

RECONSTRUCTING TEACHERS' DISCOURSE TO BUILD INCLUSIVE INTERACTIONS USING POSITIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND FORMATIVE INTERVENTION

Paula Garcia, Keila Barreto, & Ginary Acosta
Education Faculty, Universidad de Cordoba, Monteria (Colombia)

Abstract

Teachers' discourse constitutes the main bases for language instruction and learning. Humans use their discourse as a tool for building peace, and promoting inclusive interactions, democracy, and social justice in the classroom (Van Dijk, 2000). But it also may be used as a pathway for promoting exclusion. Discourse represents powerful means to transform societies. However, inappropriate uses of discourse might end in marginalization. For example, violence and discrimination are sometimes enacted in teachers' discourse by taking almost exclusive control of it in the classroom, or by unconsciously discriminating against students (McKay & Devlin, 2014). Research has explored discrimination and symbolic violence in the classroom. Others have focused on raising awareness of the power of teachers' discourse (Beaulieu, 2016; Buzzelli, 1996; Calle-Díaz, 2019; Gillies & Boyle, 2008; Ritchie & Tobin, 2001). Nevertheless, little is known about teachers' transformation of their discourse to promote inclusive interactions to students with special needs. This study explored how formative interventions and positive discourse analysis helped to reconstruct a teacher's discourse to promote more inclusive interactions with diverse learners. The study enrolled an experienced teacher in inclusive education and English teaching and 38 students. Lessons were taught at a public urban school in Monteria Cordoba, Colombia. Results showed transformation in the teacher's discourse in three main elements, subject, object, and discursive mediation tools. The teacher used more positive and inclusive discourses with students providing room to voice students' ideas.

Keywords: *Teachers' discourse, positive discourse analysis, inclusion.*

1. Introduction

Formative intervention programs have been used to unveil contradictions and promote transformation in teachers' agency. Very few studies have used formative interventions for promoting changes in the discourse of teachers to build inclusive interactions with students. Thus, this study explores how teachers' reflections on their discourse might help reconstruct their classroom practices into more inclusive interactions with diverse students in mainstream contexts when enrolling in a formative intervention program based on positive discourse analysis (PDA) (Martin, 2004; Sannino, 2015; Sannino et al., 2016). To this end, this study answered the following question: how might a formative intervention program help an EFL teacher reconstruct her discourse into more inclusive interactions with diverse students in a mainstream Colombian context? .

Formative interventions are used for expansive learning processes. We understood formative intervention programs within cultural historical activity theory. They helped to generate solutions that can lead to transformation of our activity system (Sannino, 2015; Sannino et al., 2016).

2. Methods

This qualitative study aimed at exploring a problem concerning a teacher's discourse and its possibilities for transformations. To this end, this study was framed under the theoretical principles of cultural historical activity theory (Engeström & Sannino, 2010) based on the idea that "...activity is primary, that doing precedes thinking, that goals, images, cognitive models, intentions, and abstract notions like "definition" and "determinant" grow out of people doing things" (Morf & Weber, 2000, p. 81). Activity theory uses elements such as subject, object, mediation tools, community, rules, and division of labour as unit of analysis. Subject refers to the person being studied, while the object is the intended activity. The mediation tools are the main artefacts teachers use for teaching students any subject

or topic. Rules are the conditions that help people act in certain situations. The element division of labour consists of roles, distributions of actions among workers, teachers, students among others. Whereas, the community refers to the people, groups, and team of workers as active members of the system. (Hasan, 1998; Hashim & Jones, 2007; McAvinia, 2016).

The participant of this study was a teacher from the Caribbean coast of Colombia, to whom we refer in this study as Maria. She has taught English for about 23 years in both public and private institutions. She has experience teaching to students with special educational needs, particularly to deaf and Asperger students.

To answer the question of this research, we used in-depth interviews, observations, and stimulated recalls. Interviews served to collect information about teachers' thoughts and perceptions toward the effects of common language choices we make to mean and interact with students. Furthermore, five non-participant observations lasting around two hours each were conducted to characterize the teacher's activity system in terms of her discourse (Cypress, 2018). Additionally, two stimulated recalls were used; one occurred after the in-depth interview while the second took place at the end of the FI project. María was shown scenes of some parts of her lesson to reflect on situations, particularly about her discourse and its impact in students' inclusion (Swain, 2006).

The information obtained from the interviews, observations and stimulated recalls was transcribed and analysed using qualitative coding applied in Nvivo software. The Activity theory elements were used as units of analysis to understand how the teacher used her discourse before and after the FI program (Engeström, 1999).

Additionally, we used iterative viewing and group discussions for the validation of the data. We discussed initial and final codes with a research group and the participant of this research in order to verify the codes and generate insights concerning their appropriateness for answering the question. Iterative viewing consisted of first, identifying patterns from the data organised and second, and communicating the patterns to an audience (Morgan & Nica, 2020).

3. Results

The findings of this research are divided into two parts. The analysis we did of Maria's initial discourse and the changes analysed in the teacher's activity system elements after the formative intervention program.

3.1. Teacher's initial activity system

One objective identified in Maria's initial activity system was to build a funny environment for students to feel comfortable and relax during classes. To this end, the professor employed humour and sarcasm in her discourses. Interviews revealed that Maria does not have discouraging intentions towards students when she used humour; instead, she aims at making them feel comfortable in the lessons. However, we believe this might cause marked confusions in students' learning process as sarcasm and humour in teacher's explanations might not be well received in all the students, particularly when talking about unknown topics.

The teacher used narratives about diverse topics. The aim of these narratives was to introduce students to social injustices, politics, and social values. For example, She talked about the discovery of America by using negative adjectives to describe colonizers '*when the disgusting, nasty, filthy Spanish men came to discover (makes a gesture of quotation and uses a sarcastic tone) ha ha ha (loud horror laugh)*'. With the narrative, students were encouraged to learn about historical issues that affected our country. However, it generated violence and feelings of hate. The teacher was committed to raising students' awareness about culture, history, and the importance of our roots. However, her discourse and sarcasm turned out to be more discriminatory toward foreigners.

There were other elements in the activity system of the teacher that interfered with her decisions as an inclusive practitioner. For instance, rules from the institution limited Maria's knowledge and praxis concerning inclusive education. During interviews, the teacher disagreed with the inclusive project the school had. This showed the first contradiction in Maria's activity system since she felt frustrated when dealing with the rules proposed in the inclusive education project. The other tension is clearly seen in the community element. Her community is full of diverse students. She had to teach students who had been discriminated against their disabilities. Maria wanted to offer opportunities to students with some disabilities, but lack of special training to teach blind children.

3.2. Reconstructions in teacher's discourse

Once we began with the formative intervention program, teacher Maria started realizing needs regarding her discourse which turned into opportunities for transforming three elements of her activity system: subject, object, and mediation tools. For instance, concerning the subject Maria kept being humorous and interested in inclusive practices but this time using positive discourses; she became more thoughtful regarding the use of humour particularly during the stages of questioning and analyzing.

Initially, we showed Maria transcripts of her interactions with students. She said that reading those extracts and the proposed articles made her reflect on the impact of her words in the class. This interaction helped Maria realize her discourse was not well-received by some students who felt discriminated and found her humour negative. This conversation helped Maria become more careful with her discourse and monitor her language anytime she wanted to use negative humour. During FI, we observed changes in her discourse of humour. For example, she kindly provided feedback to students, especially when responding to mistakes.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study unveiled how the teacher's reflections on her discourse during FI contribute to reconstruct Maria's classroom discourse into more inclusive interactions with diverse students. The research reports Maria's discursive practices within a CHAT framework, synthesizing elements from the participant's activity system revealing needs regarding her discourse. Therefore, initial analysis of Maria's praxis revealed discriminatory discourses that did not help to promote inclusion. Results of the study coincided with the premise that discursive choices might contribute to social change and inclusive education (Ainscow & Miles, 2009; Fairclough, 2013). The results of this study unveiled the need researchers and teaching programs have to transform pre-service discourse of inclusion (Engeström, 2011; Engeström et al., 2014; Postholm, 2020).

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