needs. Invisible pedagogies are less concerned to develop differences between students based on their competencies and a shared pedagogy and common teaching practice develops. An integrated underlying idea of pedagogy weakens the hierarchical positioning of students and exhibits flexibility in teaching students with special educational needs. The integrated idea of common practice of teaching places students with special needs as part of a greater whole in the classroom and there is a minimum external constraint on the criterial rules that students need to meet in the context where knowledge is transmitted and acquired. A close relation of communication between teacher and student in a more open environment where regulative, discursive and criterial rules develop implicitly, would make knowledge for students with special needs more meaningful, and comprehensible. Moreover, less ritualised, inflexible and differentiating pedagogical practices would generate cooperative patterns of social relationships between students with special needs and their peers in the classroom. Students with confidence who engaged in shared, cooperative tasks were also able to deal with the academic subjects of the curriculum (Thacker et al., 2002). It therefore would be interesting to explore how students with special educational needs experience the regulative control of different pedagogic modes and how these modes are projected by teachers' pedagogic discourses.

Competence and Performance Modes of Pedagogy

Bernstein's (2000) theory of recontextualization suggests different pedagogic practices which promote knowledge and addressed to different types of learners. In social organisations with strong classification and framing the recontextualization of knowledge that takes place gives student little status and few rights over the organisation of knowledge. In social organisations with weak classification and framing social and curricular integration of students exists and knowledge develops in a content openness. Social organisation in the classroom is analysed according to recognition and realisation rules as functions of classification and framing respectively and the quality of pedagogic discourse and practice would show different aspects of how knowledge is organised in a particular context and the degree of control over context organisation.

Competence model and performance model are two pedagogic models that according to Bernstein represent recontextualized knowledge (Bernstein, 2000). Competence model focuses on behaviour as part of social relations and performance model refers to behaviors which are products of social organisations and hierarchical social relations. Principles of weak classification and framing exist in competence model where less disciplinary and hierarchical criteria control students, and their behaviors are based upon cognitive, linguistic, emotional procedures produced internally to each student. Where knowledge is reconstructed in a competence pedagogic mode, shared, cooperative pedagogic activities and less screening and

differentiation on ability level exist in the placement of students in the classroom. Common values that exist in the pedagogic practices may affect the acceptance of diversity and may implement inclusive practices for students with special needs. This mode fosters students to work in harmony with their peers in order to produce their own works without any rule following. Students have more space and freedom in the construction of knowledge based on their inner abilities. The experience of pedagogic modes on students with special needs may now reside as much in social meanings underlying pedagogic practices as embedded in groupings, tasks, objects, modes of communication (gesture, posture, and gaze), spatial organisation, and visual displays in classrooms.

Performance models tend to be strongly classified and framed with explicit criteria regulating how students reproduce knowledge. This mode promotes specialised knowledge which produces educational identities and specific skills emphasising differentiation between students rather than commonality. Order arises out of an explicit criterial system that controls students' works characterised by homogeneity. The systematic differentiation of students in categories of different abilities and the hierarchical nature of the authority relationship between teacher and student suppress students' inner abilities and self-organisation and restrain their freedom of cooperation with peers. In a context where performance model prevails, the special needs of students would become more visible and would be labelled as diverse group of learners. The performance of students with special educational needs would depend upon fixed criteria of assessment and teacher's surveillance would limit their spaces for discussing and sharing ideas with peers.

A further refinement in positioning the structural and interactional practices of a specific pedagogic mode in schools may be analysed in Bernstein's (2000) dichotomy of collection and integrated type of curriculum as may incorporate in specific structures of schooling. This could examine how students experience different pedagogic modes through the analysis of curriculum.

Collection and Integrated type of Curriculum

Curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation constitute the organisation, transmission and practice in the production of knowledge inside schools. Bernstein (1973b:85) explains that "Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realization of the knowledge on the part of the taught". Bernstein analyses the collection and integrated type of curriculum in terms of the concepts of classification, framing and evaluation which affect the content of curriculum to be transmitted and determine different power relations between the students and the teachers. The collection type of curriculum develops in strongly classified and framed educational contexts as opposed to the integrated type of curriculum which is found in a weakly classified and framed context. These practices should be helpful in investigating if students with special educational needs are integrated or experience exclusion in diverse educational contexts. The collection type of curriculum supports content closure and produces specialised knowledge and specific competences in students.

The status in a collection curriculum is based on the explicit criteria of streaming, assessing and rating student's academic performance. Under this type of curriculum, knowledge is transmitted in an environment where the teacher has control over how and what is being taught. The contents of curriculum are clearly bounded and distinguish from each other and the syllabus for a given content belongs to the teachers who teach it and evaluate it. This type of curriculum produces specialised skills and specific educational identities to students. Specialised knowledge is structured around subjects close to each other and student exhibits little control over the criteria of organisation and selection of knowledge. In addition, the educational relationship between teacher and student tends to be hierarchical with teacher possessing maximal control over what, when and how knowledge is produced and transmitted. The different hierarchies of specialised education become stronger and teachers of different contents are divided and insulated from each other. A similar situation may develop in students when they do not engage in shared, cooperative tasks and differentiate on the level of abilities. For students with special educational needs, such strong classification and framing would introduce a hierarchical ordering in the ways students are distinguished in the classroom and differentiation by assistance and special resources would categorise them as diverse learners.

The essential difference in integrated curriculum centres on the main idea towards a common pedagogy and a common practice of teaching practices for all students. The contents of curriculum are open to each other and the underlying concept of commonality is emphasised. Students possess control in the educational relationship with the teacher and there is more flexibility in the organisation of teaching groups. Integrated curriculum engages students in cooperative learning tasks and the differentiation and classification of students on ability level is reduced. Moreover, teachers are not separated to subject hierarchies but they all share a common educational idea which promotes cooperation and unity. The integrated type of curriculum is legitimised by notions of openness and focuses on how knowledge is produced and transmitted by integrating students with different skills and needs in inclusive pedagogic modes.

Conclusion

Bernstein's work on the social division of teachers, students, discourses and practices allows the analysis of how power and control develop specialised practices, clearly marked boundaries and fixed identities as opposed to weak insulation where practices are integrated, boundaries are open and identities are less hierarchical in character. The mechanisms of power and control in rules of classification and framing produce the identities students with special educational needs construct as subjects to visible and invisible pedagogic practices exercised in particular pedagogic modes. Explicit stratifying differences in specific pedagogies result to the hierarchic ordering and differentiation of students with special needs in the classroom. Special educational resources, individual educational plans, statement of special needs, teaching assistants, rigidity in the organisation of teaching groups and special provision for the emotional and social functioning of students with special educational needs are some of the practices which place students in a continuous

process of monitoring, assessment and identification. Children with special educational needs will be controlled in different ways according to different pedagogic modes based on two opposing forms of power and control within any classroom or institution. The forms of control and power in educational contexts determine the individuality and identity of students with special needs who become socially accepted or socially rejected in the consolidated educational system. This legitimises the exploration to the inner world of the child to see whether he or she feels content and secure in the specific pedagogic environment.

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