Linguistics and Education xxx (2017) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Linguistics and Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/linged

Soliciting and pursuing suggestions: Practices for contemporaneously managing student-centred and curriculum-focused activities

Stuart Ekberg[a,*], Susan Danby[b], Sandra Houen[b], Christina Davidson[c], Karen J. Thorpe[d]

[a] School of Psychology & Counselling, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
[b] School of Early Childhood & Inclusive Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
[c] School of Education, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia
[d] Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 18 July 2016
Received in revised form 13 July 2017
Accepted 20 July 2017
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Classroom interaction
Interactional projects
Suggestion solicitations
Preschool
Conversation Analysis (CA)
Digital technology

ABSTRACT

Teachers attempting to implement student-centred pedagogies can routinely encounter challenges for also ensuring that classroom activities align with the relevant curriculum. In this study, we explore how teachers address this complexity. We applied Conversation Analysis (CA) methods to examine approximately 170 h of video recorded interaction across nine Australian preschools. We identify how teachers solicit suggestions to implement a student-centred pedagogy. Following initial solicitations, pursuits of suggestions progressively increase the possibility that students will make a suggestion that corresponds to curriculum agendas. We argue that, through these solicitations and pursuits, teachers implement particular interactional projects that become increasingly apparent to others and yet never entirely clear. This opaqueness aligns with contemporaneous management of student-centred and curriculum-focused classroom activities. Although students are given opportunities to shape these activities, teachers sustain discussion until they elect to accept one or more student suggestions. By soliciting and pursuing students' suggestions, teachers can enhance the possibility that students' contributions align with diverse curriculum imperatives.

1. Introduction

> "At some times or for some content, children seem to learn best from *child-guided experience*. . .At other times and for other content, children seem to learn best from *adult-guided experience*. . .Intentional teachers understand this and are prepared to make use of either of both in combination, choosing what works best for any given subject, situation, or child." (Epstein, 2007: 1–2)

This article focuses on the practical ways in which teachers implement the recommendations that educational theorists such as Ann Epstein make about intentionally designing classroom activities on a case-by-case basis. In particular, we consider how teachers solicit and pursue suggestions to contemporaneously manage the implementation of student-centred pedagogy, which aims to foster student participation, alongside attempts to ensure that classroom activities encompass a diverse curriculum. In this article we focus on group time, a setting where collaborative discussion between teachers and students can be used to make plans for future classroom activities. We show how teachers' solicitations and pursuits of suggestions accomplish multiple student-centred and curriculum-focused agendas.

The suggestion solicitations that we focus on are located within the three-part sequences that have been consistently shown to organise educational encounters (Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, & Smith, 1966; McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979a; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), including those involving young children (French & MacLure, 1981).[1] Although relying on different terminology, these studies conclude that three-part sequences are overwhelmingly initiated by teachers, and consist of a first position turn implementing an initiating action, a second position turn providing a responsive action, and a third position turn for reacting to the responsive action. Although actions implemented by teachers in the first position of

* Corresponding author at: School of Psychology & Counselling, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove, Queensland 4059, Australia.
E-mail address: stuart.ekberg@qut.edu.au (S. Ekberg).

[1] In this article we do not seek to explicitly engage in a debate around whether these sequences are a means through which teachers exercise power over students. For a review of different approaches to understanding these sequences, see Macbeth (2003).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.07.007
0898-5898/

these three-part sequences have been critiqued as restrictive, insofar as they constrain what constitutes a relevant response, they also actively promote student engagement by creating spaces for students to contribute to classroom activities and provide their own perspectives (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; French & MacLure, 1981; Gardner & Mushin, 2013; Houen, Danby, Farrell, & Thorpe, 2016; Macbeth, 2003; Mehan, 1979b). Indeed, the courses of action implemented by teachers in the third part of this sequence are contingent upon and actively shaped by students' contributions (Lee, 2007).

Promoting student contributions is especially important for the student-centred pedagogy that underpins many educational settings, including preschool classrooms (Georgeson et al., 2015). In Australian preschools, this pedagogical approach places particular emphasis on being responsive to children's ideas and interests (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). This focus is apparent in preschool activities such as 'group time' (often referred to in other countries as 'circle time'). This activity involves the entire class sitting together for collaborative conversation. A major aim in many group time activities is to promote students' own ideas, interests, and suggestions (Kantor, Elgas, & Fernie, 1989).

A practical challenge for promoting student suggestions in settings such as group time is that teachers must also ensure that classroom activities span the typically diverse curricula that underpin educational institutions (Edwards & Mercer, 1987). This can be a challenge because promoting student participation reduces teacher control over the content that is covered in educational interactions (Emanuelsson & Sahlström, 2008). Teachers can use the three-part sequences that organise educational encounters to manage this challenge. For example, a teacher can ask a series of questions to pursue particular types of responses (Lee, 2007; Zemel & Koschmann, 2011) which "seem to indicate that s/he may already have pre-planned intentions" about the direction in which the encounter should proceed (Lee, 2007: 1215). Such practices enable teachers to implement interactional projects: courses of conduct developed over time that can become progressively apparent to others (Levinson, 2013; Schegloff, 2007). In this article we will argue that teachers contemporaneously achieve student-centred and curriculum-focused experiences by implementing opaque yet nonetheless perceptible interactional projects. These interactional projects are implemented through the use of solicitations that make clear to students that they can proffer suggestions that contribute to a current discussion. This implements a student-centred pedagogy that encourages student involvement. However, the pursuit of additional suggestions conveys to students that further, and potentially more appropriate, suggestions may be possible. Therefore, the pursuit of suggestions progressively enhances the possibility that a contribution will come to be made that corresponds to an objective within the curriculum. By pursuing suggestions that correspond with the curriculum, teachers are able to contemporaneously foster student-centred and curriculum-focused experiences.

Given the opaqueness of the interactional projects that we consider, here we limit our focus to solicitations of suggestions made by preschool teachers during group time discussions that result in suggestions by students that specifically relate to the use of digital technology. We have elected to limit our focus in this way for several reasons. First, this restricts the variability of a relatively opaque interactional practice. This enhances our scope to identify some of the recurrent features that underpin interactional projects implemented through the solicitation and pursuit of suggestions. Second, using digital technology to learn about physical and social environments is an explicit part of the curriculum that is implemented in the Australian preschools we study (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). Third, compared to other curriculum imperatives, such as developing social skills, it is relatively straightforward to identify classroom activities that relate to digital technology. Fourth, a recognised challenge for promoting engagement with digital technologies is that this is a singular objective among myriad others within increasingly crowded preschool curricula (Kilderry, Yelland, Lazaridis, & Dragicevic, 2003). Fifth, preschool pedagogy places particular emphasis on student-centred learning. Our aim is to identify how a single curriculum imperative can be achieved alongside a range of other curriculum objectives, while also implementing a pedagogy that aims to promote student participation.

2. Material and methods

The data reported here are from video-recorded interactions across nine preschools in South-East Queensland, Australia. Australian preschools cater to children aged between three and five years old. In the data we report here, preschool often is referred to as 'kindy', a diminutive of 'kindergarten'. Between May and November 2012, approximately 170 h of preschool interaction were recorded. Participants provided their informed consent to participate in the study. A parent or legal guardian consented on behalf of children, who were additionally informed about the study and asked to assent to their participation. Two researchers collected data at each centre, moving around the preschool to follow shifts in activity. The recordings attempted to capture as much interaction as possible over sustained periods of time. Although the aim of this study was to explore use of digital technologies in preschools, and our previous analysis has documented ways in which students can engage with digital technologies with greater or less involvement of teachers (cf. Danby, Davidson, Ekberg, Breathnach, & Thorpe, 2016; Houen et al., 2016), data collection had a broader focus than moments in which such technology was used. This broad focus ensured data collection included activities that both led to and resulted from the use of digital technologies. A diverse range of preschool activities were video recorded to explore how digital technologies feature across preschool activities.

This study uses Conversation Analysis (CA), a well-established approach to the study of social interaction with longstanding application within educational settings (Gardner, 2013; McHoul, 1978), including early childhood education (Bateman, 2012; Björk-Willén, 2008; Cobb-Moore, Danby, & Farrell, 2009; Danby & Baker, 1998; Danby & Baker, 2000; Houen et al., 2016), and more recent focus on interactions involving digital technologies in preschool (Danby, Davidson, Ekberg, et al., 2016; Danby, Davidson, Given, & Thorpe, 2016; Davidson, Danby, Given, & Thorpe, 2014; Davidson, Danby, Given, & Thorpe, 2016; Davidson, Danby, & Thorpe, 2017; Ekberg, Danby, Davidson, & Thorpe, 2016). It has particular strengths in identifying and explaining orderly aspects of social interaction and how these are consequential for participants to those interactions (Schegloff, 1992). As summarised by Sidnell (2013), CA involves detailed examination to identify orderly communicative practices that are used by people in their social interactions with one another. In this study, detailed examination led to developing a collection of instances in which plans were made to use digital technologies. In accordance with the standard approach taken in CA, these instances were transcribed according to Jeffersonian conventions that record productional and distributional features of speech that have been found to be procedurally relevant to participants in interaction (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to participants. Where a particular participant could not be identified, 'St' for 'student' is used as a substitute for a pseudonym.

Please cite this article in press as: Ekberg, S., et al. Soliciting and pursuing suggestions: Practices for contemporaneously managing student-centred and curriculum-focused activities. *Linguistics and Education* (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.07.007