Small-group literacy teaching: pedagogy and control

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Introduction

This draft paper is drawn from a wider project, still in progress, in which teachers' stated interpretations of their pedagogical practices are related to their observed teaching behaviours. It examines elements of one small-group reading lesson taught by a teacher of acknowledged expertise to 6-7 year-old children, with a view to discussing the nature of teacher control in relation to the underlying pedagogic intention. It utilizes qualitative multimodal data derived from a video-recorded lesson, supported by an interview with the teacher.

Pedagogy and control in guided reading

According to Alexander, it is the ‘generic properties of pedagogy’ which most essentially vary according to teachers’ underlying assumptions and beliefs. These include how teachers manage time, space and pupil groupings; how they design and manage learning activities; how and what they evaluate; and ‘above all, the structure, content and control of pupil-teacher talk’ (2000:552). Alexander’s ‘generic properties’ align well with the principle of pedagogic discourse identified by Bernstein as ‘framing’, which ‘is about who controls what ... selection, sequencing, pacing, criteria and the social base...’ (Bernstein 1996:12-13). Framing relations are integral to pedagogic interaction, and apply to both the instructional discourse of schooling and the regulative discourse which establishes and maintains the social contexts that makes teaching and learning possible (Bernstein 1996:13). Specific aspects of framing can vary independently, and research suggests that certain combinations of stronger and weaker framing may be beneficial in terms of providing equal access to knowledge for learners from diverse backgrounds (Morais et al. 2004).

In a shift from the previously predominant practice of individualized ‘reading aloud to the teacher’, the English National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in 1998 redefined reading by social context, as ‘shared (whole-class) reading’, ‘(small-group) guided reading’ and ‘independent reading’. The transformation of any cultural practice, or to use Bernstein’s term ‘recontextualization’, opens up different possibilities, to be exploited, or not, according to ideological preference. Small-group teaching, particularly, appears to offer excellent opportunities for teachers to assess and respond to children’s reading prowess in a less formal, and more authentic, interaction than is possible in a class context. Additionally, it appears to afford opportunities for children to engage in ‘exploratory talk’, facilitating what Mercer refers to as ‘interthinking,’ or the ‘joint, co-ordinated intellectual activity which people regularly accomplish using language’ (Mercer 2000:16), and also for ‘dialogic teaching’, in which ‘individual teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil exchanges are chained into coherent lines of enquiry’
In New Zealand and Australia, guided reading has an explicitly socio-cultural rationale, and is viewed as a 'bridge to independence' (Ministry of Education 2002: 4). Firstly, it exemplifies the operation of Vygotskian principles (1978) within a planned small-group context. The teacher, as expert, is the active mediator of children's learning, providing 'scaffolding' that is both planned and contingent (Wood 1998). She plans the lesson to address assessed pupil needs; structures it to support learners as they internalize the new learning; and responds to pupils as they read, think and talk about their reading, providing support where they meet difficulties and challenging them further as they meet success. Additionally, it is recognized that the social context of learning enables pupils to 'construct understandings through engagement in literacy activities and interaction with others in these activities' (Ministry of Education 2002: 8).

A tension may be considered to exist here. If the teacher is positioned as guide in a formal pedagogic context which demands forward planning and contingent intervention, then strong framing of both regulative and instructional discourse is a pre-requisite. However, if learners are to engage in interaction amongst themselves, and to work through their own ideas, then framing needs to be weakened to provide a 'space' within which it is legitimate for them to do so. Collaborative discussion between learners requires time to talk, and a worthwhile focus for talk, but also an establishment of a more democratic forum in which the teacher, albeit temporarily, cedes control to the learners. Indeed, strongly framed explicit instruction, along with weakened framing over lesson pace and opportunities for pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil interaction, have been found to contribute to effective learning (Morais et al. 2004). Achieving a temporary suspension of strongly framed discourse is far from impossible, as long as both teachers and learners recognize such a pupil-talk space as having different 'rules', which, as observed by King (2003), can be taught during guided reading lessons.

However, it may be that the apparent contradiction between strongly directed, objective-led 'teaching' and opportunities for learners to express and engage with their own ideas during the lesson could have contributed to the problematic adoption of guided reading by many teachers in England. Limited research evidence suggests that it has often been interpreted as a group variation of individualized reading, typified by pupils reading aloud in turn and teachers asking low level, non-authentic questions, mirroring the monologic discourse which has been found in whole-class teaching (Burns and Myhill 2004; Fisher 2008; Skidmore et al. 2003). To date, little evidence has been found in studies of guided reading of inter-pupil 'exploratory talk' (Mercer 2000), let alone purposeful 'dialogic talk'. While the apparent non-exploitation of the opportunities inherent in small-group teaching may reflect old habits dying hard, it is likely that it also reflects a conceptual confusion relating to the principles underlying the role of the teacher in guided reading.

In this paper, I discuss how one experienced teacher of literacy teaches a guided reading lesson, with particular attention to the way in which the learning event is framed in relation to the teacher's stated intentions. I make no claims for the generalizability of my findings, but suggest that most primary
teachers are likely to recognize themselves and their work contexts to some degree within the research, and on that basis make a claim for credibility.

Method

Caroline, who had 19 years’ teaching experience, taught a Year 2 class (6-7 years) in a school on the outskirts of a city in Southern England. She and most pupils were of White British ethnicity. Acknowledged by her head teacher and local authority as a very effective literacy teacher, she was instrumental in her school’s impressive achievement in National Curriculum tests, particularly in view of the high level of socio-economic disadvantage in the locality. She maintained a literacy-rich classroom and a lively reading curriculum, within which guided reading played a small but very important part. Caroline and pupils gave their consent, knowing that they could withdraw at any point, and parental permission was also obtained. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

Caroline was interviewed about her reading history (IV 1) and her understanding of and practice in teaching guided reading (IV 2), in an attempt to provide insight into the assumptions and beliefs which underpinned her teaching. The open-ended questions provided a flexible framework which invited extended responses and included opportunities for the revisiting of themes. Two guided reading lessons with different groups were video-recorded. After watching these, Caroline provided a commentary on aspects which she considered interesting, in a process known as video-stimulated reflective dialogue (VSRD) (Moyles et al. 2003).

The lessons were initially transcribed and annotated with non-verbal features noted during close viewing of the video-recordings. They were subdivided into episodes, demarcated by linguistic boundaries as well as by their changing focus, which were confirmed by Caroline during the VSRD. Further layers of annotation were added. Firstly, I added my own descriptive interpretation of what was happening within each episode, and categorized the individual ‘moves’ of the interaction. For the latter purpose, I adapted an analytic typology used by Rose (2004) in his analysis of the ‘scaffolding interaction cycle’ (p.97) (See Appendix). Secondly, Caroline’s own comments from VSRD and sometimes also interview were juxtaposed against relevant lesson segments, adding to the data while also providing participant confirmation, or otherwise, of my own interpretation. Thirdly, a more theoretically-focused account provided a commentary on the nature of framing as the episode proceeded.

Below, I discuss one of the recorded lessons, taught to a proficient group of readers.
Lesson summary

Caroline’s intention was that children should ask each other questions based on the visual features of a simple encyclopaedia, and to answer these accordingly.

The lesson’s strong internal structure comprised a series of five functional pedagogic units termed ‘episodes’, as shown in Figure 1. These will be summarized briefly, to provide a basis for the subsequent discussion of Caroline’s pedagogical approach.

Figure 1: Summary of episodes, lesson C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Purpose (according to teacher interview/VSRD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>½ min</td>
<td>To make links to other learning/ events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>To explain what children will do/learn in lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 min</td>
<td>To check children’s existing knowledge about encyclopaedias To teach textual features to be used as basis for pupil questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16 ½ min</td>
<td>Children to ask and answer their own questions based on comprehension of textual features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 ½ min</td>
<td>Self- and teacher-evaluation of learning with reasons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Episodes 1 to 3

These three episodes introduced the lesson and carried the main teaching content. Strong framing was established at the start, evidenced through Caroline’s acknowledged self-selection of the text, selection and positioning of the group, her sequencing of information and her combined role as questioner, arbitrator of who should answer and evaluator of answers. Episode 1 was essentially a brief teacher monologue, continued in a more interactive mode in episode 2, where Caroline demonstrated the questioning activity to be undertaken later, physically involving two pupils while she issued each pupil with two question cards, to be returned when they asked a question. The focus on what pupils would learn was strong: ‘...our focus today is all going to be about questions, asking questions about something that we’ve read.’
In episode 3, Caroline switched to open-ended questioning about the generic features of an encyclopaedia, to identify what children knew already, and went on to reinforce the concept of alphabetical order. Having established their existing knowledge, she homed in on the understanding of diagrams, photographs and maps within a specific encyclopaedia about fish. She read from the text, pointing out the features very explicitly, before asking a series of closed questions (Quy) to check children’s understanding, sometimes demanding a physical rather than a verbal response, as evident in extract 1. Caroline is identified as T and children by their initial:

Extract 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T:</th>
<th>So what three things, Simon, are there going to be on the page that’s going to help us? (LOOKS AT S)</th>
<th>Quy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
<td>A photo.</td>
<td>Ident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T:</td>
<td>A photo, good boy. (COUNTS ON FINGERS)</td>
<td>Affm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
<td>A map to show you where it lives.</td>
<td>Ident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T:</td>
<td>Good. (COUNTS ON FINGERS)</td>
<td>Affm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
<td>And a scale to show its size.</td>
<td>Ident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T:</td>
<td>Excellent. (COUNTS ON FINGERS) Right let’s turn over. Now let’s have a look.</td>
<td>Affm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(PAUSE) B, show me where the photo is.</td>
<td>Quy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B:</td>
<td>(POINTS)</td>
<td>Ident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T:</td>
<td>That’s it. Where’s the map, Orla?</td>
<td>Affm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O:</td>
<td>There. (POINTS) (OTHER CHN LOOKING AT BOOKS BEING POINTED AT EXCEPT)</td>
<td>Quy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T:</td>
<td>Good. And Conor, where’s the scale? The bit to show you the scale?</td>
<td>Affm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C:</td>
<td>(POINTS)</td>
<td>Quy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T:</td>
<td>That’s it, good boy, how big the fish really is.</td>
<td>Affm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Caroline moved into an IRF sequence (here, Quy-Ident-Affm) to assess pupils’ understanding of what she has just taught and affirm their response (Affm). Rather than selecting answers (Slct) from their own background knowledge, children were now identifying (Ident) information in the text.

The framing of both regulative and instructional discourse remained strong as Caroline continued to dominate the talk, unambiguously in control of the sequencing and pacing of the lesson. She selected children to respond, and evaluated the appropriateness of their responses. However, she ensured that all children were positioned as successful learners through her careful preparatory work, and her assiduous attention to choosing children on an equitable basis. Within her controlling role, she would not allow children to be unsuccessful, and even where on other occasions their responses showed misunderstanding, she almost invariably found a way to deal with it that did not involve negation:
I never dismissed anything anyone said. I always said something, even if it wasn’t quite the right answer or whatever, I tried to say, *oh, that’s really good, but....* [or] *that could be one reason.*

Here, however, tight teacher control was temporarily, if very briefly, suspended. As Caroline sent Conor for a ruler to demonstrate the use of scale, she invited the others to ‘have a quick scan of the book, those two pages’. This invitation signalled the legitimacy of inter-pupil talk (Prdisc), which was further sanctioned by Caroline’s acknowledgement of Simon’s observation:

Extract 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDREN TALK ABOUT FISH IN BOOK – MOSTLY INAUDIBLE</th>
<th>Prdisc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S: It shows you how long it is.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: ....blind catfish... (inaudible)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Pardon?</td>
<td>Ident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: It shows you how long it is (POINTS).</td>
<td>Elab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Oh, it’s got like a picture underneath, (TAKES RULER FROM C) so you can compare it to something, that’s good.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This was the first of three short weakly framed ‘spaces’ for pupil talk which provided respite from the normal strong framing and offered children an opportunity to focus on areas of interest to them.

**Episode 4**

This lengthy episode formed the heart of the lesson. Children read two pages at a time to themselves, while Caroline listened to one child reading quietly aloud. This initiated a series of cycles in which each pupil, in turn, asked another a question (pQuy) relating to the pages read. The question cards ensured that all expected two turns each. Here again, framing of regulative and instructional discourse was strong as Caroline explicitly and consistently structured each step of the learning activity, using a series of prompt questions and repetitions of key information to ensure that learners asked and answered successfully, for example:

Extract 4

| T: Right, Billie, I want you to give me one of your questions (B PASSES CARD). Now, you can pick, who do you want to ask your question to? | Sgnl |
| BC: (SMILES, LOOKS AT C) Conor. | Drci |
| T: Conor. (LOOKS AT C) So it’s going to be about what you’ve read. (LOOKS AT B) So does he need | Quy  |
| | Ident |
| | Prep |
| | Quy> |
Here, in a preparatory move (Prep) Caroline focused Conor on the significance of his previous reading, and of page 3 in particular, in finding the answer. Her use of the ‘Prep’ move was common in this as well as earlier episodes. However, as Caroline claimed that she merely wanted to ensure that the answerer had heard the question, the scaffolding function of her comments may have been at an intuitive rather than a conscious level.

During the questioning activity, a different kind of space in the discourse became available to the learners. Although Caroline selected all questioners, and supported them as they formulated it, she offered a real, if very limited, choice to each child in terms of whom they asked and what question they asked. On video, children’s hesitations indicate that this was not necessarily easy, and Caroline explained afterwards how her assessment had indicated this level of support was important:

... when we’ve done this before with written questions, when we’ve asked - they’ve got into a real mess because they haven’t said to them, you need to look at page seven - and they didn’t really know how to ask a good question.

Caroline gradually decreased the level of support offered. Where children encountered problems, she provided prompts or asked peers to help, and sometimes encouraged a child to use more specific vocabulary or extend an answer. She continued to use non-verbal cues extensively to maintain pupil attention and to support children’s responses.

Again, some weakly framed spaces were created for children to talk together. Twice, as children waited for others to finish reading, they began to talk to each other enthusiastically (if inaudibly) about their book, also engaging Caroline briefly in pupil-initiated discussion. For example, Lyle was fascinated by one picture, and wanted to discuss this with Caroline, who opened the topic up to the wider group by asking children how they would describe it, before making her own suggestion. These events were spontaneous, and clearly not unusual; children understood that it was legitimate to talk,
based not on any explicit permission, but on their long shared history with their teacher. Caroline reflected on her own involvement in the group talk:

I definitely see it as an interaction between all of us, not just me, telling them,... they all gave something and I said *I think it looks like a piece of glass*, and it’s ... me facilitating it, more than leading it. I always try and use my thought as to extend their thought .. we’re all giving an opinion and we’re all working together on it.

*Episode 5*

To conclude, Caroline returned to the interactive monologic discourse of episode 2. She encouraged children to articulate how they knew if they had asked a good question, and to evaluate their own learning with a thumbs-up signal if they felt they had done well before giving her own judgement.

...*, you used all the right question words, *how, which, what, where, who* (CHN JOIN IN) and also I was very impressed that you didn’t just ask questions about the text part, you looked at the pictures, (HAND GESTURES) the little maps, all the other features of the book, so well done, that was excellent.

**Pedagogy and control: discussion**

It is clear from Caroline’s own commentary that each episode serves a specific function in a cumulative sequence of teaching and learning which not only unfolds throughout the guided reading lesson but extends beyond it. As such, she exercises strong control over both regulative and instructional aspects of the lesson: text, focus, activities, pace, are all managed skilfully to achieve the intended learning for all children within a very limited timespan.

**The pedagogic sequence**

The lesson is not uniform, but has an internal rhythm, and an inter-episode dynamic which might vary from lesson to lesson, according to the teacher’s perception of children’s learning needs and how she will address these. In this particular case, a fast-paced, strongly directed teaching sequence, accelerating in cognitive challenge, gives way to an extended series of variations on the central theme, before a quick review of learning brings it to a close.

However, for Caroline, the lesson itself formed a key part of a more extended sequence of learning. Guided reading routinely slotted into a daily session when all children engaged in reading activities, which included independent reading and interaction between peers which was not tightly teacher-controlled:
We always have a day where three of the groups just read on their own, they just have a chance to have a look at the book themselves, and what I’ve said to them is, *what you could do is you could read to each other, you can ask questions, you could ask somebody if you don’t know what the word is*, so encourage them when I’m not there to use the things that I want them to use when I am there.... So I deliberately have that session, it might look to the naked eye, *oh that’s a bit of a mishmash and they’re being a bit noisy*, but they’re not - they’re talking about their reading...

Above, Caroline revealed how she uses the interactions during her taught lessons explicitly as a model to support children *reading* in her absence. The extent to which she saw her role as directly supporting independent *learning*, however, was revealed during VSRD:

What you didn’t see, which was the next day, they read the rest of the book, and they did exactly the same process, but I didn’t sit there. .. I set them off saying *you have to read two pages and you have to wait until everyone’s finished* and I paired them off... they knew they had to ask each other a question, and they had their cards and everything. And it was interesting that they did go through the process, Lyle said *you need to look on page 6, this is my question*, and then she answered, so ... I think if I hadn’t done that consistent questioning ... I don’t think the next day would have worked as well because they wouldn’t have quite understood what they had to do.

She went on to explain how, in subsequent independent sessions, children would go on to write down their questions for peers instead. In this way, reading, writing and talk would be integrated in the course of the week’s reading sessions, children taking increasing responsibility for more demanding learning tasks, as the controlling role of the teacher decreased to enable children to pace their work, make decisions and talk together about it. The strength of framing, therefore, was designed to graduate from a very high level of teacher control during taught lessons to a situation in which, having established her expectations for the session, Caroline expected her pupils to take control of their own learning and activity.

Not only does the individual lesson have its internal rhythms, but in this teacher’s case, it featured as a crucial introductory part of a longer sequence of learning on the same theme. The rhythm of activity would alter across the series of lessons. This kind of staged learning, which was according to Caroline a routine feature of her practice, is resonant of Christie’s concept of ‘curriculum macrogenre’. This refers to a staged sequence of ‘curriculum genres’, a series of lessons characterized by their own individual purposes, structures and modes of operation (Christie 1999:160). The nature of regulative and instructional framing would therefore vary across the learning sequence. It follows that a one-off lesson observation would result in the gathering of partial data, which, without the benefit of dialogue with the teacher, would lead to a flawed interpretation. As this research was set up to investigate guided reading lessons *per se*, subsequent sessions were not recorded and do not feature in the data, making the VSRD and interview data in this study, particularly valuable.
In the ensuing sections, attention will be given to specific aspects of the taught lesson, with a focus on lesson framing, but discussion will be widened to include comments relevant to the broader learning sequence.

**The scaffolding cycle**

The introductory episodes were explicitly designed to serve specific pedagogic purposes: to relate the lesson to other learning, and engage the children (episode 1); to prepare them for the learning focus and activity (2); and to assess prior knowledge and teach lesson-specific knowledge (3). By so doing, and by providing carefully structured prompts and interventions, where needed, as children formulate their own questions, Caroline ensured success for learners:

They offered their responses really well and they had really quite good understanding of what they were doing. They understood how the book worked ... they understood about all the features of it, they were able to ask very clear questions all the way through, and also asked... questions about the features, not necessarily on the text.

Caroline made relatively little use of the Initiation-Response-Feedback cycle, and her use of the preparation move was a significant feature of her teaching, both in the way that earlier lesson episodes prepared children for later learning activity, and in the way that she provided information to help children respond appropriately during interaction. Her approach relates well to the ‘scaffolding interaction cycle’ described by Rose (2004:97-98) in which targeted preparation by the adult leads to identification of information in the text by the learner, and subsequent elaboration by the adult which initiates a new cycle. Additionally, this differs from IRF in that the teacher provides contingent responses which elaborate on those of the learner, and consistently affirmative feedback, both typical of Caroline’s practice with both groups observed.

**Explicitness of instructional discourse**

A related feature was the explicitness of instructional discourse. In an intensive 23 minutes, Caroline sequenced and paced her lesson carefully to explain the lesson’s relevance; tell pupils what they would learn and demonstrate what they had to do; check and reinforce their existing knowledge about how encyclopaedias work; show them the new features of the encyclopaedia; check that they understood these; give pupils opportunities to read; give pupils practice in using the new features to carry out the activity with teacher support; and review learning through teacher and self-assessment. Children were visibly well motivated and enthusiastic about learning. It was clear that, while Caroline understood guided reading to be an explicit teaching context – ‘a way of teaching a group of children to develop their ... reading skills ... with a clear focus’ – she saw her teaching role as extending far beyond exposition and questioning into the facilitation of more weakly framed learning events which
would bring about independence for learners as they began to apply their new learning without her support:

I think some of it’s modelling, some of it’s facilitating and leading them to try and get the answer for themselves, getting them to be thinkers. I think, you have to do some modelling, and I think that the modelling, I think, gets less, the better reader they get....

Her confirmation that pupils were able, later in the week, to carry out similar tasks independently, and in writing, indicated that she considered her teaching effective.

Meanwhile, there were indications that the rapid pacing was not rigid. Because of the sound preparation, pupils rarely met difficulties; hence the lesson was able to proceed briskly. However, it became clear in dialogue that Caroline was constantly observing children’s performance, and was prepared to slow down and provide appropriate teaching if the need arose:

One, I wanted to find out what they knew about an encyclopaedia, because if they obviously didn’t know what it was, we would have had to go into that some more. Two, I wanted to make sure that they understood how an encyclopaedia was put together, which is in alphabetical order... and then go on to three, which is features of the book...

...if there’s a word that they get stuck on, then ... if it was just one child, I might just talk to that one child, but if it was a misconception that they all had, I’d wait to the end, and then go back and say well actually no, I heard you all read that word, so -

Explicit, carefully sequenced instruction has been found to be a significant factor in studies which seek to identify pedagogic approaches which will enable all children, regardless of background, to succeed. This effect is particularly strong where accompanied by a good degree of cognitive challenge, clear evaluation criteria and a non-rigid pacing of instruction which enables learners to engage with their learning and each other (Morais et al. 2004). Caroline’s pedagogy, when viewed in context as the primary teaching element in a progressive learning sequence, relates well to this description.

**Projected regulative discourse**

Caroline wasted no time in establishing the regulative context of the lesson, and children were quick to follow her instructions. The regulative discourse was nonetheless strongly framed throughout. This was partly achieved through non-linguistic means, including Caroline’s authoritative posture and tone; her constantly moving eye contact; and her extensive use of non-verbal gestures. However, it was evident that all involved, late in the school year, were very familiar with what ‘guided reading’ in this class entailed, and complied with expectations with minimal explicit direction. Teacher and pupils had a shared history, a ‘long conversation’ (Mercer 1996), its rules and common experience known to participants but invisible to the observer. Children also knew from experience that they would take their learning forward into the increasingly independent reading sessions which would
follow; this did not need to be spelled out by the teacher. Caroline, therefore, was able to focus on the instructional discourse of the lesson with relatively little attention to the regulative context which has already established the conditions within which this can take place, in accordance with Christie’s view (1999:161) that the regulative register, as she terms it, projects the instructional register. From this perspective, the use of non-verbal cues reinforces and maintains the pre-established regulative context.

**Spaces for pupil talk**

On three occasions children had brief opportunities to talk together briefly, but freely, about matters of personal interest in their book, as described earlier. It was clear that they recognized this as legitimate behaviour in accordance with Caroline’s expectations. Within the strong overall framing, a bounded space had been created which was governed by different ground rules: a temporary weakening of framing.

While valuing pupil discussion, Caroline was not prepared to deviate substantially from her instructional agenda in response to pupil enthusiasms:

I think it’s important they do get a chance to talk about it, because a lot of people do talk about the books they read, and that’s part of reading, isn’t it, you talk about what you’ve read, so, I think, I must do it subconsciously, because I didn’t realise I did it, but build in these little bits where you do have this interaction, but then move it on forward, because I’m aware of the focus... I think I would probably bring it round with something like, *that’s really good, you’ve got some excellent ideas, but we now need to move on, maybe we can spend some time at a later date,* or something.

In view of the shared understanding that future reading sessions would enable pupils to talk together at greater length, for a clear purpose, Caroline’s wish to retain control of the guided discourse can be understood as a matter of pedagogic principle; she needs to stick to her agenda if she is to prepare children adequately to be successful independent learners.

**Concluding comments**

Pedagogy is a complex business, but insights can be gained from focusing on even small pedagogical events, such as the interactions of guided reading. This study has focused on the interrelationship between pedagogy and control, making particular use of Bernstein’s (1996) concept of the framing of pedagogic discourse.

Caroline is an accomplished teacher, with a well-developed personal pedagogical understanding, albeit one that is phrased in the language of teaching rather than theory. She has found ways of providing explicit, well-sequenced teaching which ensure that learners meet with cumulative success,
and has also found ways of creating ‘spaces’ within which children can engage with their own new learning in collaboration with their peers. She ensures that children are well challenged cognitively, and is observant of their progress, intervening where appropriate. This paper has demonstrated that her practice sits well within socio-cultural theories of learning, and bears a number of resemblances to pedagogical approaches which have been found to bring about effective learning for children from diverse backgrounds. It may therefore be no surprise that Caroline’s school achieves high levels of literacy attainment, despite the fact that many pupils begin school at a very low level for their age.

There must be many teachers like Caroline whose pedagogical approaches are driven by their commitment to meeting children’s learning needs. However, the wider research suggests many teachers do not teach in such a way. At a time when the Primary Strategy seeks to strengthen its emphasis on pedagogy (DCSF 2007), it may prove worthwhile to develop resources for professional learning which enable teachers to analyze the ‘generic properties’ of their own practice, to reflect on their own teaching intentions and explore the extent to which the pedagogic discourse of their own lessons supports the realization of these.

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**Appendix: Typology of moves** (adapted from Rose 2004)

- Affm  affirms
- Ctrl  direction of pupil behaviour
- Drct  directs (instruction)
- Elab  elaborates
- Eval  evaluative opinion
- Ident  identifies answer from or feature (of text)
- Indt  indeterminate – eg ‘I don’t know’, ‘Maybe’
- Infm  gives information
- Neg  negation
- Prdisc  pupils discuss or talk, usually with peers
- Prep  prepares pupil to participate successfully in subsequent interaction
- Rd  reads text
- Sgnl  signals transition
- Slct  selects answer (pupil) – from imagination or memory (of text)
- Quy  question
- p  pupil (as prefix when usual roles reversed (eg pQuy = question asked by pupil)
- t  teacher (as prefix when usual roles reversed (eg tIdent = question answered by teacher)
- +  repeats but to other party
- >  builds on previous question/answer
- ()  indicates move embeds another