

Pedagogy in diverse secondary school classes: Legacies for higher education

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Abstract.

As university teachers we find ourselves grappling with the increasingly diverse legacies of students' prior pedagogic experiences – some of which seem to work against the quality intellectual outcomes now demanded from higher education. In this context, this paper reports a descriptive study of pedagogy created for Chinese students in a mainstream Australian secondary school with a high level of tertiary entry. An influential literature on student learning in higher education has pointed to the constraining effects of both Western and Chinese secondary schooling on university students' learning. In the case of Chinese students who enter Western universities from Western secondary schools, the picture is complicated by research indicating that students of English as a Second Language (ESL) receive even more constraining forms of pedagogy than their native-English-speaking peers. A framework of Bernsteinian sociological concepts and discourse analytic concepts was employed in the study reported here to explore this possibility. Implications are drawn for managing the transition of ESL students to university contexts, and for reflecting on our own responses to linguistic and cultural diversity in the tutorial room.

Introduction

As university teachers we are under considerable pressure to ensure that our students graduate with deep knowledge and high-level thinking skills. Despite resonance with hallowed academic values, current expectations in this regard have important origins in contemporary business and political imperatives. According to a pervasive rhetoric on lifelong learning and innovation, competitiveness in globalising knowledge economies requires a substantial corps of workers who not only comprehend theoretical principles, but also solve problems independently through flexible and creative thinking (Daly 1995; Ramsden 1992). At the same time, these pedagogic expectations are being extended beyond a small 'academic' elite to an expanding student

population that is increasingly diverse in age, motivation, experience, socioeconomic status, language, culture, and ability (e.g., Biggs 1999; Coelho 1994; Holt 1993; Shulman, Lotan and Whitcomb 1998). In this context of dramatic demographic shift and rising pedagogic expectation, timeworn assumptions about university students qua learners are decreasingly valid. Indeed, as university teachers we find ourselves grappling with the legacies of students' increasingly diverse prior pedagogic experiences – some of which seem inimical to quality intellectual outcomes from higher education.

In this paper I report a study of pedagogy created for Chinese students who are studying in English as a Second Language (ESL) in mainstream Australian secondary school classrooms. Chinese students are one of the groups to whom both secondary school and higher education teachers often attribute passive learning preferences that are considered inimical to quality intellectual outcomes (Biggs 1999; Kember and Gow 1991; Ramburuth and McCormick 2001; Watkins and Biggs 1996). My general aim in reporting the study is to consider how we, as university teachers, might think about pedagogy for such students in the context of expectations for quality intellectual outcomes from our courses.

The participants in my study were second-phase ESL learners, that is, students who have yet to acquire native-like English proficiency, but are capable of English-medium study in content areas. Although such students represent one of the sources of the cultural and linguistic diversification of Australian university classrooms over the last decade and a half, research considering implications of these students' prior educational experience for teaching and learning in higher education is limited. Indeed, a recent study specifically excluded such students to eliminate prior Western and English medium influences on learner diversity in higher education (Ramburuth and McCormick 2001). This paucity of research is of concern because a substantial body of phenomenological and constructivist research has pointed repeatedly to the salience of prior learning experiences for higher education students in general, and Chinese students in particular.

The higher education research has indicated that students' preferences for low quality learning approaches are built up through experience in pedagogic contexts both at university and previously (e.g., Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Ramsden 1992; Watkins and Biggs 1996). The assumption is that most students are capable of learning in ways that are considered conducive to quality outcomes, but operate otherwise if that is what they perceive to be expected and rewarded (e.g., Biggs 1999; Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Ramsden 1992; Watkins and Biggs 1996). In teaching for quality intellectual outcomes at university, we may thus find ourselves grappling with the legacies of students' prior experience of pedagogic contexts where such outcomes were not rewarded. Knowledge of those contexts may assist us to better understand how to help students learn in ways that are more conducive to the outcomes that are now being demanded from higher education. The data presented in this article were produced as part of a multisite comparative project investigating secondary school pedagogy for both

affluent Chinese ESL students, and Samoan ESL students living in poverty.¹ Interview, classroom, documentary, and field-note data were produced in seven state secondary schools and communities in Queensland, Australia. The large project has generated studies addressing a range of problems from perspectives of the sociology of educational knowledge and ethnomethodology (e.g., Dooley, Exley and Singh 2000; Freebody and Herschell 2000; Singh 2000, 2001; Singh and Dooley 2000, 2001; Singh, Dooley and Freebody 2001; Singh and Sinclair 2001). The sub-set of the data reported here was produced in Year 10² Geography classes in a school with substantial cohorts of primarily affluent Chinese ESL students, and strong expectations of entry into higher education.

The paper has three sections. In the first, the empirical study is described. In the second section, illustrative analyses of indicative classroom data are presented. The data give access to the moment-by-moment creation of pedagogic contexts for Chinese ESL students in the study classes. In the third and concluding section I suggest that the findings are cause for consideration for university teachers. The analyses show how reliance on the teacher is produced and expected in linguistically diverse mainstream Australian secondary school classrooms. Implications for managing the legacies of such are discussed, as are implications for creating pedagogic contexts in higher education.

The empirical study

Background to the study

In the higher education teaching and learning literature it has been suggested that Asian international students and local Australian university students are relatively similar overall as learners: low-level intellectual approaches are a common problem (Ramburuth and McCormick 2001; Volet, Renshaw and Tietzel 1994). Prior experience at secondary school has been invoked to explain the characteristics of both groups of students. For example, a study of a first year Economics course in an Australian university suggested that approaches of both South-East Asian Chinese international students and local students could be partially understood in terms of recent secondary school experience where low-level approaches were rewarded through examination success and entry into higher education (Volet et al. 1994).

In the case of Chinese ESL students who enter Western universities from Western schools, the picture is complicated by findings from applied linguistics studies of the difficulties experienced by ESL students in mainstream school and college classrooms (Kubota 2001). These studies indicate

that little provision is made for ESL students in mainstream classes, and when it is, that it tends to entail teacher-directed and unchallenging activities. The findings of a 3 1/2 year ethnographic study of the learning experiences of

Chinese aspirants to higher education at a culturally diverse U.S. secondary school (Harklau 1994) are illustrative.

Harklau's (1994) study found that pedagogic activities in the U.S. school were highly teacher-directed and required low levels of intellectual activity on the part of all students. However, expectations were differentiated: ESL students were rarely expected to contribute to teacher-directed questioning routines, the most common lesson activity. Moreover, ESL students were often allocated to low track classes where writing was limited to multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank and short answer activities that could be completed by memorization and copying of only partially comprehended text. In other words, while all students in the school were engaged in relatively unchallenging teacher-directed pedagogy, the most constrained versions of such were directed at ESL students. Success was not contingent upon full comprehension of content. And opportunities for producing comprehensible oral or written output in English – thereby optimising content-specific language acquisition – were limited. Similar findings and conclusions emerged from Verplaetse's (1998) observation and interview study of the classroom talk of 3 secondary science teachers in U.S. schools with cohorts of Russian and South-East Asian ESL students.

At this point some clarification is in order. Firstly, and contra common Western assumptions, teacher-directed pedagogy in the classroom does not necessarily mean low-level approaches on the part of learners. A study of the Chinese culture of learning (Cortazzi and Jin 1996) showed that although language lessons in China are teacher-dominated, students are able to become active, reflective, independent and collaborative learners. As in teacher-directed questioning in the West, only a small percentage of students are involved in answering teacher questions in Chinese classrooms: most students observe the answers. Given sufficient preparation of the lessons at home, however, Chinese students who observe with concentration are able to interact in their minds with teacher and text. Socialisation into such concentration seems to occur from early childhood when teachers encourage peers to both help the student who is answering, and collectively evaluate answers.

At the same time, and again, contradicting Western assumptions, memorization does not necessarily indicate low-level intellectual approaches (Cortazzi and Jin 1996; Marton, Dall'Alba and Kun 1996; Tang and Biggs 1996). There is evidence that Chinese students sometimes combine understanding with memorization, engaging in 'deep' rather than 'rote' memorisation. From the research on Chinese learning, it is clear that more constrained versions of pedagogy at secondary school do not necessarily preclude students from high quality approaches to learning. The question arises: When might they do so? This question is of some interest given: (i) demands to extend quality outcomes to an increasingly diverse higher education clientele in the West; and (ii) the influential assumption that inclinations to quality outcomes are built up through prior educational experience. The study reported in this article provides some purchase on this question through

investigation of the following: *How active or passive are students expected to be in teaching-learning activities typical of Australian secondary schools? Are different versions of activities created for Chinese ESL students in these settings? If so, how? And why?*

Data production

The study was conducted at Daybreak State High School (Daybreak SHS).³ The school had a sound academic reputation, and aspirations to higher education were generally encouraged. For example, in a speech given at an information night for Year 10 students and their parents, the Principal highlighted a higher education entry rate of more than 80 percent, noting that 40 percent of graduating seniors were accepted into degree courses.⁴ In this speech, the Principal exhorted the students to become more autonomous learners because *“strategies used by [senior] teachers are designed to help . . . in . . . tertiary experience when university lecturers do not give the individual support that is generally available at secondary school”*. At the school awards night later in the year, the Director of the local school district re-iterated the higher education entry figures claimed by the Principal, and cited a University of Melbourne study showing that *“the school was at a high level and above the national average on academic results”*.

For more than two decades, the Daybreak SHS student body was primarily native English-speaking and Australian-born. In early 1989 there were only two Asian ESL students in this school of over 800, one of whom was Japanese, and the other, Taiwanese. However, that year, substantial numbers of Asian students began enrolling as a result of the introduction of Australia's business and professional migration program. Within two years, there were more than 200 ESL students at the school, most of whom were Chinese, especially Taiwanese. There were also a few full fee-paying Chinese international students.

Unlike the children of refugee and family reunion migrants who had historically constituted the majority of Asian students in Queensland schools, the new cohorts of students at Daybreak SHS were socially and economically powerful. Discussion with the Head of Department (HOD) of the school's Intensive Language Unit indicated two cohorts of Chinese student: (i) students with successful and uninterrupted school histories, the support of educated parents (especially in the case of professional migrants), and families that could fund private tutoring to supplement the services provided by the school (see also, Ho and Coughlan 1997; McNamara 1997; McNamara and Coughlan 1997); and (ii) weak students sent to Australia because it *“was seen that they had more of a chance of success here because the environment is less competitive”*. According to the teachers, the Year 10 Geography classes observed for this study included students of both cohorts.

Critically for the teachers at Daybreak SHS, both cohorts of Chinese student (or their parents on their behalf) aspired to higher education. At the Year 10 information night, the English HOD expressed concern that *“100 percent of Taiwanese students”* insisted on taking the regular tertiary track

English subject, but struggle because “*they have unrealistic expectations of their capabilities*”. This is consistent with national findings indicating that the determination of such students to acquire tertiary qualifications and professional occupations is a source of particular concern to teachers in Australian schools, as is family pressure to this end (Cahill, Birchall, Fry, Vine, Black-Gutman and McLaughlin 1996). In contrast, the Intensive Language Unit HOD was accepting of Taiwanese students’ aspirations to higher education. She pointed to the limitations of the subject of English, with its cultural and literary biases, as a problem, rather than to students’ unrealistic expectations. Accordingly, she was campaigning for the students to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for higher education entry purposes. For her, the failure of Taiwanese students at subject English was “*a sign of what English measures. TOEFL is an alternative route to university*”. The point is that aspirations to higher education were strong on the part of Chinese ESL students and raised considerable pedagogic challenges for the teachers.

The school’s engagement with the challenges presented by the Chinese ESL students was informed by a ‘standard for culturally inclusive curriculum’ formulated by the state department of education. This standard required the dismantling of barriers to students’ opportunities, participation and benefits from schooling (entry into higher education included) (Department of Education, Queensland, 1995). Before implementing the policy, the Daybreak SHS Social Justice Committee⁵ commissioned a pre-service teacher⁶ to survey ‘multicultural aspects’⁷ of educational provision at the school. This survey concluded that ESL students’ academic success at Daybreak SHS was impeded by: (i) monocultural curriculum content; (ii) the predominance of teacher-directed instructional methods; and (iii) assessment which did not account for the language difficulties of ESL students. Subsequently, reform was undertaken in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, through a re-writing of relevant school policies, and provision of a professional development program for the teachers.

With respect to pedagogy, workshops were conducted to explain common ESL student characteristics (e.g., limited technical vocabulary) and behaviours (e.g., silence in class), and recommended teacher responses to these. Further, teachers from the school’s Intensive Language Unit⁸ teamtaught with mainstream teachers in order to model a range of alternatives to teacher-centred instruction for ESL students (e.g., peer tutoring, group work, problem-solving). In the case of assessment, alternatives for ESL students were not canvassed. Rather, ESL students were expected to undertake the same assessment items as mainstream students, but with the use of bilingual dictionaries. Translation services were available at the discretion of class teachers.

School administrators nominated two experienced Year 10 Geography teachers for the study as exemplary exponents of the Daybreak SHS cultural equity policies: Ms Kathleen Watson (10 years experience) and Ms Patricia Macara (extensive, but non-continuous experience over 35 years).⁹ Both of these teachers’ Year 10 Geography classes were culturally and linguistically diverse. Ms Watson’s class of 31 was relatively heterogeneous, with a

mix of Australian-born native English-speakers and (mostly ESL) migrants from around the world, including Taiwan and Hong Kong. In contrast, Ms Macara's class of 24 had one of the highest concentrations of Asian students at Daybreak SHS, the overwhelming majority being males recently arrived from Hong Kong and Taiwan (by dint of logistical accident rather than school policy).

Ms Watson and Ms Macara's Year 10 classes each provided 4 Geography lessons for the study. I audio-taped the lessons using a four-track master cassette tape recorder and full-function mixer combination workstation that allowed four microphones to be placed amongst the students. To assist with transcription, I produced field-notes, recording who spoke when, as well as classroom maps recording who sat where. In addition, I copied down blackboard notes, and collected handouts provided by the teacher. The lessons were a component of a data set that also included a series of subject English lessons taught to two classes at the school, and 56 audio-taped and transcribed interviews with Chinese students and their parents, mainstream teachers (extended interviews and brief pre-, or post-lesson interviews), ESL personnel, and various others with social, religious, commercial and educational functions in the local community, and interest in the education of Chinese students. The analyses presented below are drawn primarily from the Geography lesson data, but substantiating interview data are cited where relevant. It should be noted that the data set was limited to Geography lessons to control for subject-specific language and conceptual demands. In Australia, Geography lessons usually entail instruction in technical vocabulary with the expectation that this vocabulary will be deployed later, independently, to define and answer geographical questions. In contrast, English lessons are generally concerned with the development of ethical positions in relation to texts, rather than with the acquisition of technical vocabulary (Christie 1999; Wignell, Martin and Eggins 1993).

The lessons recorded for the study were part of a unit on eco-tourism which entailed a case study of the Gold Coast, a domestic and international tourist destination to the south of the Daybreak area. The general aims of the unit were for the students to acquire technical vocabulary for describing coastal landforms and land use, and to understand relationships of cause and effect in land use patterns, with particular attention to tourism, environmental problems and land management. A test of definitions devised by the Social Science Head of Department was administered at the end of the unit. A three-day field trip to the Gold Coast for the purpose of observing coastal landforms and land use patterns was an optional component. Students who did not participate in the fieldtrip (including all but one of the Chinese students) undertook classroom-based activities on the same topics. Data collection for the study occurred after the fieldtrip.

Theoretical framework

Basil Bernstein's (2000) sociology of pedagogy provided useful terms for describing and explaining students' pedagogic experiences. The concept of control is key to this theory. This concept is concerned with the locus of

pedagogic activity in either the teacher or the student. Control is strong or very strong in teacher-centred pedagogy where it is clearly the teacher who selects, sequences and paces instruction, and establishes evaluative criteria. In contrast, control is weak in student-centred pedagogy where these decisions do not seem to be vested in the teacher.

The distribution of differently controlled versions of pedagogy amongst members of the one class was understood in terms of parties. Originally developed by conversational analysts, this concept denotes a grouping of persons called into being, however temporarily, to participate in talk. In classroom talk there are usually at least two parties: the teacher, and a student party (potentially a multi-person party including the whole class), although multiple student parties are possible (Freebody and Herschell 2000; Payne and Hustler 1980). All the individuals within a multi-person party are not necessarily expected to participate in the same way. This is because the conduct of a lesson relies on a potential, rather than an actual, display of the same knowledge by all students. A lesson may work if some students interact with the teacher as spokespersons on behalf of a whole class party, most of which only witnesses the interaction (Payne and Hustler 1980). This witnessing function reflects what Bloome and Theodorou (1988) describe as the 'multiple layering' of classroom discourse – the phenomenon which sees teachers addressing the whole class, even if they are ostensibly talking to a single student.

Crucially for this study, witnesses can be held accountable for content and directions conveyed to a single student. Moreover, any speaker – teacher or student – has an obligation to design their talk to be heard and understood by all (Heap 1990). The capacity to fulfill these communicative obligations was of interest in this study: it was assumed that variants of pedagogy are created when some students cannot be held accountable as witnesses, or teacher or student cannot presume to be heard and understood. This assumption is consistent with the findings of classroom talk studies suggesting that teachers generally consider it good practice to strengthen control for students who are unable to participate in classroom interaction, especially when these students are low achievers or culturally distant from the teacher (Cazden 1988; Mehan 1974; Shuy 1988).

It was assumed further that it is through students' experience of variously controlled forms of pedagogy that preferences for learning passively or otherwise are acquired. The process here is one of socialization: students acquire dispositions to act in one or another way as they infer, from the features of the pedagogy, the actions that bring rewards in the context. In overtly teacher-directed pedagogy, for example, students are likely to acquire dispositions to passivity because it is compliance with the teacher's decisions about the selection, sequencing and pacing of instruction and evaluative criteria that is rewarded. This assumption is consistent with the 'student learning' paradigm, influential in higher education research, that draws attention to student's inclinations to learn in ways that are actually rewarded by teachers (Biggs 1999; Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Ramsden 1992; Watkins and Biggs 1996).

The analytic method applied to the lesson and interview data had two parts. The entire data set was firstly scanned with a code-and-retrieve procedure (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) to identify and re-organise data salient to the research questions. Analysable episodes of lesson data were produced by marking, on the transcripts, what was happening (e.g., 'marking homework', 'filling out worksheet'), who was participating, and what they said and did. Analysable episodes of interview data were identified by marking sequences of exchanges concerned with a particular topic (e.g., 'curricular reforms undertaken in the name of cultural equity'). Audio-tapes and fieldnotes were consulted. The two data sets were then scanned to identify lesson episodes where the Chinese students seemed to be treated similarly and differently from others, and interview episodes where Chinese students, and pedagogy for them, were described and explained.

Fine-grained analyses were then conducted using a set of analytic categories built on categories available from related sociological and classroom talk studies. In the case of the classroom data, the categories addressed features including: (i) the form of teacher–student interaction during activities (e.g., types of dialogue); (ii) the categorization of acquirers in parties during activities; and (iii) the degree of teacher control of activities. In the case of the interview data, the categories included some that addressed interviewees' models of: (i) students' capacities to fulfill interactive obligations of certain activities; and (ii) appropriate forms of teacher–student interaction. The general finding of the analyses was that variants of pedagogy were created for Chinese ESL students in the mainstream classes. This finding is now documented and explicated through illustrative analyses of indicative classroom data relating to dialogic and written activities. Substantiating interview data are cited as relevant.

Participation in dialogue

Analysis of the classroom data showed that Chinese students were generally in the witness position during teacher–student dialogue. In other words, these students were rarely expected to take up the most overtly active position available to students in the classroom talk. The only exceptions were in some of the talk dedicated to review of technical terms for the upcoming test, and a discussion about beaches in Chinese countries. On these few occasions, teacher control of the interaction was strengthened for the Chinese students. The following commentary relates to the discussion of beaches in Chinese countries. This discussion was enacted through True Content Dialogue. The core moves of this form of classroom talk are (genuine) Teacher Question and Student Answer (Lemke 1990). In the study lessons, a teacher and a whole class student party enacted these moves. It was always sufficient for a single student to engage with the teacher as spokesperson on behalf of the acquiring party, while the other students witnessed the interaction. Chorus replies did not occur, and were not encouraged. Indeed, teachers typically nominated individual students to speak. In this type of talk the communicative obligation of the teacher was to elicit suitable responses from spokespersons for the student party. The obligation of spokespersons was to construct such responses and to deliver them loudly and clearly enough for all to hear.

The following extract¹⁰ occurred early in a lesson when Ms Watson approached the table of Chinese students (names italicized):

- 1 Ms Watson: ((speaking to George at Table A while booklets were being distributed. Students at other tables were chatting socially)) Have you been to the beach much?
Been to the Gold Coast? Never been to the Gold Coast, George?
- 2 *George*: One ().
- 3 Ms Watson: One time, when?
- 4 *George*: Two years ago.
- 5 Ms Watson: Really?
- 6 *George*: Yes.
- 7 Ms Watson: Have you been to the Gold Coast, Lee, when?
- 8 *Lee*: ((at adjacent table)) ()
- 9 Ms Watson: () Matt, have you been to the Gold Coast?
- 10 *Matt*: ((Either gestures affirmatively or says something that is not picked up by the audio-tape)).
- 11 Ms Watson: Much, many times?
- 12 *Matt*: ((Either gestures negatively or says something that is not picked up by the audio-tape)).
- 13 Ms Watson: Only once. There are beaches in Hong Kong, real beaches or make-believe beaches, indoor beach? Is there beach in Hong Kong, Taiwan? Taiwan must have beaches, it's an island, so are the beaches in Taiwan different from the beach at the Gold Coast?
- 14 *Matt or George*:
Yeah.
- 15 Ms Watson: Why?
- 16 *Jenny*: In Taiwan has many ()
- 17 Ms Watson: Much sand?
- 18 *Jenny*: In Taiwan it's very dirty.
- 19 Ms Watson: That's because all of Taiwan's got all that rubbish buried underneath. ((To the whole class as the activity shifts from being a small group dialogue to a whole class dialogue)): Okay. Reg, there are beaches in Croatia?
- 20 *Reg*: Yeah.
- 21 Ms Watson: Yeah, ((to whole class)) all right, I want to hear something about the beaches from all these other countries, ((to Reg)) so what is the beach like?
- 22 *Reg*: It doesn't have sand. It's only small rocks. The water isn't really clear and there isn't any waves. It's like
- 23 Ms Watson: Little waves.
- 24 *Reg*: Yeah.
- 25 Ms Watson: Okay, so they're small, no surf.
- 26 *Reg*: No, no surf
- 27 Ms Watson: So they're small waves, little stones, nice round pebbles, aren't they?
- 28 *Reg*: Yep.

- 29 Ms Watson: Yep, okay, Jenny, on the other hand is telling us that the beach in Taiwan has sand and what sort of waves, surf, big waves?
- 30 Jenny: No.
- 31 Ms Watson: Small, little waves?
- 32 Jenny: Yeah, small.
- 33 Ms Watson: But there must be times when the waves are not Small.
- 34 Jenny: ()
- 35 Ms Watson: Okay, shush, Jenny was also telling me that the sand in Taiwan is not as, not the type of sand as the sand at the Gold Coast. There's a bit of pollution, isn't there? ((The dialogue continued with other (non-Chinese) migrant students being asked to describe the beaches in their countries of origin.))

This extract is interesting because of the evidence it offers about participation of the Chinese ESL students in a particular interactive arrangement, namely teacher-directed whole class dialogue. The extract opens with teacher-directed small group dialogue, but from Turn 19 shifts to whole class dialogue. The whole class student party was sub-categorised, in the first instance, into a grouping with the capacity to take up the position of spokesperson, and a grouping without that capacity. The sub-categorisation was predicated on the instructional relevance of experience that migrant students could bring to the lesson. Being a migrant was apparently assumed to give students access to particular information that the teacher wanted introduced into the lesson ("I want to hear something about the beaches from all these other countries" (Turn 21)).

Jenny was the only Chinese student in Ms Watson's class who was asked to speak to the whole class during the study lessons. This seems to reflect an assessment of Jenny's English proficiency: Ms Watson tended to speak to the Chinese students through Jenny. From the small group dialogue that preceded the whole class dialogue, it is clear that Jenny was capable of formulating sustained output in response to teacher questions: "In Taiwan has many () . . . In Taiwan it's very dirty". However, this type of output was not required of her in the whole group dialogue.

Unlike another five (non-Chinese migrant) students nominated to speak in the whole class dialogue, Jenny was not expected to enact a Student Answer to an open question. The Teacher Questions directed at Jenny during the whole class dialogue were relatively closed, and hence, controlled by the teacher. Jenny was only required to make yes/no responses to a series of questions about waves (e.g., ". . . surf, big waves?"), and to answer a weighted question (i.e., "There's a bit of pollution, isn't there?"). She was expected to construct replies about 'wave size' and 'beach pollution' as introduced into the whole class activity by Ms Watson (albeit, on the basis of Jenny's contribution in the earlier small group activity). The other migrant students, in contrast, were expected to not only describe the physical features of the beaches in their countries of origin, but also to identify which physical features of beaches they would thus describe (e.g., sand, rocks, water clarity, waves and so forth). This differentiation of expectation within a linguistically diverse class is consistent with previous studies indicating that ESL students receive fewer questions from teachers, especially high-level cognitive and open-ended questions (Harklau 1994; Verlaetse 1998).

In explaining her interactive practice with Chinese ESL students, Ms Watson stated that she did not consider Chinese ESL students to be capable of the same performance as other students in the class. Asked, during a postlesson interview, why she had spoken on behalf of a Chinese student in one of the other lessons observed for the study, Ms Watson replied that “it would have taken too long for me to cajole and threaten and encourage him into saying it, so I did it for him . . . it’s getting them out of doing it because, you know, I mean they can do their orals¹¹ if they’re prepared, but they’re not very good at answering so I don’t make them”. In another interview, Ms Watson made a similar comment, claiming that the Chinese students “just sit there and listen” during dialogue “because they can’t keep up with rapid conversation”. The problem here is one of capacity to produce answers as rapidly as is required to sustain classroom dialogue. As is clear from the different expectations made of Jenny during (what Ms Watson dubbed) the ‘Beaches of the world activity’, it is a problem that arises in the context of certain classroom interactive arrangements. This is consistent with research that attributed U.S. science teachers’ reluctance to question ESL students to unease about the time taken to answer (Verplaetse 1998).

From the ESL literature it is apparent that opportunities to produce comprehensible output are necessary for optimal linguistic and conceptual development (Harklau 1994; Verplaetse 1998), in this case, development of the technical language and concepts pre-requisite for independent engagement with geographical problems; for high-level intellectual work in Geography (Wignell et al. 1993). As established earlier, witnesses to teacher–student dialogue in Chinese classrooms seem to observe with concentration, interacting with the teacher in their minds (Cortazzi and Jin 1996). Crucially, however, this ‘imaginary output’ is predicated on understanding. Students prepare the lesson at home, and literal comprehension questions figure prominently in classroom activity. Such understanding cannot be assumed in the mainstream Australian classroom, or as the literature indicates, the mainstream U.S. classroom. In the study reported here, this was evident from data about written activities that pre-supposed comprehension of input delivered dialogically. The following data are illustrative.

Participation in writing activities

Teacher control of writing activities was regularly strengthened for Chinese students. These activities were usually enacted as Seatwork, an activity with two extended phases: (i) a spoken preparatory phase; and (ii) a primarily nonspoken phase where students work independently as the teacher circulates around the room (Lemke 1990). No obvious attempts to adapt the spoken preparatory phase of Seatwork for Chinese students were observed, but the independent written phase of the activity was nearly always adapted for these students. Ms Watson and Ms Macara encouraged these students to copy peers’ work (even though this was overtly prohibited for most students in the lessons) or dictated answers to them in the course of repeating the preparatory talk. An extract illustrating the dictation strategy, as employed by Ms Macara, is now presented.

The following data was extracted from a Seatwork activity that required the students to write a paragraph explaining the sequence of events represented in a series of diagrams depicting the development and management of coastal erosion in the context of residential development on sand dunes.

During the preparatory phase Ms Macara established strong control of the activity: “Today you’re going to write a paragraph . . . Have a look at those series of pictures, you can see that they follow a sequence . . . You’ve got the development occurring with the sub-division of the dunes . . . So, perhaps when we’re writing this paragraph we can make some statement for our topic sentence about how building on sand dunes can create further problems”. During the independent written phase of the Seatwork Ms Macara was observed offering assistance to John and Hugh, two students from Taiwan. The extract is a lengthy teacher monologue studded with rhetorical questions – an activity observed repeatedly in Ms Macara’s lessons. The monologue arose after Ms Macara asked students to indicate whether they needed help: “If you’re not sure and you don’t understand what I want you to do, put up your hand and I’ll come”. It should be noted that the extract has been broken into segments to highlight analytically salient portions of an otherwise lengthy and unbroken stretch of monologue. The breaks are for ease of reading only. They do not represent features of the talk.

- 1 Ms Macara: ((describing a series of worksheet diagrams on the development and management of coastal erosion to John who was sitting beside Hugh)) So people have built houses on the sand dunes, the dunes are being eroded and what’s happening to the houses? When the sand is taken away from underneath their house, the houses can fall down, can’t they? So to stop that from happening, what do they do? To stop the top of the houses from collapsing as a result of erosion, what do they build? They build walls. When they build these sea walls though, the waves come in and bash against the sea walls. Their houses are safe, but what about the beach, what happens to the beach? The sand on the beach is then taken away, isn’t it? So there’s no more sand on the beach, so if you went to a beach like that you would not see any sand there, just the rocks at low tide and the high tide would come right up. People couldn’t do sunbaking on the beach. So what do they have to do then? The Council or the Government has to bring in sand and dump it on this side of the sea wall so that there’s a beach ().
- 2 So all of this ((series of diagrams on the worksheet)) is about problems as a result from building on sand dunes. Just think, this is a whole pattern of what’s happened in there.
- 3 Can you just tell me in one sentence basically what that’s all about? This is about problems, it’s about problems. Do you understand what has caused the problems? It’s about problems that come from building on sand dunes.
- 4 So how about we start off like this and say, ‘Building on sand dunes at the beach can make problems’. Just start it that way. How about you write that down? Have you a piece of paper?
- 5 Hugh, are you doing the same thing?
- 6 ((to Hugh and John)) So you can write, are you ready? ‘Building on sand dunes, sand dunes, sand, S-A-N-D dunes can lead to problems’. Understand what I mean by ‘lead to’? Things that can create or make problems, lead to, problems. Full stop. All right. What’s the first

point there? Sand is eroded away during storms and what is happening to the house? The houses can fall down. Erosion during storms takes sand away from under the houses and the houses are in danger of falling down. Or, during storms sand is eroded away from the houses and () the houses are threatened. When something is threatened it means that it's in danger of some of the problems we have ((Bell rings))

Teacher control over the pacing of the written activity was strengthened for the two Chinese boys. The class in general had been simply told that they were to write a paragraph, but for John and Hugh (and presumably the other Chinese boys sitting around them and witnessing the interaction), start time was explicitly controlled: “Just start it that way. How about you write that down? Have you a piece of paper? Hugh, are you doing the same thing? So you can write, are you ready?” (segments 4–6). This very strong control extended to the selection of content. During the preparatory phase of the activity the teacher had gestured at evaluative criteria: “So, perhaps when we're writing our paragraph we can make some statement for our topic sentence about how building on sand dunes can create further problems . . .”. In contrast, evaluative criteria were strongly controlled for John and Hugh through dictation: “‘Building on sand dunes, sand dunes, sand, S-A-N-D dunes can lead to problems’. Understand what I mean by ‘lead to’? Things that can create or make problems, lead to, problems. Full stop” (segment 6). Where the class in general had some freedom to formulate a topic sentence, for John and Hugh the sentence was dictated even to the level of spelling (S-A-N-D) and punctuation.

Both the lesson and interview data indicated that the teachers' perceptions of the Chinese students' oral English language proficiency informed decisions about pedagogic strategies during written work. True Dialogue entailing genuine teacher questions and student answers (Lemke 1990) was observed regularly as the teachers asked Chinese students whether they understood the meaning, or more commonly, the procedure of the lessons. The focus on procedure rather than meaning is consistent with previous research (Verplaetse 1998).

Like Ms Macara in the extract above, Ms Watson did not assume that her Chinese students understood what had been said during dialogue. The following is indicative: “Jenny and Nancy? Do you know what we're talking about? Jenny, do you understand? Did you look up all the meanings of all these words ((in your electronic English–Chinese dictionary)), too, Nancy? So do you understand the difference?” (Lesson 2). During one of her interviews Ms Watson explained this strategy. Asked why she approached the Chinese students so frequently during Seatwork, Ms Watson said: “why I check is because I know that they've got problems . . . what I decide I want done at the beginning of the lesson is what I want done. So I'll do everything I have to do to make sure of that”. Ms Macara made similar comments: “I find sometimes they're looking up words in their electronic dictionaries and the words are just to give them clarification of what it is that I'm asking them to do of the procedures”.

Analyses of the classroom data set indicated that the case study lessons, with their extensive use of the strongly controlled activity of Seatwork, were typical of Western schooling as described in the classroom talk literature.

This standard classroom arrangement was regularly adapted for Chinese students. In practice, these students were sub-categorised as members of the whole class acquiring party who were not able to engage unassisted in the independent written phase of Seatwork that followed the dialogic introductory phase. Very strongly controlled copying and dictation activities were thus made available to them. Effectively then, these students were made witnesses to the independent work of peers or to the displayed thinking of the teacher. An element of witnessing was thus inserted into the independent phase of Seatwork, an activity that typically entails individual work applying ideas developed orally. A similar finding emerged in the U.S. where it was found that teachers in mainstream science classrooms tended to tell ESL students what to do, rather than ask questions as they would with a native-English-speaking student (Verplaetse 1998).

I suggest that the pedagogic options taken up in the case study lessons represent a mechanism for socialising the Chinese ESL students into lowlevel intellectual approaches. Choice of the oral mode potentially renders input incomprehensible for ESL students in particular. Moreover, strongly controlled repair strategies of copying and dictation made available to Chinese ESL students only during written work do not necessarily redress this. From the data, it is apparent that those strategies got the students through the supposedly independent written work required in the lessons. But it cannot be assumed that this is sufficient, in and of itself, to engender independent mastery of the content, especially for weak students like the cohort at Daybreak SHS that had been sent to Australia because of the greater availability of higher education.

Implications for higher education

In this article I have documented pedagogy created for Chinese ESL students in mainstream classes in an Australian secondary school where expectations of entry into higher education were strong. The data illustrated pedagogic mechanisms by which these students were potentially precluded from even the limited opportunities for high-level intellectual work made available to students in general in their classes. Although the data were part of an intensive case study, cautious generalisation is possible on the grounds that: (i) the activities observed in the case study lessons have long been described as typical of Western classrooms by classroom talk researchers (see Edwards and Westgate's (1994) review of 30 years of research); and (ii) stronger control of activities for students who are culturally and linguistically different from the teacher has also long been reported (Cazden 1988; Harklau 1994; Mehan 1974; Shuy 1988; Verplaetse 1998). In other words, the data can be understood as a case of some common pedagogic phenomena in the West. Accordingly, I now discuss some implications for managing the transition of ESL students from Western schools to Western universities, and for creating pedagogy in higher education settings.

The research on Chinese learners reviewed earlier has contributed significantly to our understandings of higher education pedagogy (see the collection edited by Watkins and Biggs 1996). From that research we have learned that the low-level intellectual approaches of Chinese international students in Western universities do not necessarily reflect preference, so much as institutional factors including surface-level assessment requirements, over-crowded curricula, and the difficulty of English medium study. Common Western assumptions about the effects on intellectual preferences of teacher-centred

classroom activities and memorisation strategies have been questioned. Moreover, there is evidence that Chinese pedagogy is not as teacher-centred as is commonly assumed: small group, collective work is encouraged in some contexts (Cortazzi and Jin 1996). In short, 'Chinese culture' does not necessarily dispose students to low-level intellectual approaches. These insights facilitate more informed pedagogic understanding of the prior educational experiences of Chinese students, as is now encouraged in the higher education literature.

After consideration of the prior educational experiences of learners, it is worthwhile for university teachers to focus on how gaps between students' ways of learning, and the ways required to achieve quality outcomes from higher education, might be bridged. On the one hand, there is evidence that the desire to succeed makes Chinese students relatively adaptable to the expectations of new pedagogic contexts (Biggs 1999; Volet and Renshaw 1996; Watkins and Biggs 1996). And yet, on the other, it is important that the difficulty of this adaptive challenge is not under-estimated.

The will to high-level intellectual approaches cannot compensate for inadequately developed skills and knowledge to enact such (Tang and Biggs 1996). The findings of the study reported here suggest that such skills and knowledge should not be simply read off the fact of successful graduation from Western secondary school into university. That potential for independence that is made available in secondary school pedagogy is not necessarily distributed evenly in linguistically diverse classes where standard interactive arrangements, with their emphasis on oral input, are in place. It seems crucial, therefore, that we find ways of discovering what our ESL students know that is relevant to the high-level intellectual work we require of them, and find out further, what it is that they can do with what they know. At the least, we need to entertain the possibility of differential outcomes from what are ostensibly the same secondary school experiences. The findings suggest further that questioning ESL students (Chinese or otherwise) in the course of whole class dialogue may not be a particularly useful means to this end. One-to-one or small group dialogue, where communicative obligations can be relaxed considerably, may be more informative.

Finally, it is worth considering the interactive arrangements that we establish in our tutorial rooms more generally. Dialogue occupies a hallowed place in higher education. The tutorial is, classically, a dialogic activity. In the tutorial room, tutor and a small group of elite students have historically unpacked the lecture dialogically. But our student groups have diversified – and grown. By way of personal example, I knew tutorials of 15 as an undergraduate student, but the tutorials I teach regularly top 30. Questions arise: How appropriate is whole class dialogue as a means of input in such conditions? How possible is 'imaginary output' on the part of ESL students in fast-moving discussion with 30 participants? How strong a foundation does such experience establish for high quality independent work in assignments or applied questions in examinations? These are clearly empirical, as well as professional, questions. And so I conclude by pointing to a need for classroom talk research documenting micro-contexts of higher education pedagogy, and tracking effects on the intellectual quality of ESL students' learning.

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Notes

1. The study presented in this article used data produced for the Large Australian Research Council project, *Constructing Australian Identities Through Language and Literacy in Schools, Communities and Workplaces (1996–1999)* (Parlo Singh, James Garton, Peter Freebody). I collected all the classroom, interview and field-note data used in the article.
2. Year 10 is the third of five secondary school grades in the Queensland education system, and the final year of compulsory schooling.
3. The name of the school, and of all people mentioned in this paper, are pseudonyms.
4. Information drawn from field notes I compiled during 23 visits to Daybreak SHS, one visit to the local Buddhist temple, and 5 visits of school personnel to the University.
5. ‘Social Justice Committees’ were formed in Queensland state schools during the 1990s for the purpose of guiding the implementation of emergent social justice policies in particular schools. These committees were generally comprised of members of the school administration, teaching staff, paraprofessional staff with duties related to social justice target groups, students and community representatives (Dooley et al. 2000).
6. A ‘pre-service teacher’ is a student enrolled in an initial teacher training program at university (a ‘student teacher’ or ‘teacher trainee’). The pre-service teacher at Daybreak SHS undertook her survey of multicultural provisions as part of her practicum experience.
7. This quotation is taken from *Social Justice: The Experience of One High School*, a document generously provided by the Head of the Daybreak SHS Intensive Language Unit. As the author of this document was a member of the school staff, it is not possible to reference the work in a conventional manner without running the risk of revealing the identity of the school to Australian ESL specialists.
8. The Intensive Language Unit was an English language teaching facility established at the school after the diversification of the student population. Most ESL students attended private English language colleges or an Intensive Language School when they arrived in Australia. After enrolment at Daybreak SHS, they undertook a modified school program in the Intensive Language Unit, and were then progressively integrated into mainstream classes that required increasing proficiency in English. Geography, with its relatively high English language demands, was one of the last mainstream subjects taken by ESL students.

9. Pseudonymous names have been chosen for their similarity to the participants' real names (e.g., English names have been given to Chinese students who used English names).
10. Transcription conventions: (i) (()) = clarifying comment inserted by researcher; (ii) () = untranscribable comment; (iii) George = Chinese student; and (iv) S-A-N-D = word spelled aloud.
11. In Australian settings 'the oral' is a pre-prepared talk often employed as an assessment piece from primary school onwards. Many subjects will include an oral, in addition to written assignments or examinations.

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