The Australian Journal of
INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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INCLUSIVE and EMPOWERING DISCOURSE in an EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY CLASSROOM with INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the classroom discourse and strategies of Marcia, an early childhood teacher of a class with a high percentage of Indigenous Australian students. These students have been demonstrably successful on standardised literacy tests, which is not the case for Indigenous students in general in Australia (e.g., MCEETYA, 200). It will be suggested here that Marcia's approach and relationships with the students, as constructed in her discourse, have been a large contributing factor in this success. Marcia's discourse can be described as both inclusive and empowering and, as such, it will be proposed that awareness of her techniques may be of benefit to teachers who are working with groups whom education systems tend to marginalise and disempower. Marcia's lessons were observed as part of the project, "Teaching Indigenous Students with Conductive Hearing Loss in Remote and Urban Schools of Western Australia". This project was based in Kurongkurl Katitjin, School of Indigenous Studies, at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia, and was funded by an Australian Research Council Strategic Partnerships with Industry [SPIRT] Grant and the industry partners: Department of Education of Western Australia, Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia and Aboriginal Independent Community Schools, Western Australia.

Introduction

Australian teachers have not been very successful in fostering the English literacy skills of their Indigenous students. For example, since the inception of the National Literacy Benchmarking tests for reading and writing undertaken across the nation by students aged approximately eight, 10 and 12 years, Indigenous students have scored significantly lower than the cohort as a whole (MCEETYA, 2003). While such standardised tests are likely to be culturally-biased, and the whole testing situation may be culturally-inappropriate, current indications are that this sort of testing is likely to continue and that judgements made about students on this basis will persist. It is therefore relevant to look at the work of a teacher whose students have done well on such tests, and to examine the features of the discourse in her classroom which may be positive and empowering for the students. We do so in the spirit of positive discourse analysis (Martin, 2004), which attempts to analyse exemplary discourse practices rather than critique the problematic.

Given the large number of language groups to which Indigenous Australians belong, it is difficult to generalise about discourse practices, however, some work posits features such as the following as characteristic of interactions to which Indigenous Australians are accustomed:

- many people may speak at once;
- attentiveness is not shown either by silence or eye contact;
- adults tend not to talk down to children;
- it is not considered polite to ask direct questions or to move too quickly from social to "business" talk; and
- silence is an acceptable response (Malcolm, 1998, p. 130).

There is often a mismatch between discourse with such features and the type of classroom discourse many Indigenous Australians are subjected to. Because of this, it is useful to compare the classroom discourse of a successful teacher of Indigenous

students such as the one in this study with these suggested features, and to investigate any other characteristics of her speech which may create a positive learning environment for the students. A related study (Thwaite, 2004) illustrates the discourse of another successful teacher of Indigenous children who was working in a different environment.

Methodology

As mentioned, the case study described here is part of a larger investigation into teaching Indigenous Australian students with conductive hearing loss. This case involved observing one teacher, Marcia, and her class over a period of seven months, from May to November 2002. During this period, the researcher and team visited the class five times. On each occasion, we asked to see an entire lesson or learning experience, usually of approximately half an hour in length. The focus was particularly on lessons involving literacy. We talked with the teacher briefly before the lesson, then video- and audio-taped the lesson. Afterwards we audio-taped an interview with Marcia about the content of the lesson and the progress of the students in the class. All material was then transcribed.

Marcia is an experienced teacher of four- and five-year-olds who works in a preprimary centre attached to a large primary school in a suburban area. The surrounding area could be described as disadvantaged, with the principal stating that 80% of the parents are welfare recipients. The school is classified as "Difficult to staff" by the Western Australian Department of Education and Training. Approximately one third of the students are Indigenous Australian. Marcia's class contains both preprimary (four year-olds) and Year 1 students (five-year-old students undertaking the first year of compulsory schooling). She has a full-time teaching assistant working with her, and an Aboriginal/Islander Education Officer (AIEO) visits regularly.

Discourse analysis

Marcia is an extremely dynamic teacher in every sense of the word. Her classroom is characterised by lively interaction and equitable relationships with the children (for example, in terms of how she refers to them and the power that they are given). She makes connections to the children's world through explicit references and through use of some of their own varieties of language. Marcia is highly alert to whether the children are paying attention and understand what is required of them in the classroom. She scaffolds their learning to ensure that they can all achieve success. She is particularly concerned with accuracy – examples below illustrate how she emphasises standard spelling – and does not hesitate to give children clear feedback if they are on the wrong track. Marcia is very explicit in referring to aspects of literacy involved in the wide range of tasks in which the children in her class engage, and very persistent in ensuring that the children are keeping up with what is happening in class. Some illustrations of these features in Marcia's discourse appear below. Two more extensive transcripts from one of her lessons are shown at the end of this paper.

Non-verbals

Marcia is non-verbally extremely expressive: she has a very expressive face, and makes much use of gestures such as pointing to her lips to indicate quietness, and pointing to and mouthing some of the words. She uses non-verbals to help demonstrate particular aspects of speech as linked to spelling; for example, she demonstrates the tongue position for "th" in "then". She verbally draws attention to her non-verbals, so that the children will realise how the gestures can help them.

Example 1

> Marcia: down the bottom there, just behind the [inaudible] I'm pointing

She has a very dynamic voice with great pitch variation and uses amusing songs, some of which she has created herself, to emphasise rhyme and rhythm.

Refers to explicit aspects of literacy learning

In order to help the children learn, Marcia draws their attention to specific aspects of literacy, particularly pronunciation, but also including word attack strategies, spelling, conventions of print and features of "story". Example 2 is an example of a word attack strategy.

Example 2

> ? What's this?
>
> Marcia: [Inaudible] Sound it out. S-a-t.
>
> ?: Sat.

In the following three examples, Marcia emphasises the pronunciation of the phoneme /t/, which the children sometimes do not aspirate at the end of words. This is a feature of some vernacular varieties of Australian English and Aboriginal Englishes.

Example 3

> Marcia: Can we hear the t. I didn't hear the t on the end.
>
> Marcia and children: The hungry giant.
>
> Marcia: Beautiful.

Example 4

Marcia: The bees zoomed out. I want to hear you say this word.

Children: Out.

Marcia: Good.

Example 5

Marcia: A t. A ... This letter.

?: t

Marcia: t. That's right a t.

Marcia reminds the children of two recognised strategies for helping with spelling, checking the overall appearance of the word and focussing on a particular part of the word, in this case the end.

Example 6

Marcia: ... just **remember how it looks.** ... Can't sound it out. You have to remember how it looks.

Example 7

Marcia: **what goes on the end** for "then"?

Teaching students about the conventions of print, Marcia draws the students' attention to aspects of layout in the context of the story they are sharing together.

Example 8

Marcia: What does it mean when this word's bigger? We have to say it ...

Marcia and children: Louder.

She also refers to the features of "story", reminding the children of typical basic elements of the narrative genre.

Example 9

Marcia: We forgot to write "The End".

The above examples illustrate that Marcia is conscious of a range of linguistic features, including text structure, graphophonics and visual features, and that she can translate this knowledge so that it is useful for the students.

Refers to linguistic features

Marcia had ensured that the children were familiar with the terms "word", "sentence" and "story". She refers to other particular types of words and parts of language, but without using over-technical vocabulary. For instance, in Example 10 she uses a gloss for rhyming words.

Example 10

Marcia: Who can remember these words that sound the same?

Provides strategies for completing tasks successfully

Marcia makes sure that the children are able to meet her expectations and achieve success. In doing so, she provides hints for approaching their work, using similar principles to those of the "scaffolding interaction cycle" described by Martin & Rose (Martin & Rose, 2005; Rose et al., 2004). Using this cycle, a teacher scaffolds what acceptable answers might be. Marcia's technique scaffolds what acceptable responses towards achieving a task might be.

For example, Transcript 2 (below) shows Marcia beginning a spelling test with the children. In Example 11 she gives several strategies that will help the children with this test and which would also be generalisable to other occasions:

- copying (for one boy who is having difficulties)
- leaving a difficult word and coming back to it
- looking at a word they had written before
- remembering the word.

Example 11

Marcia: He's just having to copy ... Leave it, come back to that one.... Look at the word ... Writing the same word, aren't we? ... try and remember it in your head, OK?

The following example from another lesson gives a practical strategy for completing a task:

Example 12

Marcia: you're going to have to write a little bit smaller to fit the word in.

The suggestions from the teacher may seem obvious to anyone experienced with literacy and with completing tests, but they are just the scaffolding that the children in this class need (see also the section below on scaffolding).

Inclusive discourse

One of the ways in which Marcia gives the impression of being on a level with the children is a way of talking which includes everybody on an equal footing. This aligns with Malcolm's suggestion that Indigenous Australians are accustomed to discourse where adults tend not to talk down to children, as mentioned above, and as such would help create a comfortable atmosphere for the Indigenous children in the class. Marcia's inclusive discourse is expressed in her use of pronouns, in the ways she asks the children for advice, and in the ways she addresses them.

In Example 13 she uses the inclusive first person pronouns, "us" and "we":

Example 13

Marcia: Let's pretend **we're** pop stars.

In Example 14 she consults the children about whether they want to go quickly or slowly while breaking up a list of words into phonemes:

Example 14

Marcia: Do we want to do it fast or slow first?

The following examples show Marcia using solidary terms of address when speaking to the children:

Example 15

Marcia: Okay, **you guys** finished?

Example 16

Marcia: Come on, **old man**, let's do it.

Example 17

Marcia: No, **mate**, you've got "wex".

(see Transcript 2 for the context of this example.)

Example 18

Marcia: Here you go, **buddy**.

Marcia's inclusivity is more than just tokenistic, as she really does include herself in activities engaged in by the children.

Gives children agency

Marcia's discourse is empowering for the children in that she encourages them to make decisions and asks them for information. For example, we observed during one visit that those children who said they wanted to read fast were allowed to do so. In the example below she sensitively gives an offer of help:

Example 19

Marcia: ... Nathan. Do you want me to help you – do you want me to read it with you?

This offer puts the child in the position of deciding whether he wants help or not.

The following example is a true request for information:

Example 20

Marcia: What's the date today? Does anybody know?

This question puts the teacher in the role of secondary knower (Berry, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c). She sounds as if she genuinely doesn't know the information.

Combination of direct and indirect commands

When instructing the children Marcia uses a variety of forms, which has the effect of downplaying her authority. Some examples of her less direct commands are given below. Many of them also include the feature of inclusivity, as in Example 21, repeated below:

Example 21

Marcia: Let's pretend **we're** pop stars.

Marcia's commands achieve indirectness through choices of mood other than imperative. Example 22 is in the declarative mood:

Example 22

Marcia: ... we're going to do it together. Ready?

Example 23 is a modalised declarative:

Example 23

Marcia: **Maybe** you can squish it with your hands.

This has the effect of making the command sound like a suggestion rather than an instruction.

Examples 24 and 25 are interrogatives:

Example 24

Marcia: ... Can we have a look at the poster now?

Example 25

Marcia: Walter, **could** you do me a favour and bring the trays of reading books down the bottom there?

In Example 25 Marcia's question draws attention away from the power disparity between teacher and student, as if it is Walter's choice whether he helps her or not.

Example 26 uses a modalised interrogative:

Example 26

Marcia: ... **can** you come and sit down **please**.

Here Marcia is using politeness conventions that are not always considered necessary in teacher discourse.

This variety in expression was similar to another case study teacher, Yvonne's, use of both direct and indirect commands. However, Yvonne tended to use repetition of instructions more than Marcia (see Thwaite, 2004, p. 82ff).

Instructions are followed by explicit examples

Marcia often follows her instructions by a related example. Similar to scaffolding appropriate responses to a task, this strategy makes it easier for the children to ascertain what is expected. Example 27 illustrates this approach:

Example 27

Marcia: ... Mrs Capricorn's going to ask you to say the missing word, Robert. So Mrs Capricorn is going to say, "Which word is missing?"

Marcia has realised that the children are more likely to understand direct than indirect speech.

Makes sure children have understood instructions

The examples below show that children's understanding of instructions is monitored. This is clearly very important for children who have any hearing loss, as some children in this classroom did.

Example 28

Marcia: I'll put the lists, one list, two at the back there. Can you see it?

S: [Inaudible].

Marcia: The green – [inaudible] Nestor, can you go and point to where I put the lists today please?

D: [Inaudible].

S: I can see them.

Marcia: Can you see them?

S: Yup.

See Transcript 1 for the context for this example. S and D represent students. This example also involves the feature of repetition/persistence referred to below.

Examples 29 and 30 show Marcia checking compliance to her instructions:

Example 29

Marcia: Walter, you **actually** have to open the book so **we** can start, **darling**.

Note she includes the reason for her request as a way of softening it.

Example 30

Marcia: Bobby, I don't see that pencil in your hand.

This is also an indirect way of asking Bobby to do something.

Links examples to children's context

Marcia contextualises her discourse by relating it to the children's own lives and contexts, with which she is familiar. In the following example the class is reading the book *The hungry giant* together. Marcia mentions the name of the suburb where they live to make the story more real:

Example 31

Marcia: (The giant) might come **to (our suburb)**. He might come to **your place.**

Discourse directed towards specific children

For various reasons, from time to time Marcia mentions particular children:

- to get their attention. This occurs very frequently, with the name often at the beginning of the utterance (to make sure they listen to the following message) and sometimes at the end:

Example 32

Marcia: No, that's a no **Winsome**.

Example 33

Marcia: Mrs Capricorn's going to ask you to say the missing word, **Robert**.

Marcia also explicitly gains the attention of one or other of the groups in the class (Preprimaries or Year Ones) in this way.

- to ensure compliance

Example 34

Marcia: **Alison** we're going to do it together.

- to relate the discourse to them (see also previous section on making links to the children's context.)

Example 35

Marcia: (The giant) might come to your place for a feed **Nathan**.

Note that "feed" is a word used in Aboriginal English (see below). Marcia does **not** tend to address a particular child in order to put them on the spot to answer a question.

Scaffolds children's responses

As previously mentioned, Australian work on helping Indigenous students with literacy emphasises the notion of scaffolding their responses so that the students are aware of the expectations of the teacher and what is considered appropriate (see, for example, Martin & Rose, 2005; Rose et al.,1999).

Marcia uses various means of helping the children know what sort of response is expected from them. These can be quite explicit:

Example 36

Marcia: ... We have to say it ...

Marcia and children: Louder.

Scaffolding may consist of informing them of what constitutes an unacceptable answer.

Example 37

Marcia: Number 2 – was. **I do not want to see w-o-z** (see Transcript 2, below).

Or she may gives hints on how to get to a desired answer:

Example 38

Marcia: If you know what the first letter is, put it down. If you know what the last letter is, put it down.

Also see above section on strategies for completing tasks.

Repetition/persistence

Marcia is dogged in ensuring that all the children meet her expectations to the best of their abilities, and know what is going on (some of these examples show inclusivity as well).

Example 39

Marcia: Invisible. Shall we talk to them?

?: No.

Marcia: Shall we talk to them?

?: No.

Marcia: No, that's a no Winsome.

Example 40

Marcia: Now we say them together ...

...

Marcia: ... we're going to do it together.

Repetition is used both as a discourse strategy and as a way of helping children learn:

Example 41

Marcia: You're all going to have to write this word 10 times on the page please.

Note that "persistence" is one of the 33 keywords identified by the Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia project (STELLA, 2005) as "attributes describing accomplished practice".

Clear feedback

Marcia frequently praises the class and individuals. It is very clear whether their answers are correct or not, thus helping to avoid "interactive trouble" (Ludwig & Herschell 1996, p. 76ff). This fits in with her philosophy of teaching such aspects of literacy as spelling, where the right answer is more important than "having a go". Marcia's view goes against the approach to spelling which is predominant in Western Australian schools. This approach, as promoted by such programmes as First Steps (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997), favours "invented spelling" as a stage in learning to spell. Teachers normally allow children who are considered to be at this stage to use approximations of standard spellings. The use of "have-a-go pads", where children try out their ideas of what a word might look like, is encouraged.

The following extracts from interviews before and after the lesson recorded on 29 August, 2002 indicate Marcia's attitude to spelling and accuracy. Minor editing has been performed on the transcript to increase the coherence of the text in areas where some words were inaudible.

I = interviewer
T = Marcia

Before the lesson

The interviewer commented that it is unusual not to encourage the children to "have-a-go" with spelling.

T: Well, we're saying here that these, the Indigenous kids need direct teaching and they want to know that they're doing it right and we'd rather they were doing it right, than they were having a go and failing all the time.

And getting up there to Year 3 and still writing W, W-O-Z, you know? And making all these, you know, so what we're doing is teaching them how to look around, how, if they've got dictionaries, how to use their dictionaries, you know, they've got their favourite people in there and a whole range of things and so I'm starting to get them to use it now.

I: 'Cos otherwise they see it written wrongly so many times.

T: That's right ... and so when I do spelling tests, they usually get all of them right 'cos I say, think about how it looks first and they try and remember how it looks and then they're doing it. I said, I cannot sound it out. The ones that we can sound out, we do. The other ones, we say, look and learn, remember how it looks. We say the letters. You know, we use a whole range of strategies and we're doing the Let's Decode program as well as speech therapy strategies that we're using as well and ... I don't know what else I'm doing but anyway ...

I: That's the way I learnt to spell. We didn't have any of this "have-a-go" business in my day.

T: **No, I think it's absolute garbage.** They've left, do you know what I mean? I do, I do ... so because some kids, like mostly the girls, are very visual and they just pick it up like that ...

After the lesson

I: You were talking earlier, before the lesson started about the focus on accuracy and ... I certainly noticed with the board which you were holding up that there was a high level of accuracy there. Can you just refresh my memory on the reasons that you were focusing on accuracy and the benefits that you've seen looking at kids you've had over the past few years that have gone through the school.

T: Well, what we've decided, as the staff in the early childhood we're noticing that, because we're at the bottom of the bucket with literacy, we were trying to work out, what is the problem? What could we fix? What strategies could we use to improve them? And we had a lady come over from the eastern states and she said, let's go back to reading for accuracy, not fluency, first of all, and writing for accuracy and so, we've taken that approach, we've kind of let go of the Whole Language approach and so what we're finding as you can see is that because we're asking them to be accurate, by the time they get to Year 3, they haven't written "was" 1,000 times incorrectly. It hasn't been ingrained, it hasn't, that memory, what do you call that? That synaptic, the memory hasn't been, you know, so deeply (ingrained) and they can't fix it. It's just too difficult to fix by the time they get to Year 3 so we want them to write correctly and they're quite happy to, like if you, Breanna, well, she can sit down right now and write, "On the weekend, I went to the park and I had fun.", so she's very confident so from there, she can build on.

Marcia's method makes use of the children's visual memory for letter patterns in words. She tries to ensure that they are mainly exposed to correct models of spelling, rather than encouraging invented spelling.

She makes sure that they get a lot of practice in writing the correct forms of words, for example by writing lists of them up on the whiteboard (sometimes working together). Although Marcia's views on the teaching of spelling would be considered unusual in Western Australia, the success of her approach is borne out by the results of her class in standardised spelling tests.

Returning to the general issue of feedback, responses to the students are both positive and negative. Example 42 shows Marcia praising the class, while Example 43 shows negative feedback:

Example 42

Marcia and children: Man, van, ban, pin.

?: Pen.

Children: Pin.

Marcia: Pin. **Very good**.

Example 43

Marcia: oh dear me. No, no, no, no, no ... **We've** really messed that up.

Note that Marcia includes herself in the rebuke. Another instance of negative feedback occurs when one boy's work is described to him as "koonya, man". I believe this word can be translated as "shit".

Uses some Aboriginal English and Noongar words

Marcia uses some words from both the local language, Noongar (also spelt Nyungar or Nyoongar) and Aboriginal English (see Malcolm et al., 1999 for a description of Aboriginal English), the effect of which could be seen as creating solidarity and relating her talk to the children's own context. It is possible that some of these terms may also have more of an emotional effect on the children than Standard English words.

Example 44

Marcia: He might come to your place for **a feed**.

Marcia also uses Aboriginal English words such as "unna". This is a very inclusive particle which can be used like a tag in Standard Australian English (Cahill, 1999, p. 27). Her use of the Noongar word "koonya" has already been mentioned above.

Implications for pedagogy

Identifying some of the discourse features used by teachers such as Marcia, with specific examples, can be of help to preservice teachers, who are often taught what to do insofar as the steps of particular teaching strategies are concerned, but do not necessarily have explicit guidance on forms and functions of discourse. As Marcia is known as a successful teacher in the context in which she works, which is one which is characterised by a high proportion of Indigenous Australian children, it could be that some of her discourse is especially appropriate for interacting with these children. If so, it would be especially useful for Western Australian teachers to learn from her example, as they will nearly all work with Indigenous children at some stage during their careers. However, it is also possible that some of the features of Marcia's discourse have wider application and would prove useful when working with different types of children. With new developments such as the Lessonlab programme (2005), preservice and practising teachers are able to view video clips of examples of "best practice". While the data we obtained on Marcia's teaching is not available for this purpose, it is an example of the type of case study that could be usefully incorporated into such a programme.

Conclusion

Some of the discourse features illustrated here may contribute to the documented success of children from Marcia's class in standardised literacy tests. These include:

- gaining children's attention;
- solidarity and inclusivity;
- relating to children's socio-cultural and socio-linguistic contexts;
- being explicit;
- using scaffolding;
- giving clear feedback; and
- persistence.

We can compare what we have seen of Marcia's talk with Malcolm's (1998) postulated features of typical Indigenous Australian interaction, mentioned above. The feature, "many people may speak at once" was not particularly observed in Marcia's classroom, nor indeed in any of the case study classrooms observed by this researcher, and it is suggested that this is an institutional feature of classroom interaction which may be one of the things Indigenous students often need to adjust to on entry to school. Note, though, that Lipka (1998, p. 29) cites "allowing multiple speakers" as a feature of the classrooms of indigenous teachers of various backgrounds, so this variable may be related to the cultural identity of the teacher.

In Marcia's classroom, however, there was a great deal of group work in which turn-taking rules were freer than in whole-class discussions. Similarly, asking

direct questions is something difficult to avoid in the classroom context. However, in Marcia's case she certainly gave the children a lot of support which scaffolded their responses to her questions. The fact of silence being an acceptable response is difficult to illustrate, but Marcia did avoid "spotlighting" particular children or trying to force an answer from them, allowing a variety of children to respond to her questions. Marcia displayed awareness of the feature, "attentiveness is not shown either by ... silence or ... eye contact" and did not require this, but instead monitored children's attentiveness by other means. For instance, Example 30 (above) shows that she is checking whether a child has followed her instructions by observing whether he has picked up his pen. Malcolm's claim that in Indigenous Australian discourse, "it is not considered polite ... to move too quickly from social to "business" talk" is not supported directly by the data gathered for this project, as we did not observe the teacher at the beginning of the day when she first interacted with the children. Nevertheless, Marcia's knowledge of and connections made to the students' social contexts indicates her awareness of social and cultural dimensions. Thus we can conclude that, overall, Marcia's techniques would allow for Malcolm's suggested features of Indigenous Australian interaction, given the constraints of the classroom situation and given that it is very hard to generalise about diverse groups of Indigenous Australian peoples.

Another comparison which could be made is with the previously published case study of another teacher, Yvonne (Thwaite, 2004), who had a similar cohort of students, except for the fact that they were all Indigenous. Like Marcia, Yvonne displayed solidarity and inclusivity in her discourse, expressed, for example in the variety of command forms. Like Marcia, she empowered the students by giving them agency, and Yvonne's students, who were all in Year 1, showed a greater tendency to initiate sequences in the discourse. Similarly to Marcia, she gave clear and responsive feedback. However, her explicitness came from repetition of instructions more than Marcia's did.

It is also beneficial to compare Marcia's discourse with the findings of Lipka and colleagues (Lipka, 1998) from their work with indigenous Yup'ik Eskimo teachers in Alaska, although obviously the two contexts have many differences and it must be kept in mind that Marcia is not an Indigenous person herself. Lipka's team found, for example, that "Yup'ik ways of teaching supported a more conversational classroom interactional routine" than did the teaching of "mainstream" teachers (p. x). In the classrooms of Yup'ik teachers there was "increased student-to-student interaction, conversation between teacher and students, and a drawing in of shared contextual and cultural knowledge" (p. 7). The teachers "spoke to students as a whole instead of "spotlighting" individual students" (p. 14). While Marcia's classroom discourse could not really be described as "conversational", it does have some features that are more like conversation than traditionally-structured "classroom talk". For example, she uses inclusive discourse and pronouns, as in Example 21 above, repeated here again:

Example 21

Marcia: Let's pretend **we're** pop stars.

Marcia also uses solidary terms of address such as "mate" and "buddy", which would be found more often in a casual conversation than in a classroom. While for the purposes of this paper we have concentrated on Marcia's own talk, she did set up many opportunities for group interaction among the students; for example, when they worked together on planning to redesign the classroom space and implementing their plans. She also encouraged them to help each other with their work; they did not have a competitive attitude towards this and it was not considered "cheating". We have already seen how she related classroom material to children's contexts, with the example of the Hungry Giant making a visit to their suburb (Example 31). Marcia's position in regard to the children's cultural knowledge is more difficult to illustrate and, as mentioned, she does not share their cultural background. However, it is likely that they would see her use of Noongar and Aboriginal English words as demonstrating a positive attitude towards their culture. Although she did address remarks to individuals in the class, these were more likely to be statements than questions, and to not require a verbal response. She mostly directed questions to the whole class, rather than "spotlighting". Examples 7, 10 and 20, given above, illustrate this. Thus it is evident that Marcia's discourse shares some of the features mentioned as characteristic of the Yup'ik teachers' discourse, although we have mentioned other features of her talk not covered in Lipka's book. Not being an "insider", Marcia could not be expected to have the same relationship to cultural knowledge as the Yup'ik teachers did. Therefore, although Marcia was a demonstrably effective literacy teacher, she would not be able to provide the cultural continuity that an Indigenous teacher could.

From the present study and our previous one (2004), it can tentatively be suggested that there may be some discourse features which successful teachers of young (four- and five-year-old) Indigenous Australian students may have in common and that, furthermore, these features may have some relationship with the type of discourse these children are familiar with in their communities. In addition, it is possible that some of these features, such as a more conversational style, may be shared by successful teachers in other

Indigenous communities outside Australia. However, there remains much more work to be done in order to explore these suggestions further. Along with Marcia's dynamic personality, it is probably the combination of many aspects of her teaching, rather than any individual variable, which leads to her outstanding results. Thus caution is required in prescribing any particular feature for use by preservice teachers, as they need to situate their discourse as a whole in its social and cultural context.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was presented to the CALLR Roundtable, Perth, Western Australia, 1 October 2004. I would like to thank Marcia and her students for welcoming me into their classroom. Names of the teacher and students have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

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Transcript extracts

Transcript 1

Among other features, Transcript 1 illustrates Marcia's persistence and explicitness.

T: They're not here, alright? I'm going to read you the stories that you just [inaudible] and then we're going to go and practise spelling. Now, while we're practising spelling, I'm going to be back here doing your reading work and seeing if you can read this story to me and you can practise your spelling, eh? In your blue spelling books or on the blackboard or on the whiteboard. Write two lists. I'll put the lists, one list, two at the back there. Can you see it?

S: [Inaudible].

T: The green – [inaudible] Nestor, can you go and point to where I put the lists today please?

D: [Inaudible].

S: I can see them.

T: Can you see them?

S: Yup.

Transcript 2

Transcript 2 illustrates the different types of Commands used by Marcia, her scaffolding the children regarding how to approach a test, and the feedback she gives them.

T: I heard some of you singing the different parts. OK, ready? Number 1. Mm-mm-mm. Don't cry, alright? I, make it easy just to start with. Number 2 – was. I do not want to see w-o-z. Was. Walter, just remember how it looks. Yes, got it, got it, good, good. Excellent. Went – listen, I do not want to see wet, I do not

want to see w-e-t. I want to see went. Went. Went. Got it. Got it. Excellent. W-e – yes – n – got it. You got wet. I want went – w-e-n-t. No, mate, you've got wex. I want w-e – cross off it, yeah, he's getting there. He's just having to copy. W-e-n-t, went. Can you say that word match when you say the N sound. Went. Went. OK. For. For. Can't sound it out. You have to remember how it looks. Yeah, yeah. Very good. How does it look? I went for a walk. Yes Amanda, yes. Walter? Walter. Leave it, come back to that one. Ready? The. Yeah. Good. Got it, got it. Good. Next one. Then. Look at the word – th – and then what goes on the end for then? Writing the same word, aren't we? Now it's then. Very good, very good. Excellent. Amanda, try and remember it in your head, OK? Then. Is that a N on the end? That's right, N. Good, does everyone have an N on the end of the word "the"? OK, the next one? They.

About the author

Dr Anne Thwaite is a lecturer in language Education at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. She is interested in working with Indigenous people in educational contexts to improve participation and outcomes.