

'WE DON'T DO ANYTHING': ANALYZING THE CONSTRUCTION OF LEGITIMATE  
KNOWLEDGE IN MULTILINGUAL SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways in which what counts as *legitimate* knowledge is produced and negotiated in two multilingual classrooms of two different programs designed to “attend to diversity” at secondary schools in the Madrid region. Following a sociolinguistic approach, the article focuses on the ways in which local identities, beliefs and social relations emerging from situated practice become a window through which to understand how different social experiences and academic trajectories are institutionally constructed in connection with broader social processes. For this reason, the article seeks to connect recorded and observed classroom interactional patterns, through which *legitimate* knowledge is produced, with social actors’ (teachers and students) positioning-s, and the academic trajectories of students enrolled in such programs. We end with a discussion about the possible consequences of such practices for migrant students, recently arrived in the Madrid classrooms, in terms of academic success and school participation.

KEY WORDS: Sociolinguistic Ethnography, legitimate knowledge, multilingual schools, Spain, immigrant students, social interaction.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The recent demographic transformation of classrooms in the Madrid region has created a laboratory for studying policy makers' responses to the new cultural and linguistically diverse socio-educational context (Martín Rojo, et al., 2003; Martín Rojo and Mijares 2007; Poveda 2011; Martín Rojo 2010; Relaño-Pastor 2009). Central to these responses is the question about what type of knowledge newly arrived students should have in order to participate in their host schools. Knowledge in education is usually seen as a matter of assessment criteria, pedagogical aims, teaching and learning strategies, as well as teacher training techniques. This article studies the ways legitimate knowledge is produced and negotiated in the local practices of two multilingual and multicultural secondary schools in Madrid, *Violetas* and *Evangelista*<sup>1</sup>, in connection with the students' display of certain forms of social positioning and their academic trajectories. Our attention is drawn to the study of *participation* within different programs where students of migrant backgrounds are concentrated for various reasons, such as not knowing the language of instruction, Castilian Spanish, or the local curricular content. The study of the construction of legitimate knowledge means taking into account who the authorized agents are, who embodies knowledge, what communicative resources are used to validate classroom practices, and what the interactional consequences are for the participation of newcomers in these programs in the Spanish education system. In this regard, the local study of participation is linked to wider processes, taking into account the institutional mediation between local and social orders in the shaping, production and reproduction of such processes (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001).

Data were gathered through ethnographic sociolinguistic research, involving fieldwork in various multilingual secondary schools in Madrid between 2003 and 2007. For the purposes of the present article two of these schools were selected, as explained in the next sections. The results of this research showed the impact of the recent multilingual make-up of

certain classrooms in Madrid due the rapid demographic transformation in the last decade, and documented the ways in which multilingualism was managed by participants in local educational practices, as well as the consequences of such practices for participants, in terms of academic success and social participation among newcomers (Martín Rojo 2010; Alcalá 2010; Patino-Santos 2009; 2011; Rasskin, 2012 ; Pérez-Milans 2007; 2011; Relaño-Pastor 2009)<sup>2</sup>

The following section provides a literature review of how knowledge has been studied in critical discourse studies of language and education, including our theoretical perspective and the analytical tools employed in our sociolinguistic ethnography approach. In section 3, we introduce the context of our ethnographic research, and section 4 analyzes what counts as legitimate knowledge and how it is produced in a Spanish-as-a-Second-Language class, or Bridging Class (Aula de Enlace), in Violetas secondary school. After that, section 5 focuses on how legitimate knowledge is managed in the mainstream Social Studies class in Evangelista, which is the school with the largest number of students of migrant background in our corpus. Finally, section 6 concludes with a discussion of the possible implications emerging from the analysis, with emphasis on the links between the participation frameworks legitimated in these two school programs and the social relations and categories co-constructed by students and teachers, in the context of these academic trajectories of students attending such programs.

## 2. SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

Educational knowledge has usually been addressed as a matter of assessment criteria, pedagogical aims, teaching and learning strategies, as well as teacher training techniques (see, for example, Blumenfeld 1992; Goodlad 1984/2004; Sangpil 2005). Our questions concerning knowledge follow a quite different approach. By drawing on the perspective of a critical sociolinguistic ethnography in education (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Blommaert &

Makoe 2012; Goldstein 2003; Heller 1999/2006, 2011; Heller & Martin-Jones 2001; Martín-Rojo 2010; Patino-Santos 2011; Pérez-Milans 2013), we conceptualize knowledge as a body of practices, norms and values that are (re)constituted in daily life under specific socio-economic and historical conditions. In other words, we study knowledge in relation to critique (Blommaert 2001) and interaction.

Concerning critique we are interested in the construction of what counts as *legitimate* knowledge; that is, we inquire into the forms of knowledge that are considered acceptable or appropriate. From this perspective, understanding what counts as knowledge implies giving account of the social categories, meanings and social relations that emerge under the contingent conditions of a situated context. As for interaction, we focus on the local processes by which these categories, meanings and social relations are negotiated by teachers and students in the moment-to-moment of the classroom activities.

In this regard, sociolinguistic ethnography with a critical perspective provides us with a lens to identify links between everyday talk, interactional routines carried out in institutions and wider social, ideological and historical processes (Heller 1999/2006; Martin-Jones 2007). It shares with disciplines such as ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967) and poststructural sociology (Bourdieu 1982; Giddens 1984) the concern of understanding how social categories and relationships are produced, reproduced, but also potentially transformed, in daily practices. These ideas have brought to the fore the central role of language in the constitution of society by acknowledging that it is through language in action that we construct common ways of relating to each other and to the material world, on the basis of which we “can define social categories (who is expected to do what, have what interests, wield what kinds of power) and confront and organize new experience” (Heller 2001b: 215).

Such critical and situated stances are particularly relevant in the school, a key state institution where the construction of knowledge cannot be detached from the social and

discursive processes by which the ideological framework of the modern nation-state is institutionalized, reproduced, naturalized, and contested/transformed (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). School represents a mandatory institution where individuals are socialized into the set of conventionalized (linguistic and behavioral) norms, rules and appropriate knowledge (Mehan 1987; Wortham 2003) upon which social order is historically (re)produced in each context.

Consequently, by paying attention to the daily interactional rituals of classrooms we can give an account of not only the ways teachers and students carry out the task of education, but also of the particular interpretations, identities, beliefs, social relations and understandings that emerge from the participants' forms of local positioning. If traced through the space/time of specific school participants, these local identities, beliefs and social relations emerging from situated practice become a window through which to see how different social experiences and academic trajectories are institutionally constructed in connection with broader and more complex social processes. On the basis of these fundamental considerations, we are specifically concerned with the following three questions about the production of legitimate knowledge in the communicative practices of two classrooms in the Madrid Region:

- How is legitimate knowledge produced and co-constructed?
- What forms of legitimate knowledge are produced in the interaction, with what consequences for those participating in these particular educational practices?
- What social categories, regarding the participants and the situation, emerge in these interactional routines, and what do they reveal about the social positions and interests involved, in connection with broader social processes?

Previous studies have pointed out that, when aiming to link what happens in local interactions with the broader significance of these interactions, one of the main empirical challenges is to create ways of relating ethnography to interactional data (see Martin-Jones 2007). In this regard, we draw on the concept of situated interaction (Gumperz 1982) to go beyond the here-and-now of the immediate action, in order to include ethnographically informed data in our analysis (as will be described in Section 3). For the particular purposes of this article, we pay attention to the study of *participation*, which is understood as “the forms of involvement performed by parties within evolving structures of talk” (Goodwin & Goodwin 2004:222). Within this analytical framework, we specifically draw on the notion of *participation framework* (Goffman 1981:137) as it allows us to describe how relations and meanings emerge from the social organization of talk (who does what, when, through what semiotic resources and with what consequences in the course of the action). Following Goodwin & Goodwin, participation involves attending to the ways in which it is embedded in “coordinated task activities” (p. 223) performed by multiple parties.

For this reason, our analysis focuses, mainly, on the sequential organization of talk involved in the different activities, routines, tasks and norms (Cazden 1998) and the participation structures (Philips 1972) performed by participants in the classroom. Thus, we examine how turn-taking is organized, since “looking at turn-taking allows us to see who the legitimate speakers are, what the legitimate forms are, and how these forms are used to regulate both access to knowledge and displays of knowledge” (Heller 2001a: 399). Similarly, we consider question-answer sequences among teachers and students, asking whether they are “factual” or “opinion” sequences (Tsui 1995), observing the possible implications of their use when dealing with what is being validated within the interaction. These are resources enabling us to explain the foregrounding and backgrounding processes of knowledge in different teaching/learning events (Martin-Jones 2007).

Students' responses to the production of legitimate knowledge are also explored in detail via an ethnographically documented description of the ways in which they deal with the required participation frameworks. Such ways include creative and agentic responses through which they position themselves in disalignment with (or aside from) the forms of knowledge legitimated by the teachers, as has been widely documented in previous studies carried out in different contexts (see D'Amato 1993; Hurd 2004; Rampton 1995, 2006; Jaspers 2005; Jørgensen 2005).

In the following section we provide some context for the fieldwork that we conducted in Madrid, before turning to a more detailed analysis of two classroom interactions from our data corpus.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF SITES AND DATA

Data for this paper were collected as part of a multi-team sociolinguistic ethnography at three public secondary schools in the south of Madrid, *Jardines*<sup>3</sup>, *Planetas*, *Violetas*, and, one in the center of the city, *Evangelista* (all pseudonyms) during the period 2003-2007. These schools were chosen because of the high percentage of linguistically diverse students as well as the number of educational programs that were supposedly specifically designed to attend to their needs. Three of these schools (*Jardines*, *Planetas* and *Violetas*) were located in traditionally working class areas, whose neighborhoods had increasingly changed demographically in the previous decades due to the settlement of different migrant communities, from Latin America (particularly Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia), Eastern Europe (mostly from Romania and Poland), North Africa (mostly from Morocco and Guinea) and Asia (mostly from China). *Evangelista* was the only school located in the center of Madrid, in a highly transited area, that had quickly become home to migrant communities from China, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic.

Particularly, in *Evangelista*, 83% of the student population came from Latin America, the majority being from Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Colombia. For more details concerning these schools' ethnic compositions, see Patino-Santos (2010, p. 97).

The corpus comprised a total of 58 audio and video recordings of classroom interactions in classes of Spanish language, History, Geography, Maths, as well as in Spanish as a Second Language classes aimed at newcomers. In addition there were 35 in-depth interviews with teachers, school governors and students, as well as two focus groups of school heads and teachers, and three with students from the same schools. All of our data were collected respecting the linguistic repertoires of our participants, mostly Spanish, but also other languages and linguistic varieties used by some students in the classroom. In addition, as part of the data triangulation process, we studied the researchers' field diaries, field notes, classroom materials, and official documents provided by the different schools. The target classrooms correspond to the second year of Compulsory Secondary Education or 2° ESO (Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria – *Compulsory Secondary School*). In this article we analyze two interactions prototypical of the ways legitimate knowledge was co-constructed, validated, and negotiated over the course of the conversational history of students with a migrant background and their teachers in *Violetas* and *Evangelista* schools. All participants in our ethnography signed consent forms before we started our fieldwork.

Three different programs were implemented at these schools with the aim of catering for culturally and linguistically diverse students - namely, Compensatory Education, Bridging classes, and Curricular Tracking Programs. Compensatory Education (Educación Compensatoria) targets socially disadvantaged students, guarantees access to education and supports them up to secondary school graduation. Initially designed to compensate for the educational deficiencies of students of Roma background, a group considered "at social risk" by policy makers, during the late 1990s, Compensatory Education started to include students



of migrant backgrounds, mainly those who did not know the language of instruction. Today it is one of the programs with the greatest concentration of immigrant workers' children in the Madrid Region (Martín Rojo 2010). The Bridging classes, which started in 2003 as part of a Welcome Program (Escuelas de Bienvenida) were aimed at addressing the linguistic and academic needs of newcomers who did not speak Spanish or share the basic knowledge of the host education system. Students attended these parallel classes for a period of no less than nine months and in some cases over two academic years before being placed in the mainstream classrooms. The Curricular Tracking Programs are intended to help students over 16 with learning difficulties to fulfill the general objectives of basic Compulsory Secondary Education. Through a particular methodology and content simplification in two different areas (science/technology and language), the students sent to these programs receive lessons in classrooms outside the mainstream with a view to meeting the program's objectives. In some schools, this program also has a concentration of students of migrant backgrounds (Martín Rojo, 2010).

Let us now turn our attention to the two focus schools, *Violetas* and *Evangelista*, with the aim of presenting our analysis of 'legitimate knowledge'.

#### 4. *VIOLETAS* SECONDARY SCHOOL

*Violetas* secondary school had 600 students at the time of our study. Of these, 88 were of migrant backgrounds, making up roughly 15 % of the total student body. This percentage was higher than in other schools in the region. Of these 88 students of migrant backgrounds, 14 were classified by their teachers as students with compensatory educational needs and received support through *Compensatory Education*, *Curricular Tracking* and the *Bridging Class* programs. We focus on one Spanish as a Second language class (Bridging class program) we observed during the first year of our study. This class consisted of two local

teachers and a group of nine students aged 14 to 17 years at the time of the research; among these students, three were from China, three from Morocco, one from the Ukraine and two from Brazil.

#### 4.1. Easy Spanish, Word by Word

When we carried out our research on the teaching of Spanish as a second language (SSL) in Bridging classes in *Violetas*, there was no official curriculum in these classes. Teachers were left without any institutional guidance, which, in the context of our study, meant that they had to design their own syllabus, choose materials and plan the lessons based on their “intuitions” about second language teaching rather than on well-defined academic criteria (Pérez-Milans, 2007). The topics chosen during one academic year in this language class were as follows: greetings, requests and basic instructions, parts of the body, city maps, medical services, public transport, the market and jobs. While these seem to provide a crucial repertoire for what students would need in daily life outside the school, our ethnographic fieldwork showed that the students sensed these choices as “non-serious enough”, or simply not academically oriented. In their perspective, these topics were not related to the content knowledge required in the mainstream classrooms where they were later sent.

Extract 1 provides an illustrative example of one activity in the Bridging Class where one of the two teachers involved, Victoria, in her mid-thirties, and three students, Gaosheng (a male from China), Aisha (a female from Morocco), and Rodrigo (a male from Brazil), coordinate their actions around the classification of a list of 21 words under three headings: “shop,” “job” and “place of work”. As part of the “jobs” unit of work, the students in this activity were required to identify each of these word categories with a different color (red, black or blue).

**Extract 1<sup>(4)</sup>**

1 **Victoria:** SCIENTIST {looking at her sheet}

2 **Aisha:** {looks at her sheet and then at the teacher} (scientist)<sup>o</sup>

3 **Victoria:** {to Aisha} there's one whose name is Ramón y

4 Cajal / name / {looks down at her sheet} isn't there?

5 {Rodrigo takes a marker and seems to circle on his paper}

6 **Aisha:** {looking at her sheet} yes

7 **Victoria:** {to Aisha} what is a scientist? / is it a shop?

8 **Aisha:** {looking at the teacher} no

9 **Victoria:** {shakes her head looking at the sheet} what is it?

10 **Aisha:** {looking at her sheet} it's &

11 {Gaosheng, in the meantime, is staring at his sheet, and Rodrigo, leaning back on his chair, looks

12 at Victoria and at Aisha}

13 **Victoria:** {to Gaosheng} what is a scientist? {she takes the Chinese-Spanish dictionary in the

14 classroom and starts looking it up}

15 {Gaosheng keeps looking at his sheet}

16 **Rodrigo:** (( ))<sup>o</sup>

17 **Victoria:** tell me {she continues to look it up in the dictionary} (4<sup>o</sup>) {she stops looking it up and

18 looks at Gaosheng } what is it out of these three!?! / see / you only have to- RED BLUE OR-OR

19 BLACK!

20 **Gaosheng:** {to the teacher} (blue)<sup>o</sup>

21 **Victoria:** well come on! / of course! (10<sup>o</sup>) {she continues looking it up in the dictionary}

22 {Gaosheng and Aisha circle their sheets; Rodrigo is still leaning back on his chair playing with

23 his pen}

24 **Victoria:** (let's see / look)<sup>o</sup> {she finds the word in the dictionary and shows it to Gaosheng}(8<sup>o</sup>)

25 [OK?]

26 **Aisha:** [the painter Goya]

- 27 **Victoria:** {looking at the dictionary}= scientist / yes?  
28 {Gaosheng nods his head while looking at the dictionary}  
29 **Victoria:** let's go on  
30 **Aisha:** {to the teacher} the pain ter Goia  
31 **Victoria:** {to Aisha} GOYA

*Ethnographic observation and recording by Pérez-Milans [UI\_2-3v\_V200404A\_b]*

As this example shows, classroom activities in the Bridging Class rested on a pattern of very well defined “participation structures” (Philips 1972), characterized by a teacher-centered interactional style. The teacher allocated turns, directed the questions, requested answers from students, and expected students to conform to the participation structure established in the classroom. In fact, interactional sequences hinging on instructions for performing tasks and explanations to elicit knowledge predominated within the corpus of audio-recordings of classroom interactions in the Bridging Class. In particular, our data show how a recurring sequence was constructed collaboratively by the participants in the course of the activity around each one of the words on the list.

The sequence started with the teacher asking for the word in question. After this, there would be a reply from the students. Then, the teacher would ask about which color, out of three options, would best match the word, and students would respond by circling the word in the corresponding color on their photocopies.

In Extract 1, it is particularly interesting to note how this recurrent sequence is interactionally expanded and how this expansion signals what counts as legitimate knowledge in the activity and what subsequent forms of social positioning emerge on the part of the participants.

The sequence starts with the teacher reading the word ‘scientist’, which plays in the interaction the function of indicating the beginning of the elicitation sequence of knowledge (line 1). This opening is followed very quickly and spontaneously by Aisha, who

immediately gets the teacher's attention (see exchanges between Aisha and Victoria, in lines 1-10). However, Gaosheng's interactional disengagement soon leads to a shift in the participation framework.

While Victoria and Aisha engage in question-answer exchanges under the visual attention of Rodrigo, Gaosheng is the only student who is staring at his paper (lines 11-12). The teacher immediately leaves the on-going elicitation sequence unfinished in order to redirect the posted question to Gaosheng (line 13). This relocation points to an understanding of Gaosheng's form of non-verbal participation as a cue of lack of understanding, from the perspective of the teacher, which is later ratified by Victoria's reaction of looking the word up in the Spanish-Chinese dictionary (lines 13-14), and showing the definition to Gaosheng (line 28). The teacher's interpretation of Gaosheng's form of engagement is also reinforced in what follows during the rest of the activity.

After the question has been redirected, Gaosheng keeps looking at his sheet without providing any verbal response (line 15), this time resulting in the repetition of Victoria's request -"tell me"-, which overrides the whispered intervention by Rodrigo (line 16) and requires Gaosheng to label the word "scientist" under one of the available categories in the exercise (line 17). Since Gaosheng does not reply, the teacher becomes more impatient and rephrases the question in a more direct way, raising her voice (lines 18-19). This finally produces a timid verbal response from Gaosheng, who provides the corresponding color (line 20), immediately confirmed by Victoria (line 21) as a further request for Gaosheng to circle the word with the indicated color (see lines 21-23).

It is only at this moment that the teacher shows Gaosheng the definition in the dictionary by a soft command -"let's see / look" – thereby relegating the task of defining the word to a secondary place in favor of categorizing and circling, which become the primary task. Once Gaosheng circles the word by using the appropriate color, the ending of the sequence is

initiated by Aisha, who forces the transition to the next word by reading aloud twice (lines 27 and 31). This transition does not take place until the teacher makes it (line 32).

This analysis shows a participation framework heavily controlled by the teacher with implications for the types of non-verbal responses students deliver. Here, the action is geared towards vocabulary that students must group into three categories by circling them with colored markers. The students' participation space in the activity is limited. On the one hand, students only respond individually to the teacher's request, for example, to closed questions about the category of each word. On the other hand, they have to circle each word with the appropriate color. Furthermore, the teacher expects students to show their understanding, which emerges as a pattern of non-verbal participation (eye-gaze) during most of the interaction. This emphasis on expressing mutual understanding also emerged from the interviews with Victoria, where she stated "the most important thing here is that the children communicate, I don't care how but they need to understand us, especially through oral language of course" [Interview with Victoria].

In particular, Extract 1 shows how the students position themselves and are positioned by the teacher differently according to the possibilities offered by this established participation framework, resulting in the emergence of distinct social categories. Gaosheng, with his physical positioning, lack of eye contact and oral participation, is placed at the center of the interaction. The teacher targets him in every participation turn, questions him and looks at him insistently. As a result of this participation framework, he is socially categorized as the poorest language learner in the focus activity – even though he performed better in all writing activities than his peers (see Pérez-Milans 2011, for a detailed analysis of the interactional and discursive categorization of the Chinese students in this Bridging Class).

This pattern also allows us to understand the positioning of Aisha, who makes use of the available spaces and resources (including eye-gaze, repetitions of some of the teacher's turns,

answers to questions not directed at any specific participant, and jumping ahead to the next words on the list) in order to avoid being categorized as a “poor learner.” She is constantly getting the teacher’s attention and positive feedback. Finally, Rodrigo, who was labeled as an advanced student by his teachers, manages to position himself as such in this interaction by enacting boredom- leaning back on the chair and playing with his pen - whilst acting the expert by providing verbal answers to questions not addressed to him.

All in all, the above analyzed interaction points to the constitution of a social order that is mainly based on the negotiation of different forms of legitimate knowledge. The study of the management of participation in this context reveals how verbal actions of word categorization (i.e. naming of the focus occupations plus naming of the corresponding category), and non-verbal actions of engagement (i.e. eye-gaze), as well as specific instructional procedures, such as highlighting (i.e. using the appropriate color), are interactionally placed at the center of the activity, these being constituted in the course of the action as key forms of knowledge upon which salient social relations and institutional identities (“good”/“bad” learner) are established.

One year later, and after being incorporated in the mainstream classrooms, the students were re-directed to Compensatory Education and Curricular Tracking Programs due to their poor results. This relocation into programs that are parallel to mainstream education accentuated the process of unequal distribution of cultural capital in *Violetas*. That is, these students ended up being placed in the educational programs that were considered as less prestigious, both institutionally and socially. In other words, programs such as the Bridging Class never ensured them access to the mainstream classrooms.

Although we believe that the subsequent academic results of students attending the Bridging Class cannot be explained exclusively as the direct consequence of the types of practices legitimated in these classes - since academic trajectories are often the result of a

matrix of socio-cultural, cognitive and pedagogical processes that go beyond what happens in classrooms (see also Willis 1977; Ogbu 1987; Gibson & Ogbu 1991; D'amato 1993) - the Bridging Class students we interviewed at the end of the first year did agree that the type of linguistic skills associated with the knowledge that was legitimized in these classes was insufficient to follow ordinary mainstream classes. They were dissatisfied with the experience since their initial expectations of accessing post-compulsory education were unfulfilled. From this group, all the students of Chinese origin dropped out before they had finished their compulsory education since they thought that this school did not provide them with the means to succeed academically. That is to say, they sensed that they were wasting their time in the Bridging Class and that the school system they were enrolled into was not made for them. As stated by one of the students of Chinese background: "this school is not for me / I prefer to work with my parents and help my mum in their business / I can be helpful there" [Interview with Xiao].

##### 5. *EVANGELISTA* SECONDARY SCHOOL

The school with the highest number of students of migrant backgrounds in our corpus was *Evangelista*, located in the center of Madrid (Patino-Santos 2007, 2011), where students, mainly from Latin America and in particular Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and the Dominican Republic, were artificially grouped (123 of a total of 149 students, 82,5%). This composition was interesting since teachers perceived the students to "have advantages" over other groups because these students spoke Spanish and, therefore, "shared our language". However, despite this perception, both the classroom interactions in the school and the students' academic trajectories suggested that shared knowledge of Spanish did not give these students any advantages (see Patino-Santos, 2007), as it will be shown in this section.



For the purposes of this article, our analysis in *Evangelista* focuses on the mainstream Social Studies class. This class comprised of a local teacher and a group of 14 students, out of which only two were local students, whilst six were from Ecuador, two from the Dominican Republic, one from the Philippines, one from Morocco, one from Romania and one from Venezuela.

### 5.1. Social Studies: "They don't need to know Spanish geography"

The lesson observed in Social Studies was "Islam" (The Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages). This topic had the potential to foster awareness of cultural diversity and strengthen multicultural relationships. However, the observations conducted in this classroom showed that no such potential was realized and that knowledge of Islam and Moroccan culture as offered in the school curriculum often confused students and seemed incompatible with their own realities, as some students commented to us in the interviews. In Extract 2, the central activity of the lesson was a reading aloud activity that included answering a list of questions prepared by the teacher. These questions were taken from the textbook and put on a sheet of paper out of their chronological order. The teacher gave this sheet to the students, who had to go from page to page in the textbook to find the answers to the questions. Apart from the teacher, Genaro (aged 63), the participants in this interaction are: three students of Ecuadorian backgrounds, Brian (male, 13), and two girls, Eugenia and Carolina (both aged 13).

#### **Extract 2**

- 1       **Genaro:** wh- / why did the Muslims decide to invade the  
2       Iberian Peninsula? /answer!  
3       **Brian:** because of the ability of /&  
4       **Genaro:**                                      & because of the ability of the Government

5 in Spain at the time // do you know the expansion  
6 **Eugenia:** because of the?  
7 {laughter}  
8 **Genaro:** the weakness of the Visigoth government / it was the  
9 Visigoths who governed / they were a Germanic people / remember (7")  
10 and here we come back again to old ways / listen I don't want to be boring or  
11 repetitive but to learn history / with Rome, the Mediterranean was one / Medi /  
12 terranean! / sea around land / surrounded by lands / dominated by a single  
13 people / by a single government / by a single empire / the Roman // (...) / with  
14 the arrival of the Germanic people the unity of the Mediterranean was  
15 broken because the Roman Empire was divided into two / and with  
16 Mohammed!↑ / well in fact next week / next week / next Sunday / a  
17 national newspaper is going to publish a biography // I'm going to get it and  
18 we'll distribute it in class / for one / it's going to bring out- / because on  
19 Wednesday or Thursday the biography is coming out // {to Brian López} López! /  
20 Jesus Christ's biography / eh? / or Jesus of Nazareth / (...) a biography is  
21 coming out /// good / well the expansion of the Muslims /→ the expansion of  
22 Islam was very fast and they reached North Africa // why did they decide to  
23 attack Spain? / across the Straits of Gibraltar / because they saw that not only  
24 was it possible to get in but also to win // right? /first thing / and now /  
25 secondly why was the conquest so easy and fast for them?↑ / go on reading  
26 / we've said why / because they saw the need /and because it was so easy!  
27 {students engage in parallel conversations during Genaro's talk}  
28 **Brian:** because &  
29 **Genaro:** & because! / it's what always happens in life!  
30 {laughter}  
31 **Genaro:** eh? / an[empire falls / an] =  
32 **Carolina:** [(weakness of)° the Visigoths that remained→]

- 33 **Genaro:** = weakness! / he said it before! / another reason! //
- 34 **Brian:** take possession // {some other students engage in parallel conversations}
- 35 **Genaro:** because they weren't united / because they were fighting
- 36 amongst themselves / because different families were SQUAbbling! / as
- 37 we've said / another reason // (( )) thaat's life! / united we stand↑! / how do
- 38 we say this in a sentence? / united we stand! ↑
- 39 **Students:** {some students shout} DIVIDED WE FALL!

*Ethnographic observation and recording by Patino-Santos [1d\_E260104S]*

This teacher would always conduct the class in the same way: holding the floor as long as he pleased to and leaving students with few participation opportunities. He would ask a question aloud from the questionnaire and would select one of the students to answer. The students would try to participate, on many occasions by self-selection. However, the teacher's answers often overlapped with students' answers before students completed their turns. This explains the significant difference between the duration of the teacher's turn and that of the students, and how the teacher controls the floor at all times. We see how, after the teacher formulates a factual question (line 1), Brian self-selects to answer by literally reading the reply from the textbook (line 3). Once he starts to read, the teacher overlaps the student's turn and completes it without waiting for the student to complete the answer. A clarification question from Eugenia (line 6) allows the teacher to take his turn again and starts off on an extensive speech in which he deploys a series of rhetorical and interactional strategies. He introduces the content, mentions themes in brackets, defines, reformulates and evaluates the contents, among other actions. If we look carefully at these strategies, we can see how, within this particular context, these actions seem to undermine the teaching practice itself (see Rampton 1995, 2006, for similar findings).

Far from explaining the central theme, we find a series of commonsensical definitions ("Me/diterranean! / sea around land / surrounded by lands"). In addition, tautologies and rhetorical figures, such as repetition, are frequent ("dominated by one single / people / by one single government / by one single empire"). Furthermore, the teacher makes evaluations based on personal opinions and anecdotes ("with Mohammed / well in fact next week / next week / next Sunday / a national newspaper is going to publish a biography"), and opens thematic brackets that are interwoven in the central theme. Within this turn, for example, we can find at least five thematic changes that can be summarized as follows: (1) identification of the Visigoths (line 9); (2) a reminder parenthesis making a chronological leap to the past before the period described (line 10); (3) an anecdote on the biographies of Mohammed or Jesus Christ that will be in the paper and will be distributed amongst the students (lines 16 and 18); (4) brief embedded sequence to scold "López" (line 19); and finally (5) a return to the sequence's central theme, "the expansion of the Muslims" (line 21).

The teacher relocates this display of knowledge through a rhetorical question, "why did they decide to attack Spain?" which he answers himself. He wants to gather data that he would like students to "retain." He states two things: first he asks "why did they [Muslims] decide to attack Spain?" (lines 22-23), and then he asks a second question that opens another elicitation sequence: "why was it so easy?" (line 25). Brian then decides to participate again to answer this supposedly "factual question", but, once again, his turn overlaps with the teacher's, and his answer is redefined according to the teacher's own ideas. Finally, an aphorism, that is, a set phrase or saying that the students could reply to in chorus reflects one of the most important participation characteristics in the construction of what counts as legitimate knowledge.

Classical sociolinguistic studies have shown that sharing a language does not ensure success at school or access to the resources of dominant linguistic groups. This is due in part

to the differential use and evaluation of linguistic varieties in the school (Bernstein 1975; Labov 1972; Philips 1972). The students of Latin American origin in *Evangelista* were a prototypical example of this situation. The teachers assumed that speaking Spanish should place them on an equal footing with local students, but nevertheless they were often pre-classified as “smart but not willing to study,” “they only come to Spain to work” or they “have low academic standards” [Fieldwork notes]. The study of interaction allows us to see how these classifications are enacted through classroom practice: the everyday routines of the classrooms in *Evangelista* were based on the belief that “these students do not need much”, as explicitly stated by the Social Studies teacher in research interviews.

Genaro represented just over half of teachers in this secondary school (15 of 28), who were approaching the retirement age of 65. According to his testimony, he had lived through the transformations of the Spanish education system for the last 10 years, including the arrival of cultural and linguistically diverse students, which in his opinion, teachers were not trained for. He was familiar with a system where “those who came to school wanted to follow an academic path”. In fact, during the interviews, he used to recall memories of the times when there were not problems of behavior and according to his own words, “teachers were respected”.

Genaro’s perception of the challenges that diversity brought to classrooms was shared by the interviewed teachers in our research in multicultural schools in Madrid. It is from this discursive space that we could understand the interactional patterns in this particular classroom. Genaro felt that he had to retain control over discipline in the course of the activities. The observations we conducted in his classes allowed us to see how he focused his attention on one single student, either because he/she was aligned or disaligned with the activity of answering the questionnaire, while the others were ignored. Such a situation, in turn, generated a fight for the front stage, since all the students wanted to be heard. The

students would then self-select to carry out the task requested by the teacher: reading aloud or trying to answer somehow and, in some cases, even guessing the answers; other forms of participation were relegated to what was described by the teacher as “a lack of discipline” [Fieldwork notes, Social Sciences class observation].

The way in which participation is managed in Extract 2 shows us not only what counts as legitimate knowledge and who embodies it, but also the social categorization of the students involved in the interaction. In this class, Genaro often defined the students as lacking the social rules of conduct in the classroom (“they don't know how to behave”). For this reason, Social Studies classes were filled with reflections on life, where the teacher would comment on life and the future, and preach to students with statements such as “you are young and you don't give a damn”, or moral statements, demanding certain behaviors from students, such as “Return to the [right] path!” (as a scolding to a girl he accused of truancy). These students reacted differently to such forms of social categorization. Many of them observed during the interviews that “in this school you don't work,” yet they wanted to take an active part in the classes as well in the school culture.

Most students, however, sought to respond to boredom or what they perceived as too much authority through what they called “having fun” and socializing with their friends resulting in a lack of investment in their schooling (see also Ogbu 1987; D'Amato 1993; Patino-Santos 2009; Martín Rojo 2010). These students would therefore alter any activity within the classroom by means of different strategies ranging from *acting* (laughter, parallel conversations and parodies of the norms, as in lines 7, 27, 30, 34, 39) or even openly talking back, which would even lead to students being sent out of class or expelled from the school. As for classes other than Social Studies, they made more effort to attend these but did not do their homework and sometimes missed classes by hiding in the bathrooms or leaving the school.

Two years later, out of the 15 students in the mainstream Spanish and Social Studies classes of 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Evangelista, only two reached the baccalaureate, a path necessary for those students who want to continue into higher education. The rest had either had to repeat 11th grade, had changed schools, or had gone to Curricular Tracking classes, Remedial Vocational Training Programs or, in the worst cases, had dropped out to start working. Some students concluded that in their school they “didn’t do anything,” as Claudia, a third year ESO student in 2005/06 explained: “For example / here practically nothing / we don't do anything / look / during the first class [time of class] / nothing / during the second / what did we do in the second? ... nothing either / the third hour / nothing” [Interview with Claudia]. As mentioned in the previous section, it is difficult for us to link directly what happens here in interaction with the end of the academic trajectories of these students. However, the fact that the secondary school with the highest presence of newcomers was also the school with the highest rates of truancy and school drop-outs might be more than a coincidence. Genaro retired in 2009.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The study of what counts as ‘legitimate knowledge’ in the two focus schools of our corpus shows the types of knowledge that are valued in these classrooms. In the case of the Bridging Class in *Violetas*, the triangulation of classroom interactions and interviews points to legitimate forms of knowledge which are based upon verbal and non-verbal actions geared towards performing basic word categorization and circling while performing communicative engagement. As for the Social Studies class in *Evangelista*, our data show that discipline takes a prominent position, which in turn results in an activity where students’ forms of action are reduced mainly to reading out what the teacher requests.

The analysis of the participation frameworks legitimated in these two classrooms shows how social relations and categories are co-constructed in ways that do not seem to favor mainstream academic trajectories. Beyond any consideration of cognitive issues having to do with what the focus of the curricular content students learn (or do not learn) may be in the two programs studied, the interviews with our participants indicate that prolonged learning experiences like the ones analyzed here contribute to forms of institutional disengagement on the part of the students, who often feel that the above-mentioned forms of legitimate knowledge do not fit with their previous expectations about what they should learn in secondary education.

We have found that these forms of disengagement are enacted and negotiated in the moment-to-moment interactional routines of the classroom activities. In both cases, students position themselves in disalignment with respect to what it means to be a “good” or “bad” learner in the context of the established legitimate participation framework. In *Violetas*, this interactional disalignment is explicitly displayed by Gaosheng, who does not comply with the legitimate participation framework and avoids any of the verbal/non-verbal forms of engagement expected by Victoria. In contrast to arguments in which this would be taken as an instance of an intercultural misunderstanding, linked to a cultural pattern in the way Chinese people interact with so-called “Westerners” (Günthner 1993, Young 1994), the ethnographic fieldwork carried out in this school points to the progressive conformation of a pattern of non-compliance that emerges from an interactional history between Victoria and Gaosheng, in which the latter gradually expressed his disagreement with the activity management – indeed he was one of the students who dropped out of school, stating that he preferred to work in his parents’ business than waste his time in the school.

In *Evangelista*, this interactional disalignment is enacted through parallel conversations on the backstage, laughter, and over-engagement on the part of the students.



The turn-taking dynamics managed by Genaro leave students with few spaces to make front stage contributions. Thus, these instances of disalignment are discursively constructed as “a lack of discipline”, suggesting the construction of a more complex and polarized participation framework in which all actors participate actively (including the teacher). In other words, as students agreed in the interviews, such disaligned and hence disengaged positioning emerges as a form of contestation in response to what the students understand as an authoritative and boring teaching style.

The consequence of such disengagement over time, in both cases, was the students’ lack of investment, which, in some cases, such as that of Gaosheng in *Violetas*, and Carolina, in *Evangelista*, ended up with the students dropping out of the system. Both situations lead us to reflect on what the communicative practices in these schools reveal. Erickson suggested in 1987 that school success or failure should not be understood merely as the students’ responsibility, but also as the failure of teachers and the community. In order to be successful, all actors involved in the educational practice need to create mutual trust based on good intentions and coordinated tasks; teachers should convince their students that what they teach is good for them, while students should trust that their teachers know what is good for them. This spirit of mutual trust should imbue all communicative practices in the school and be realized in all activities. Unfortunately, in the case of the two classes portrayed in this paper this spirit of trust is not perceived by either group of students or by their teachers.

By studying the forms of legitimate knowledge that emerge in these practices, we observed in both groups that neither the teacher, on the one hand, nor any of the students, on the other, are able to convince the other party that they make the mutual investment necessary to accomplish the coordinated task successfully.

The students do not convince their teachers that they are interested in the academic experience, and the teachers are not able to convince their students that investing in an

academic path is worthy. In consequence, school is not worthwhile for the students, as their discourses and trajectories illustrate. Ethnographic data concerning students' body of knowledge in and outside the classroom tellingly indicates that, instead of investing in what the school proposes, they invest in what D'Amato (1983) defines as situational factors, that is, in the social experience of the class: "I attend school because of my friends", as one of the interviewed students explained (see Pérez-Milans, 2009 for a detailed discussion on peer relationships in *Evangelista*). Statements like this are revealing and should alert educators to the ways in which some contemporary secondary school systems are failing to meet the needs of students of migrant backgrounds. In particular, the documented practices, processes and voices in this article reveal the increasing destabilization of modern forms of institutional arrangement, curriculum delivery and inter-personal relationships between teachers and students, under contemporary conditions of greater geographical mobility and social/cultural/linguistic diversification. Traditional practices and forms of knowledge become a more visible site of struggle, in a context where teachers and students are provided with little institutional resources and non-specific policy developments in order to cope with these new conditions (beyond just a physical space for newcomers in the classroom). This lack of institutional support leaves the involved social actors (teachers and students) with the responsibility of having to negotiate relevance, therefore placing them as the only ones liable to social inequality.

#### NOTES

- (1) Names of schools and participants have been changed to protect identities.
- (2) All methodological and analytical tools used in this paper come from the research project "Socio-pragmatic analysis of intercultural communication in educational practices: towards social integration in the classroom" (BFF2003-04830) (*Análisis socio-pragmático de*

*la comunicación intercultural en las prácticas educativas: hacia la integración en las aulas*), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and directed by Professor Luisa Martín-Rojo.

(3) Recordings and interviews gathered in the fieldwork have been authorised by the participants.

(4) Extracts in this article have been translated from Spanish, the only language of instruction in the contexts of the study. Original transcriptions are shown in Appendix 2.

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