

whole regarding members of minority groups as well as within the schools through culturally responsive pedagogy (Erickson 1987).

Several studies of minority children, particularly those who are poor and who have grown up in large families, have documented that members of these groups frequently have more interest and practice in working with their peers as compared to other adults, including their teachers. While many of the cross-cultural studies have focussed on teacher-student collaboration, this pattern of social interaction suggests the importance of student-student collaboration in a classroom. If student resistance to learning is seen in part as a result of an individual making the choice between the world of one's peers over that of the mainstream authority figure, this form of collaboration could offer an alternative route to resistance.

Martha Coonfield Ward (1971) studied the ways in which children acquire speech in a small all-black community near New Orleans. She found that these children engaged in more verbal interaction with their peers than with adults; with adults they were taught to be silent or to withdraw. Because of the material conditions of their home life, the value of cooperation is emphasized as there are few toys and many young children. At an early age, young children learned to rely on each other and overt peer or sibling rivalries are noticeably absent.

A similar observation was made by Gay and Abrahams (1972) who found that in poor black families, the older children perform most of the interactional and educational roles with their siblings. As children in these families grow older, their communication with adults becomes limited. Younger children learn concepts of work, responsibility and cooperation in addition to how to live on the streets and how to socialize successfully, from their older peers. These children seem to think of learning as a give-and-take relationship between the individuals who have the knowledge and those who have yet to learn. Thus a learner in one context will become a teacher in the next situation. This is in direct contrast to

many traditional classrooms in which cooperation may be framed as cheating and choosing to cooperate rather than to compete may be read as not working to one's potential.

Ray McDermott (cf. 1974: 105) has looked at reading groups in early elementary classrooms. He writes that given a particular social organization, reading failure for certain students is a social achievement:

...reading disabilities are products of the way in which the people in the classroom use their categories for interaction to produce statuses and identities, or ways of attending stimuli, in the classroom setting... Any formal differences in the communicative styles of the teacher and the children can introduce havoc to their relations and the messages of relationship they consequently send to each other... Reading skills get caught in this battle over which cues are to be attended - peer group cues or teacher cues.

McDermott's studies add evidence to the argument that collaborative learning among students could provide an alternative to student resistance.

Henry Giroux (1983: 293) writes that the theory of resistance brings into focus the social practices of schooling. His analysis adds to this picture of the role of collaborative learning in many minority cultures:

Furthermore, resistance theory reveals the ideology underlying such a curriculum, with its emphasis on individual rather than collective appropriation of knowledge, and how this emphasis drives a wedge between students from different social classes. This is particularly evident in different approaches to knowledge supported in many working-class and middle-class families. Knowledge in the working-class culture is often construed on the principles of solidarity and sharing, whereas within middle-class culture, knowledge is forged in individual competition and is seen as a badge of separateness.

In her description of the Warm Springs Indians, Philips (1972, 1983) writes that children spend more time as a group than with adults. The emphasis in this culture on collective responsibility suggests the importance of including collaborative activities among peers in classrooms. In the classrooms that she observed, Philips found that Native American students participated more actively in student-run group projects. These students generally ignored the instructions to pick a leader, they exhibited little conflict over who should be directing the

activity, and they completed their tasks without needing the intervention of a teacher.

Another lens which can be used to look at the above situation is one of competence and incompetence (note: those two terms are used advisably). In other words, the Native American students were competent participants in student-run groups and other speech events that had participation structures that were similar to those of the community, while they displayed less competence in speech events such as class meetings and reading groups which required culturally different participation structures.

Au and Mason (1981: 117) term this a "competence/incompetence paradox" which refers to children who are capable of solving a wide range of problems at home and who appear slow to learn at school. It is speculated that this incompetence arises from the differences between the social organization of the home and the school (Au and Mason 1981; Philips 1972, 1983).

In their study of an inner city classroom, DeStefano and her colleagues (1982) examined students' language during reading instruction. They found that the students' relative success in becoming literate was masked by an emphasis on appropriate participation in the reading events. They concluded that what counts as literate behavior in this classroom has more to do with following the rules and procedures for social and communicative behavior than comprehending the text. Thus, the students could be competent readers in their comprehension of the material or in an academic context, yet they might be judged incompetent in their performance or in a social context.

The sociolinguistic studies described above suggest that adaptations in the participation structures of classrooms should be introduced in order to make schools more culturally congruent with the homes and communities of their students. Their introduction may have a profound effect on children's learning. The suggestion is that these changes should be made at the level of content and form or

social interaction. In other words, 'in addition to teaching explicitly about various cultures, adaptations need to be made at the level of "invisible culture" (Phillips 1983). The above research indicates that a classroom participation structure which includes collaborative learning between teachers and students and among students as peers reflects the community norms and values of various minority groups. It runs counter to, but does not exclude, the North American mainstream values of individualism and competition. In this sense, collaboration is defined to encompass both content - the joint production of meaning or learning by constructing understanding through transactions with others, and form - social interactions that are based on mutual participation.

III: Towards a community of learners

The development of a community of learners in a classroom holds the possibility to change the hegemonic practices that currently exist and offers a new perspective on the view of schools as vehicles for cultural reproduction and student resistance. The concept of a community of learners offers an educational structure that emphasizes the social nature of learning, allows the teacher to become immersed in the students' cultures, can increase the cultural congruence between the home and community and the school, and offers the possibility of reducing the resistance often enacted by minority students in mainstream classrooms. If students and teachers work together in collaborative relationships, the notion of schools as a site for the reproduction of power relationships and social structures will necessarily have to be modified. In the final section of this paper, I will move towards a definition of a community of learners by first discussing the ways in which the concept of a community of learners differs from both speech communities (cf. Hymes 1972; Gumperz 1972) and interpretive communities (cf. Fish 1980; Radway 1984). I will conclude with a discussion of what a community of learners is or might be.

Speech communities have been defined by sociolinguists as groups of people who share both a common language and the knowledge of how to use that language appropriately in daily life (Hymes 1972). The boundaries of speech communities often coincide with other divisions such as race, class, and religious or ethnic groups (Gumperz 1972). In a classroom, students and teachers may share a language at the same time that they employ different ways of using and interpreting the discourse that is enacted there (Hymes 1972). Communities of learners can be built across speech communities so as to include members of a multicultural classroom. In order for this to work, teachers and students need to be aware of the cultural assumptions about verbal and nonverbal social interactions that members of each speech community holds. A first step is for members of a community of learners to begin to become aware of and to articulate their own knowledge of cultural conventions.

In his notion of interpretive communities, Fish (1980) challenges the authority of the text and relocates this authority within the community of readers. The interpretive communities which he describes are situated in culture and need to be understood in terms of the context in which they are constructed. For Fish, then, interpretation is a product of social interactions between readers in a specified community. Jan Radway (1984: 33) elaborates Fish's notion of interpretive communities in her study of a community of women who read romances. She writes:

...reading is a complicated semiotic and fundamentally social process that varies both in place and in time. That is to say, different readers read differently because they belong to what are known as various interpretive communities, each of which acts upon print differently and for different purposes.

The concept of a community of learners which I wish to introduce includes the collaborative making of meaning which is described as a function of interpretive communities, and goes beyond this notion of community. First, in multicultural classrooms, communities of learners will include members with diverse values and purposes for print. This students and teachers will work

together to listen to competing and often conflicting interpretations so that all viewpoints are heard. While students and teachers will bring to the classrooms their various cultural backgrounds, the classroom will be a place where these cultures are simultaneously allowed to remain distinct and to be learned. This community is not situated in one culture but in many.

This notion of community is similar in some respects to McDermott, Gospodinoff and Aron's (1978: 247) conceptualization of context. They postulate that group members use their understanding of their interactions to contextualize their interpersonal communication. They define context as:

(1) in some way formulated by the members of the group, in words or gestures; (2) in some way, usually by postural positioning, acted out in form as well as content; (3) behaviorally oriented to as patterns by the members at certain significant times; and (4) used by the members to hold each other accountable.

In their description of a reading group, McDermott and his colleagues (1978) describe the ways in which each movement or postural shift forms the contexts on which the next movement is constructed. This is a physical description of the kind of collaboration that is possible in a community of learners on numerous levels.

As a part of an ethnographic study of how people construct their own theories of reading and writing, I interviewed a twelfth grader at an independent school (Schultz 1987: 12). She described the multiple of readers and writers, including her family and friends, of which she is part. Her description of her poetry class that includes eleventh and twelfth graders as well as adults who belong to the wider school community (teachers, parents, alumni, etc.) captures some elements of a community of learners:

It's nice to have a lot of thought going on [when you're reading as a group of people]. Sort of like when you first brainstorm. You throw everything out and you go through slashing out what doesn't mean anything. Get it down to a nice outline. So it's great to have five minds working on something rather than just one. And also having a teacher like Judith Johnson who works in sort of mysterious ways. She asks questions and somehow manages to make everybody want to talk at a very free level. So we sort of open the poem up to each other that way, I think. And everybody thinks about it differently. Like

we're reading one Marion Moore poem and one kid was saying that he was convinced that it was a very confrontational poem and everybody else was saying it was a retreat. It's neat to know that it can mean so many different things. There's something about it, because it becomes so much clearer in class. I guess there are certain books I will not read myself, like Ulysses and other James Joyce things like Finnegans Wake and things that just would be impossible without having people there to sort of walk you through it. And also reading [a poem] aloud is much better if you have a group, than just reading to yourself, I think.

In a later conversation, she said:

It's nice to have Jenny [my sister] say things because sometimes they'll be really different from how I see it and I can adjust a little bit. So it's fun.

This description of a community of learners describes both a collaborative construction and search for meaning and a set of social interactions which make this learning possible.

Most of the sociolinguistic studies which have been described in the overview above have focussed on homogeneous populations, members of a single culture. The next step is for researchers to examine inner city multicultural classrooms. Rather than critiquing the ways in which these classrooms don't work, I suggest that a classroom in which the teacher and students are achieving a modicum of success be found to pursue the question: how do teachers and students form and participate in communities of learners? There are four lenses that can be used to examine closely this concept of communities of learners: first, intercultural differences, how does one's social class, race, ethnicity or gender affect participation in a community of learners; second, power and powerlessness in a community of learners, which voices are privileged and which are silenced; third, the hegemony of the single correct answer and individual testing, how does collaborative learning co-exist in a classroom, school and society in which success is measured by individualistic tests; and fourth, social construction theory, where are there opportunities in communities of learners for reproduction and resistance?

The concept of communities of learners has been presented as an example of culturally responsive pedagogy that is based on collaborative learning. The next question is: how are these communities enacted in multicultural classrooms and what possibilities do they hold for remedying the current inequities of our present educational system in the United States.

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