

Gee's Theory of D/discourse and
Research in Teaching English as a Second Language:
Implications for the Mainstream

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In this paper I will undertake an exploration of James Paul Gee's theory of D/discourses and discuss the relevance of this theory to current research in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and teaching English as a second language (TESL/ESL). In doing so, I will elaborate on Gee's theory of D/discourse and will focus on Gee's discussion of how D/discourses may be acquired. Following this, I will explore some of the parallels that exist between Gee's theory and current research in SLA and TESL, and by doing so, will demonstrate how certain conditions are required for D/discourse acquisition to occur in the manner theorized by Gee. My intention is to use Gee's theory and TESL research to suggest that schools and classrooms with students from minority language backgrounds need to carefully consider the social contexts in which these students are integrated. I also intend to show how Gee's theory and TESL research provide support for the notion that, for effective language learning and academic achievement to occur for ESL learners, pedagogical interventions need to target students who are first language speaker of English in order to enhance ESL students' opportunities to learn and integrate into the classroom.

Gee's Theory of D/discourses

Linguistic theory has always played a significant role in the formulation of theories for second language acquisition (for summaries see, Beebe, 1988; Ellis, 1985; Fitzgerald Gersten & Hudelson, 2000; Spolsky, 1989). It has often been the case that significant theories derived in relation to first language acquisition have received subsequent consideration within the field of TESL. The intention of this section of this paper is to continue in this tradition by considering the relevance of Gee's theory of D/discourses for TESL. Drawing on sociolinguistic theory, and other disciplines such as cognitive science and philosophy, Gee's theory provides a tool for investigating discourse and social practice that highlights the interrelationships between

language, language learning, social identity, and social context (Knobel, 1999). Given that recent research in TESL has recognized the need for a theory that can begin to address these complex interrelationships (Duff, 2001, 2002; Gunderson, 2000; Norton, 1997, 2000; Peirce, 1995), there is a strong rationale for determining the relevance of Gee's theory to TESL. However, before proceeding to this, I will provide an overview of the key concepts of Gee's theory.

Discourses and discourses.

The basis of Gee's theory is revealed in the distinction between 'discourse' and 'Discourse' (denoted by the use of lower-case d and upper-case D).¹ While sociolinguists have typically used the term *discourse* to refer to verbal interactions and sequences of utterances between speakers and listeners, Gee's distinction is designed to recognize the interrelationships between social relations, social identities, contexts, and specific situations of language use (Gee, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1996). In this regard, **Discourse** with a capital **D** describes:

...a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or "social network" (Gee, 1996, p. 131).

Thus, a Discourse integrates ways of talking, listening, writing, and reading, but also integrates acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and feeling into patterns associated with a recognizable social network, or affinity group (Gee, 1996, 1999, 2001a).

There are innumerable Discourses, for example cellular biology, skateboarding, professional sales, midwifery, graduate student in language and literacy, and many others. In this manner, Discourses can be thought of as identity kits, or "forms of life" (Gee, 1996, 2001a,

¹ Careful attention to the use of lower-case d and upper-case D will be required throughout this paper.

2001b; Knobel, 1999), in which people share “everyday theories about the world”. These theories inform people about what is “common sense”, and what is typical or normal from the perspective of a particular Discourse (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Gee, 1999). It may be helpful to think of Discourses as sub-cultures within a larger culture or society. In this sense, a person can belong to many sub-cultures (Discourses) at the same time. Within each Discourse that a person belongs to, there are common identities, beliefs, and ways of thinking, feeling, and being that are recognizable as both appropriate and defining of membership to other members of the Discourse. It is because of this that members of a Discourse can recognize others as either “insiders” or “outsiders”. Additionally, being an effective and recognizable member of a Discourse suggests that the Discourse is reflected in the identities of its members. In other words, to be in a Discourse, your view of your own identity must see you as a member of that Discourse.

Gee holds that you cannot engage in a Discourse in a less than fully fluent manner: you are either in or you are not. If you don't fully display an identity associated with a Discourse, then you are saying that you do not have that identity: you are then either a pretender or an initiate. Note though, that, “The various Discourses which constitute each of us as persons are changing and often are not fully consistent with each other; there is often conflict and tension between the values, beliefs, attitudes, interactional styles, uses of language, and ways of being in the world which two or more Discourses represent” (Gee, 1989, p. 7).

Given the nature of Discourse, it should be evident that language is seen as one of the constituent elements of Discourse. Thus, Gee defines **d**iscourse with a lower case **d** as:

... any stretch of language (spoken, written, signed) which “hangs together” to make sense to some community of people who use that language... [M]aking sense

is always a social and variable matter: what makes sense to one community of people may not make sense to another (1990, p. 103; 1996).

Thus, Gee's theory holds that meaning in language is situated. That is, meaning is tied to people's experiences and perceptions relative to the Discourse they are presently using language within. In this sense, words mean only as they are situated within a Discourse, and they take on other meanings if they are situated differently within that Discourse or another Discourse. Again, it may be helpful to consider sub-cultures and the varying jargon, colloquialisms, and manners of expression that often accompany them. The language specific to a sub-culture is, in a sense, analogous to **d**iscourse, in the manner that Gee uses the term. In other words, a specific discourse is made up of all of the language bits and uses that are associated with a specific Discourse. In this sense, a specific discourse (that is, associated with a particular Discourse) can be referred to as a social language (Gee, 2001b).

Social languages are embedded within Discourses. Different social languages are reflected in different patterns of vocabulary and syntax. Given the nature of Discourses, social languages connect to specific social activities and to specific socially situated identities associated with a Discourse (Gee, 1996, 1999). This suggests that knowing a specific social language means knowing how to use its specific grammatical and lexical features in a manner that is characteristic of the Discourse. For example, knowing the social language of stamp collecting means that one can use stamp collecting language like a stamp collector, and knowing the social language of graduate studies in reading research means that one can use the specific language of this Discourse in a manner that is recognizable to the members of this Discourse (Gee, 2001b). A significant implication that arises here is that knowing a particular social language means you are able to "be" or "recognize" a particular identity within a Discourse. In

other words, knowing a particular social language, or discourse, means that you are, or have become, a member of a particular Discourse.

Acquisition and learning.

In noting that we all participate in multiple Discourses it is important to distinguish between primary Discourses and secondary Discourses. Primary Discourses are those that we are initially socialized into in our homes. Secondary Discourses are those that we gain through subsequent participation in various social groups, institutions, and organizations. Gee also distinguishes between dominant and non-dominant Discourses (Gee, 2001b). Dominant discourses are those Discourses (often secondary Discourses) that are associated with social roles of status and privilege, and are thus accompanied by the associated benefits and social goods of such roles. Non-dominant Discourses involve membership and belonging within a particular social network but are not often accompanied by any wider benefits or social goods.

Implied in the concepts of secondary and multiple Discourses is the understanding that, in addition to a primary Discourse, a person can acquire additional secondary Discourses. However, it is important to point out that, according to Gee (1992; 1996; 1999; 2001a; 2001b), Discourses cannot be learned through overt instruction. Rather, Discourses are acquired through socialization and apprenticeship into the social practices of a particular Discourse. While some form of modeling and instructional guidance are important, discourses, or social languages, are typically acquired through immersion in meaningful practice (Gee, 2001b). In other words, when you are learning a social language in a manner that allows you to produce it, you are being socialized into a Discourse (Gee, 2001b).

Gee (2001a) presents a number of important factors that are required in order for one to acquire fluency in a new discourse:

1. The “newcomer” needs to be able and willing to take the perspective of members of the Discourse.
2. Newcomers need exposure to advanced practitioners of the discourse.
3. Newcomers need some efficacious overt instruction regarding both the discourse and the Discourse. Note however, that this instruction must be undertaken by a “mentor” within the Discourse and does not occur in a classroom or in any formal instructional sense.²
4. Newcomers need opportunities to hypothesize, practice, and test the rules and use of the language used within the D/discourse.

As a sub-point to this list, newcomers also need feedback on their practice and protection from punishment if they get something wrong.

Gee's description of what is required to acquire a D/discourse follows a Vygotskian model of apprenticeship, reflecting immersion in the D/discourse and scaffolded, supported interaction (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1983; Vygotsky, 1987) with people who have already mastered the Discourse. As such, Gee's theory intersects with elements of contemporary social constructivist theory (Cambourne, 2002; Palincsar, 1998), especially where acquisition of a d/Discourse is done through a cooperative and collaborative process of active engagement between experienced and inexperienced members of a Discourse.

Gee's list of factors tells us something of the “price” (2001a) that has to be paid by “newcomers” to join a new Discourse, indicating that membership requires growing a socially-situated identity that is tied to the Discourse and its values, and that this new identity cannot

² Gee contends that discourses, and languages for that matter, are never really learned in classrooms. Classrooms can only serve a supportive function in clarifying and elaborating on the experiences that learners have in practicing language in authentic settings and situations. In other words, because traditional language classrooms try to teach only discourses, they do not reflect or provide practice opportunities for authentic Discourses.

conflict with the pre-existing core sense of self of the newcomer. In other words, when there is tension or conflict between existing and new Discourse-specific identities, this tension can deter the acquisition of fluency of one or the other of the conflicting Discourses. Thus, if active involvement in a Discourse means having to be complicit with values that conflict with those of one's primary Discourse or other pre-existing secondary Discourses, it is likely to be the case that full fluency will not be achieved and that the newcomer will continue to be seen as an outsider by members of the Discourse.

To conclude this section of the paper, Gee's theory of D/discourses can be summarized as follows. Language use exists as one component within the larger construct of a Discourse, which Gee (1989; 1992; 1996) suggests reflects a social grouping that shares patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that are tied directly to their identity as a group. Within a Discourse, language is given meaning through agreement by the Discourse members in relation to specific social situations and contexts. The use and meaning of language within a specific Discourse is referred to as 'discourse'. Learning a discourse means having to become a member of a Discourse. The only way to become a member of a Discourse, and thereby learn the discourse, is to be apprenticed into the group. If, however, there is a conflict between the required values or identities of two distinct Discourses, acquisition of the new Discourse may be difficult.

Before moving on, it is important to note that Gee's theory holds significant implications for ESL learners. Given Gee's discussion, it is clear that ESL learners are actually required to learn multiple "Englishes"; that is, the many discrete discourses associated with the many Discourses within which they will have to participate.³ Furthermore, in order to learn these discourses effectively, ESL students need to have opportunities to practice with the authentic

³ For example, the many Discourses of social life among their peers, both in and out of school, the Discourses of academic subject areas and school life, the Discourses of shopping, entertainment, family life, etc.

membership of the various associated Discourses. In other words, in order for ESL learners to become fluent in the various discourses they require in English, they will need to become members of the various associated Discourses. Because of these significant implications, it seems worthwhile to look at recent research on socialization and learner identity in TESL and SLA, to determine if there is evidence that supports Gee's theory. It is to this research, then, that this paper will now turn.

Relevant TESL Research

The traditional focus of research on socialization in TESL and SLA has been on the improvement of classroom organization and interaction practices to enhance learning outcomes (see summaries of this research in, Ellis, 1985; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). However, Heath's (1983) classic study of variations in language socialization and use among different communities, and subsequent theory and research by others (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Cummins, 1996; D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Holland & Quinn, 1987; E. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; R. Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), have influenced a number of contemporary SLA and TESL researchers to take a critical approach in addressing the implications of language socialization and learner identity specifically for second language learners.

Parallel to Gee's theoretical notion of D/discourse, SLA and TESL theory and research has embraced the understanding that language use occurs within specific social contexts and that meaning in language is derived from the specific context of use (Enright, 1986; Enright & McCloskey, 1988; Tough, 1985; Wong Fillmore, 1982, 1989, 1991). This theoretical foundation has served the development of a number of context-sensitive pedagogical approaches. Examples of these include theories of communicative competence (Swain, 1985) and approaches focused

upon the integration of second language and content instruction in mainstream classrooms (Chamot & O'Malley, 1986, 1994; Mohan, 1986; Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989). Additional research supports Gee's theoretical assertion that there are, in fact, multiple D/discourses that need to be acquired by language users (Gunderson, 2000; Harklau, 1994; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 1997; Willett, 1995), with several of these studies indicating that language teaching programs often fail to recognize that there are multiple and overlapping D/discourses that learners need to acquire (Crago, 1992; Crago, Annahatak, & Ningiuruvik, 1993; McKay & Wong, 1996). Underlining the relationship between discourse and Discourse, Duff (2001) observed that without knowledge of current events within their new community (an element of Discourse), ESL learners were virtually excluded from discussions with their English-speaking peers and that understanding of these discussions for ESL learners was sometimes delayed for days, if it happened at all.

Recent TESL and SLA research also supports Gee's assertion that some form of apprenticeship is required to gain entrance into and thereby learn a D/discourse. A number of studies suggest that in order to be effective, language learning must involve the learner in some element of authentic interaction with the community of speakers associated with the target language or discourse (Clair, 1995; Duff, 1995, 2001, 2002; Edelsky, 1986; Gunderson, 2000; Guthrie, 1985; Harklau, 1994; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 1997, 2000; E. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Peirce, 1995; Willett, 1995). Norton (2000) points out that success in formal ESL classrooms depends on learners' having access to the social networks of English speakers outside of regular class time. In this sense, Norton sums up the need to look at the relationship between the individual language learner and the larger social world.

Following Gee's notion of apprenticeship and the gaining of membership in specific Discourses, TESL and SLA research also seems to confirm Gee's notion of the "price" (Gee,

1996, 2001a) of entry into a Discourse: having to take on an identity that is congruent with the Discourse. For example, Willett (1995) studied the socialization of international ESL students in a first grade classroom and noted that the students constructed identities, social relations, and ideologies that were appropriate to the social world of their grade one classroom. The students were not just learning language but also the rules and roles required for competent membership in the classroom and community. In a similar study, McKay and Wong (1996) observed that learners establish changing identities within specific conversations, thereby demonstrating shifting identities for the multiple Discourses in which they were engaged. However, the identities and conversations were also shaped by broader conversations taking in place in society as a whole. These included cultural stereotypes and images, both favourable and unfavourable, held by the dominant society, which McKay and Wong refer to as “colonist/racialized discourse” (p. 583).

McKay and Wong's (1996) study is interesting because it echoes Gee's (1996; 1999; 2001b) notion of dominant and non-dominant Discourses and suggests that language learning is often not an egalitarian process. Learners are, in many cases, assigned identities and roles by members of the target Discourse, and these identities and roles may not permit status as equal members of the Discourse. Thus, it is necessary to consider relations of power in language learning (Canagarajah, 1999; Cummins, 1986, 1996; Fairclough, 1989; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). Several studies explore this theme and indicate that in many cases, ESL learners are provided limited roles and opportunities for participation in the target Discourse. For example, Harklau (1994) observed that ESL programs are often isolated and marginalized in schools and that these schools typically make few or no adjustments for ESL speakers. This results in the absence of opportunities to learn the school and social language because students have little interaction with their teachers and less with other students. In Harklau's case study,

she observed that under such conditions, the ESL learners became reticent about interacting with local students, unwilling to pay the entry price to the Discourse while simultaneously being excluded. In this sense, the relations and identities of a Discourse affect the conditions of language development (Willett, 1995).

This notion that unequal relations of power may be influential in the acquisition of D/discourse suggests that there are conditions that need to be met in order for the type of apprenticeship suggested by Gee to be effective. Primary among these is the condition that learners need to be welcome within the target D/discourse. A number of studies suggest that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, ESL learners are often excluded from, and made to feel unwelcome in the D/discourses they seek to join. Duff (2001), for example, reports on a study of ESL students in a mainstream social studies class and observed that local students actually became unruly when the teachers spent time addressing ESL students comprehension needs or soliciting their input during lectures or discussions. Further, local students would make deliberate use of rapid and colloquial speech. These actions served to limit ESL students' interaction with teachers, especially when teachers responded to such classroom management issues by not involving the ESL students. Furthermore, the ESL students in Duff's study feared being laughed at by local students and seemed to lack a sense of permission to speak about their concerns, issues and views. These findings are paralleled in a study by Miller (2000), who found that adolescent ESL students in an Australian school had few real opportunities to use English outside of the ESL classroom and that in mainstream classrooms they felt they were neither heard nor understood.

Some research suggests that the condition of being welcomed into a D/discourse may be constrained by differences between the school culture and the students' first culture, and the inability of students to conform to the identity (Discourse) expected by the school culture. For

example, Kanno and Appelbaum (1995) report on a study in which ESL learners felt that the school was so preoccupied with their language and content learning that their social integration into classrooms was completely ignored, thereby limiting their opportunities for authentic language use and practice. Gunderson (2000) reports on two large-scale studies of approximately 35,000 immigrant students in which the differences between students first cultures and the culture of school limited the students' ability to learn language and to learn academic content. As Gunderson points out, the students' inability to access opportunities to practice English in an English only school is like "starving in a smorgasbord" (p. 697). Gunderson adds that a sense of belonging contributes to one's identity and that ESL students are often "lost in the spaces between various identities" (p. 702). This is why students of similar first cultures often stick together in schools, despite this not being well viewed by many teachers and students. Reflecting Gee's notion of the "price"(Gee, 2001a) of membership, Gunderson adds that, "In many ways, the degree of a student's success in school in Canada is a direct measure of the degree of first cultural loss" (p. 703).

Perhaps the clearest statement made regarding the role of identity in language learning comes from Bonny Norton⁴ (Norton, 1997, 2000; Peirce, 1995), whose research with immigrant women who were learning ESL suggests that learners access to practice opportunities with first language speakers of English is very limited, and that only limited and specific roles and identities are made available to learners who access practice situations. Furthermore, Norton proposes the idea of learner investment in the target language, which she uses to describe the complex and dynamic relationship between the learner and the social world. In this sense, a learner invests in multiple identities in order to learn a language, the degree of investment in

⁴ Bonny Norton has written under several names in the past – Bonny Peirce, Bonny Norton Peirce, Bonny Norton – but has requested that all references now be attributed to her as Bonny Norton.

specific identities having significant bearing on how well the language is learned. However, echoing Gee's notion of the "price" of entry into a D/discourse (Gee, 2001a), Norton suggests that many of the identities that learners might invest in are prescribed by the target language community and that these identities are often shaped by the conceptions of ethnicity, gender, and class that prevail in the target language community. This being the case, a learner may not choose to invest in certain of the available identities, and akin to the tension between D/discourses outlined in Gee's theory, this limited investment will reduce the degree of language acquisition. Norton also proposes that learners may begin their language learning with a specific identity and investment in mind and later be forced to reconsider these after a realization of the actual identities available and associated investment required. Thus, Norton rejects the idea that learning can be explained solely by traits like motivation and instead underscores the notion that language learning is influenced by relations of power in the social world. Her research indicates that the social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers is often constrained by power relations in a manner that acts to limit learners access to practice opportunities and, following Gee, to specific identities within the new Discourse. In other words, the learners are not necessarily welcome within certain Discourses or sectors of Discourses.

What I have discussed to this point is that Gee's theory of D/discourse provides a useful tool for describing the acquisition of second languages. In the cases of TESL research noted above, Gee's theory can be used to explain that learners struggle to learn more than just language (discourse) because they also require fluency in the socially situated meanings of language use that come from membership in a specific Discourse. The studies examined here also indicate that learners do need to participate in a Discourse in order to gain fluency and subsequent membership. In most cases, the learners recognized the need to participate in language use within specific areas of their lives, and they were very aware of their inability to progress when this

practice wasn't available to them. Gee's theory can also be used to explain various aspects of the role of identity in language learning. Gee's description of the "price" of entry into a Discourse is clearly indicated through the struggles that many learners report in adopting a new identity in order for membership to be a possibility. However, it is also apparent that access to practice, apprenticeship, and mentoring is often beyond the learner's control: in most studies examined, it is evident that only certain roles and identities are made available to learners within the Discourses that they wish to enter. These limited roles and identities have served to limit access to practice, apprenticeship and mentoring within specific Discourses, and have also limited the types of identities that available to learners within specific D/discourses.

In this section I suggested that the ESL research indicates that the condition of being welcome within a D/discourse is required in order for Gee's theory to hold. Thus, I will now return to Gee's theory to elaborate on some aspects that may account for this condition, and also to determine if Gee's theory affords any framework to develop potential solutions for addressing this condition.

Creating an Inclusive Discourse

In this, the final section of this paper, I want to address some of the possible reasons why a Discourse may not welcome new members and therefore exist as a closed Discourse. I also want to explore possible ways in which a closed Discourse could be made open to new members. Through doing so, I intend to show that Gee's theory provides an explanation for why ESL learners tend to be excluded from participation in the Discourses of their new communities. I also intend to show that Gee's theory intersects with social constructivist theories in a manner that allows for the development of a classroom approach that is more inclusive of linguistic and cultural diversity. Furthermore, I intend to show that the primary target of this approach needs to

be the membership of the target Discourse community, that is, the first language English-speaking students and teachers who are in classrooms and schools with ESL learners.

Closed and unwelcoming Discourses.

There are two reasons why a Discourse may be closed to new members. The first of these is explained by Gee's (1989; 1996; 1999; 2001b) distinction between primary and secondary Discourses and some of the psychological features of one's primary Discourse. According to Gee, primary Discourses contain only themselves. In other words, with only one's primary Discourse as a reference, a person is unable to notice or be aware of the boundaries and features of this primary Discourse. Stated another way, until a secondary Discourse is acquired that is sufficiently different from one's primary Discourse, and therefore contains tools with which to analyze one's primary Discourse, a person will be unaware that the primary Discourse exists at all. Under these conditions, one would view the world through the singular lens of one's primary Discourse. In more colloquial terms, within a primary Discourse the members are largely 'asleep at the wheel' until they obtain another Discourse to use in critiquing their primary Discourse.

This condition of being 'asleep at the wheel' in the primary Discourse suggests that the Discourse may be closed because the membership is not aware that the Discourse exists. The implication here is that apprenticeships are unlikely to be made available if the members do not identify themselves as a social network. Furthermore, there will be no awareness of the fact that ESL students who are seeking membership will need to learn more than just the language required of the Discourse. In other words, where the membership of the primary Discourse is unaware of or, more precisely, not conscious of its own "ways of being", it is unlikely that they will be sensitive to any attempts made by outsiders (like ESL students) to learn these ways of being. This will be particularly the case in those schools where the school D/discourse is a close

match to the primary D/discourse of many of the teachers and students. In such a setting, the teachers and students may not act intentionally to exclude “others”, but their unintentional and unconsidered actions are likely to do just that.

The second reason why a Discourse may be closed results when being unaware of one's primary Discourse combines with Gee's (Gee, 1989) notion of dominant and non-dominant Discourses, forming a particularly powerful form of exclusion. In this case, not only are the members of the primary Discourse unaware of the nature of their Discourse, they are also unlikely to be able to acknowledge and value any display of identity from alternate and secondary Discourses, particularly where these are perceived to have limited status and social benefit in the wider society. In other words, anything different from the primary and dominant Discourse is usually dismissed. The result here is that the identities and values that ESL learners bring from their primary and pre-existing secondary Discourses are unlikely to be recognized and valued within the Discourse in which they are trying to gain membership. Given the discussion about conflicting Discourses in a previous section of this paper, it is clear that where important, core values and identities of learners are contradicted in the values held by the target Discourse, the acquisition of the D/discourse will be impeded. As reported in TESL research, ESL students often feel this contradiction of values and lack of identity affirmation in their new classrooms and schools, with the result being that they are silenced in the new Discourse and reconsider their investment in learning it (Norton, 2000; Peirce, 1995).

Returning to research by Duff (2001; 2002), it was observed that most ESL students did not have Canadian-born friends, and vice versa, and the students attributed this to having too much explaining to do for each other. In other words, they did not feel that apprenticing someone was worthwhile. Furthermore, asking for explanations in class often exposed the ESL learners to ridicule and confirmed their difference. Silence in class protected them from these attacks but

also excluded them from peer apprenticeships. Thus, it appears that the disruptive behaviour of the Canadian-born students whenever ESL students were given extra teacher attention, was enacted to maintain the dominant position of the Discourse of the Canadian-born students. These actions inevitably resulted in the closing of several Discourses for ESL students, and their sense that they were unwelcome within these Discourses.

Now the existence of either of the above conditions (a Discourse that is unaware of itself and therefore unaware that anyone might be trying to learn this Discourse, and a Discourse that excludes the values and identities of others) speaks to the need to develop pedagogic interventions directed at the members of the closed or unwelcoming Discourse. This is contradictory to the traditional role of intervention in ESL programs, which have tended to be exclusively directed at the ESL students or some element of programming that they will encounter. Yet the theory and research I have presented thus far suggest that ESL students struggle as a result of being excluded from opportunities to practice and apprentice with their peers in the target Discourse. Therefore, in order to make such practice opportunities and apprenticeships available, the target Discourse needs to be opened up, and this can only happen by intervening with the membership of this Discourse. Stated another way, an intervention is required to awaken members of the dominant Discourse to the fact of their own Discourse, and to establish conditions that are inclusive of linguistic and cultural diversity. Such an intervention would facilitate the creation of a new classroom Discourse that welcomes a diversity of values and identities rather than only those of the dominant Discourse.

Before moving on to speculate more about what such an intervention would require, I would like to provide one additional thought to support the need for such an intervention. There is an often-made observation in ESL programs that, despite differences in their first language backgrounds, ESL students tend to form friendships with each other. It is often the case that

students from countries as varied as Japan, China, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia form friendships and social networks with each other and that these networks make use of English as the language of communication. What is interesting here is that the English language, rather than being a barrier to communication, actually facilitates their cross-cultural socializing. Interestingly, the students most often reported as not participating in these cross-cultural social networks are those who speak English as a first language. This seems to suggest, as Gee would point out, that, first, more than language (discourse) is required to acquire membership in a Discourse, and second, the members of the dominant Discourse are uninterested in the identities or values held by members of non-dominant Discourses. It is interesting that within the multicultural and multilingual reality of schools with ESL students, the students with the greatest limitations of social interaction (based on the degree of diversity expressed in the social relations) are those whose very language forms the target of learning for the ESL students. There are innumerable arguments about linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and the ownership of language that are relevant here and which challenge educators to consider whether they are facilitating the ongoing exclusion of ESL students by failing to ask students from the dominant culture to think critically about the socially situated implications of their language and Discourse.⁵

Creating an Intercultural Discourse.

Opening up closed Discourses and creating conditions that welcome diverse identities and values within a Discourse implies the changing of a Discourse, thereby creating new Discourses. Yet Gee suggests that Discourses cannot be taught (1989; 1992; 1999), that they

⁵ There is also a key intersection here with the MCE/ARE literature in that this entails something of teaching accommodations skills to dominant groups. However, exploring this intersection is beyond the scope of the present paper.

must be acquired through apprenticeships with members of the target Discourse. If this is the case, how then, can a new Discourse be established if there are no present members to oversee apprenticeships? The answer, I believe, lies in using the principles of social constructivism to create classrooms in which all students can be apprenticed into an understanding of Discourses, thereby creating an intercultural Discourse that becomes the norm for classrooms and schools. Stated in another way, schools need to be sites in which the Discourse that is used and valued is one which welcomes newcomers and openly values diversity in its membership.

The first question that might follow from such an assertion is whether schools don't already endorse and make use of such a Discourse. Much of the TESL research I have already cited suggests that, despite whatever might be officially endorsed, this kind of Discourse is presently not the case in many schools and workplaces. In fact, one could argue that this kind of Discourse is not yet established as part of the dominant Discourse in the wider mainstream society, despite the reality of multiculturalism and the impacts of globalization.⁶ Furthermore, Campbell (2000) suggests that most educational policy still reflects a monolingual and monocultural bias, and that coming from a non-mainstream cultural background is still a disadvantage. Campbell argues that cultural diversity can be celebrated at the same time that being from a non-mainstream culture can be considered a disadvantage. In this sense, differences in cultural background have become a replacement for racial differences as an explanation for any lack of educational achievement. Such explanations prevent schools from looking at how their present Discourse practices act to exclude culturally diverse students from potential opportunities to apprentice into educational achievement. In this sense, the school system never questions its own values or assumptions, nor the cultural bias reflected in these values. It keeps the focus of intervention on the learner rather than the system. Additionally, Lawrence (1997)

⁶ Following this thinking, an intercultural Discourse involves something of changing society!

argues that merely describing cultural differences as is often done in “multicultural sessions” is not enough to lead to intercultural understanding and tolerance, that engagement between people of diverse backgrounds is required. The converse, treating all the students the same, shows the power of the monolingual orientation of pedagogy and its failure to recognize the role of dominant and non-dominant Discourses in excluding some learners but not others (Bourne, 2001).

So, how then, should we go about the business of creating a new, welcoming and inclusive Discourse in schools? To begin, Gee (1989; 2001b) suggests that students can be made more aware of their primary and pre-existing secondary Discourses if they are taught something about Discourse. Note that Gee is not contradicting himself by saying that we can teach a new Discourse to students, as teaching a Discourse is something Gee says cannot be done. What he is suggesting is that by teaching about Discourses, rather than teaching a Discourse, our students can become consciously aware of how their first language or D/discourse works. For this to happen, the students need to be engaged in an apprenticeship, otherwise known as schooling, in which they develop a ‘meta-language’ that can help them to see how the Discourses they already have work, how these Discourses relate to other Discourses, and how these Discourses relate to self and society. Gee refers to such as Discourse as a ‘liberating Discourse’ because it can, in fact, be used to liberate one from the unconscious confines of a primary Discourse. “Liberating literacies and Discourses are those that give us the meta-language for the critique of other literacies and Discourses and the way they constitute us as persons and situate us in society” (Gee, 1989, p. 9). A parallel to this notion can be seen in Cambourne’s (2002) suggestion that teachers ought to create “intellectual unrest” within and among students.

Providing a liberating Discourse is an essential part of establishing a new, inclusive classroom Discourse. However, the inclusion of diverse identities and values also needs to be

ensured. This can be achieved by drawing on social constructivist theory but it demands that the constructivism needs to be inclusive. In other words, this can only happen where all students are taught to work across cultures and languages so that the identities and values of all students are valued. Gee discusses the notion that one Discourse can blend or mix with others (Gee, 2001b). He refers to this hybrid Discourse as a 'borderland Discourse', and this is what I am talking about in respect to the intervention required in schools, where a social constructivist approach should actively seek to incorporate the diverse Discourses present rather than using constructivist methods merely to integrate ESL students into the mainstream Discourse. In other words, where ESL students are present, schools need to incorporate the use of hybrid Discourses if they hope to be truly inclusive.

Palincsar (1998) suggests that the development among learners of an "*intersubjective attitude* about the joint construction of meaning is required to build shared understanding" (p. 355). The point I am emphasizing is that in schools with multilingual and multicultural student populations, if the primary mission remains the teaching of the language and culture of the dominant societal group (in other words the dominant D/discourse), a truly intersubjective attitude can never be attained. Without the setting of a framework for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interaction, I doubt that, given the evidence outlined previously, children in mainstream classrooms will be able to undertake group-work in a manner that achieves negotiated shared meanings which truly reflect diverse identities and values. What is required is for classrooms to serve as settings where all learners are socialized to work with their peers as partners. In other words, while all students require coaching in order to work with each other as intellectual partners, they also require coaching in learning how to work with learners from other cultural and language backgrounds. This kind of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic

constructivism would result in a distinct classroom Discourse, a hybrid of all Discourses represented by the students. Such a Discourse would best be termed an 'intercultural Discourse'.

The concept of interculturalism is vast and as a term does not describe a single or unified theory or school of thinking. Thus, a review of the literature on intercultural education is beyond the scope of the present paper. However, the kind of intercultural classroom I have described is supported in the thinking of several theorists and researchers. For example, some intercultural theorists (Lahdenperä, 2000; Parla, 1994) talk about the need for schools to express their multicultural composition through cultural encounters that result in different students becoming conscious that their own identities and cultures. Furthermore, the cultural encapsulation (Parla, 1994) of teachers and schools needs to change to address the limits of monolingual and monocultural teaching perspectives. The reality is that most classrooms are multicultural and diverse. Thus, hybridized language practices not only make sense, they also reflect the reality currently within many classrooms. This approach would act to contradict what Gunderson (2000) suggests has become the perspective of schools, in which "multicultural has come to mean non-white, and that Canadian born students, those who appear most in need of learning about multicultural issues, are convinced that the term does not include them" (p. 705).

Conclusion

This paper has explored James Paul Gee's theory of D/discourses and has considered the relevance of this theory to the field of TESL. Through an examination of current TESL research on language socialization and learner identity, I have shown that there is considerable evidence to support the Gee's theory in this area. However, I have also discussed that in order for newcomers to acquire a Discourse, the Discourse must meet the condition of being welcoming and open. In order for these conditions to be met, the membership needs to be aware of their

Discourse, and the Discourse itself needs to become inclusive of the values and identities that newcomers bring. I have also presented an initial discussion on how an intercultural Discourse could be achieved in schools.

In conclusion, there is some hope that an intercultural Discourse can be achieved. A recent study by Bourne (2001) suggests that students from minority language backgrounds regularly make covert use of their languages to accomplish learning tasks set in classrooms, often mixing and sharing terms from each other's language. This implies that the students are not passive pawns in the socialization process and that their resilience can be expressed through a covert intercultural Discourse. Schools merely need to embrace what is already happening naturally. The connection between language and identity within and among individuals is not stable because languages, including English, become hybridized and pluralized through the natural course of their use. Thus, the emergence of new Discourses is completely natural and attainable.

That schools could and should encourage the development of an intercultural Discourse will appeal to any educator who claims to value equity and inclusivity in education. There is added impetus, however, where a school has embraced diversity in its mission and expresses this through the recruitment of international students. It is with these schools that I am most interested as the development of an intercultural Discourse seems to parallel the development of an international or global perspective. Thus, it is my intention to make use of the theory outlined in this paper in future explorations of Discourse in such schools.

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