A complex dialogue

Collection: Small group teaching

Resource: Peer reviewing a seminar: *The Bonesetter's Daughter*

Approximate duration

1-2 hours

Learning outcomes

To acquire a degree of awareness of the multi-levelled nature of the seminar as linguistic, cognitive, and social process.

Introduction

This is another approach to peer review, but on this occasion we are recommending attention to the social and linguistic dynamics of the occasion.

The activity

The primary question here (for either individual reflection, or peer discussion) concerns what kind of work is taking place in the seminar. Within what framework of conventions (tacit or overt) does the discussion take place? What sort of language interactions are taking place? Individually or with a colleague, cull from the class discussion examples of (for instance):

- exploring
- evaluating
- questioning
- informing
- agreeing
- disagreeing

- changing the subject
- backing down

Is there any competition for dominance or control of the floor? If so, how is it managed?

Another dimension to consider would be the inter-play between levels of formality. Where does this seminar fall on the informal - formal spectrum? A related question concerns technical language. How far is the discussion conducted in the professionalised terms of literary or cultural criticism? Can you spot examples of re-wording taking place?

Possible Approaches

One way of approaching this task would be to focus on the tutor. We're not asking for a discourse analysis. But in general terms, what strikes you about the tutor's linguistic activity? For example, what proportion of her utterances might be classified as social / enabling? And what proportion are propositional / conceptual interventions or utterances? Obviously, some utterances - perhaps all - will be multi-functional. (Even affirmative noises like 'mm', or 'aha', or gestures like nodding are clearly supportive of an argument as well as a speaker.) You could draw yourself a rough pie chart of functions, and if you are working with a colleague compare your drawings.

Links & References

- Allington, Daniel, and Joan Swann. 'Researching Literary Reading as Social Practice'. *Language and Literature*. 18.3: 219-230 (2009).
- Benwell, B and Stokoe, E. 'Constructing Discussion Tasks in University Tutorials: Shifting Dynamics and Identities'. *Discourse Studies*. 4.4: 429 - 53.
- Hodgson, John. The Experience of Studying English in UK Higher Education. English Subject Centre 2010.
- Swann, Joan, and Daniel Allington. 'Reading Groups and Literary Texts: A Case Study in Social Reading.' *Language and Literature*. 18.3: 247-64 (2009).
- Whiteley, Sara. 'Text World Theory: Real Readers and Emotional Responses to *The Remains of the Day*.' *Language and Literature*. 20.1: 23 - 42. (2011)

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.
http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/

Resources in the Small group teaching collection

- Small group teaching: introduction to the collection
- Seminar design: resource overview
  - Seminar design: individual activity
  - Seminar design: group activity
- Peer reviewing a seminar: Oliver Twist : resource overview
  - Peer review: individual activity
  - Adjusting the level
- Peer reviewing a seminar: The Bonesetter's Daughter : resource overview
  - **A complex dialogue (*you are here)**
  - Negotiated authority
- Thinking about seminars: resource overview
  - Relevance and red herrings
  - Weighing up the elements
- Nightmare scenarios: resource overview
  - Facing up to nightmares: group activity
  - Comparing notes
- Transformative writing: resource overview
  - Transformations: individual activity

- Transformations: group activity