

In the final section of the book (Chapters 7-8), Atkinson reviews Bernstein's most recent writings and looks at the critical role that curriculum and pedagogy play in the reproduction of a social order which reflects the hierachial distribution of wealth and labour within our society. Atkinson reminds us that when reading Bernstein one must always bear in mind that what is significant is the systemic relations between the domains of school, family and work. He explains that Bernstein is proposing that working-class parents have limited access to the invisible pedagogy, while the visible pedagogy is immediately understandable to them, and that differing access has major implications for the effectiveness of different types of schooling for different groups in society.

In summary, it can be said that Atkinson's book is definitely not an introduction; there are all too numerous concepts, research studies in sociology, anthropology and linguistics, inclusive of all the prefixes (i.e., sociolinguistic) which must be understood if the clarity of daylight is to be perceived. The book is well written, disturbing, and revealing. How often do readers fall victim to a myth based on simplistic and incorrect interpretations of complex theoretical notions? In completing the task of interpreting and explicating many years of writing on complex and wide-ranging theoretical issues, Atkinson made a major contribution both to our understanding of Bernstein as a social thinker and to our understanding of the role that language plays in all settings that contribute to the continuation of the social orders. I cannot leave the summary, however, without thinking of a statement made by one of my graduate students after reading Atkinson's book: "Bernstein casts a large shadow and Atkinson's shadowed view is not clear. One must question whether it is indeed Bernstein's vision or Paul Atkinson's vision we are privy to at this point. But in any case, it could be 'just another interpretation.' "

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Hull, Robert. *The Language Gap*. London: Methuen, 1985, 232 pp., \$10.95 (paperback).

Just in case the question occurred to any sports-minded reader, the answer is no; there is no connection between author Robert Hull and a famous Canadian of the same name. Hull is a British teacher and researcher who, with *The Language Gap*, has made a valuable contribution to at least two areas of pedagogy that are currently receiving considerable attention. The first of these is classroom talk, or the kind of language that occurs in the normal events of the classroom. This is the primary focus of the book, and while Hull's position may be summed up in the book's subtitle, "How classroom dialogue fails," the reader should not therefore presume that the view presented is an entirely negative one, nor that Hull thinks that classroom dialogue *necessarily* fails. Rather, this is a much more balanced, even-handed picture, about which I'll comment further later. The second area of pedagogy addressed, although much less obvious, is language across the curriculum, including oral language and, to some extent, reading and writing in the content areas.

Hull is an experienced teacher who spent eighteen months as a careful participant observer in a large British comprehensive school, with most of the examples drawn from 12- to 14- year old (i.e., junior high age) students. That level, in itself, is helpful, since much of the North American work on classroom talk is centered on the primary grades. The data for the book then are a combination of lessons observed, discussions with students about their lessons, textbooks, and teacher prepared worksheets, all gathered during the observation time. In addition, Hull includes examples from his own teaching, and examines his work just as rigorously as that of other teachers. He states in the preface (p. xiii) that, "This is a teachers' book, written by a schoolteacher for schoolteachers," and he asks teachers to use their "intuitive skills and empathizing observation" to question and re-examine how language is used for learning.

I agree that the book can be very helpful to teachers, although I think the readership should also include others interested in how learning occurs in classrooms. But I doubt that this book will reach the breadth of readers who might benefit from it. The title is apt as an encapsulation of the central thesis, but it may not get the book into the hands of some readers, both teachers and other scholars, who would find it helpful.

Hull began with the idea of observing students in difficulty at school, but instead of assuming that they needed a remedial reading class, his idea was to examine the suitability, for all students, of the regularly assigned classroom tasks.

There is a chapter each considering a series of lessons in science, math, history and creative writing, as well as shorter examples from other subjects. But that is not apparent from the chapter titles. Hull's contention is that the same problems arise consistently across subject disciplines and so each example is used to illustrate an aspect of student understanding or misunderstanding. The teachers were all trying to teach well and were all concerned for their students. But the lessons frequently did not enlighten as intended, and each chapter, including one on how time is used, explores a different theme in the dialogue difficulties. Together they make a cohesive and thought-provoking picture of student and teacher talk in classrooms.

The structure of this book is provided by a concept taken from Wittgenstein (Specht, E.K. *The Foundations of Wittgenstein's Late Philosophy*, trans. D.E. Walford, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969) that propositions may be described as either "empirical" or "grammatical." Hull explains them much more fully, but in brief, empirical propositions are those which may be falsified and hence have a grounding in a reality outside themselves. Grammatical propositions, or parts of propositions, are governed by rules of usage and need not have external touchstones. Hull goes on to show that much classroom talk consists of grammatical propositions. During lessons on artesian wells, for example, a set of vocabulary terms (limestone, sandstone, absorbs, porous, permeable, pervious) were used or explained in terms of each other, even on the diagrams. The students were unable to make a connection to anything they knew in the world around them. This same difficulty emerges in various forms as Hull examines the work of different teachers, with different subject matter and different instructional strategies. It appeared that, too often for students, the concepts presented to them appeared as fragments of an abstract construct, mere words perhaps, without empirical support and without involvement through their everyday language.

This thread runs through the book, appearing in repeated glimpses as different classroom dialogues are examined. The forms and implications are many. For example: 1) a misunderstanding of structures, as when a student thought that "Flushing (22,000)" meant that 22,000 fish were caught there; 2) a futility of field trip tasks when they call, not for close observation, but for continued book tasks; 3) a difficulty with instructional strategies, as when a history teacher tried to simplify the difficulties faced by Elizabeth I and portrayed them as boulders in a path, thereby creating an inappropriate image that misled students, and 4) a reluctance on the part of students to volunteer personal knowledge, since the teacher controls what counts as knowledge and students have apparently stopped expecting a connection between what they know and what they are learning.

There is much that is attractive about Hull's writing style. The many examples of actual classroom dialogue have a vitality that helps to re-create the classroom and the analysis always arises from the data (rather than being imposed upon the data). The tone of Hull's writing is at once warm and cool, so that there is an empathy for students and teachers that is supportive even while the difficulties are being highlighted and the criticisms revealed. The book is written in the first person, and as noted earlier, Hull includes his own teaching in the criticism. The examples of teacher comments and behavior sometimes seem extreme, and while more subtle examples might be more effective, the point is that those given are incontestable because they actually occurred.

It may be paradoxical to say that the book seems both cohesive and fragmented, but for me that was the effect. The cohesion is derived from the underlying themes, noted earlier. They are subtle but strong and very helpful to the reader. Another cohesive force is the easy merging of theory and practice that is a strength of this writing. The fragmentation is felt in the somewhat abrupt shifts among examples and analyses, and is perhaps heightened by a tendency at times to analyse very exhaustively. But as this occurs only with specifics, it does not detract from the effect of the central theme. The fragmentation makes it easy to read bits, if one wishes, and this is a very readable book.

Occasionally, Hull strikes a particularly apt phrase, as when, for example, he describes the dry, neutral, compacted language of text books as a "house-style" (p. 183), effectively employing the image of an uninteresting wine.

In spite of some flaws, this book is well worth reading, not least because it shows so clearly that when classroom dialogue is thwarted and teaching becomes a monologue, students are bound to experience a language gap that impedes their learning.

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