Low SES contexts and English: What might they mean for each other?

Garth Boomer Address 2017

Wayne Sawyer

AATE Hobart July
PISA results 2009

‘the socioeconomic background of students and schools does appear to have a powerful influence on performance’ (OECD 2010: 13)
Concentration of disadvantage

Children bring their individual advantages or disadvantages to school, where these are pooled and where the effects are multiplied. Thus in schools with a very high concentration of children from poor families, about 18 in 100 Year 3 students fail to reach national minimum standards, while in schools with a very low concentration of such children, only between 3 and 5 in 100 fail to reach national minimum standards (Teese, 2011)
no form of knowledge can take precedence of (sic) a knowledge of English, no form of literature can take precedence of (sic) English literature: and... the two are so inextricably connected as to form the only basis possible for a national education (Newbolt, 1921: 14)
Ball et al. (1990): ‘the report represents the language and culture of the new ruling class as Language and Culture themselves’ (p.53)
Doecke (forthcoming) Newbolt holds to the view that teachers need to be responsive to the dispositions and tastes of the children in their classrooms ...its vision of the role that education might play in creating the conditions where children from all classes have access to (a literary) culture – contain(s) ... the sober recognition that society is not as the authors would wish it to be. The very force of its rhetoric...evokes an intractable situation where such practices stubbornly resist the implementation of a larger vision of education as enhancing people’s sense of the “life” available to them’
Newbolt (1921) ‘By the tradition of the public schools the Latin and Greek classics are far more highly estimated... (English literature) is within the reach of all without distinction’ (pp.12-13)

‘There are still people in positions of influence who are inclined to regard a humane education of the lower classes as subversive of public order. We believe that view to be wrong. The fact that the majority of elementary school children will have to take up some form of manual labour, perhaps of unskilled labour, must not limit the kind of education they are to receive, for, as we have shown, education is a preparation for life, not, in the first place, for livelihood; it is the development of the whole man, and not the ...training of a factory hand’ (Newbolt, 1921, p.60)
Pat Thomson, *Schooling the rustbelt kids*

It is not the case in rustbelt schools that nothing can be done, nor is it the case that everything can be done ... It is a matter of making a positive difference – but rustbelt staffs cannot pretend that there is an impermeable barrier between the school and the ‘outside’, ...

At the same time... (t)eachers and schools must act as if every (student) can learn what matters for them to have equal life chances ... Nor should realism equate with the abandonment of the imaginary of a just and caring society... (2002: 182-183)
Fair Go engagement and pedagogy: MeE Framework

Classroom experiences
Classroom processes
Message systems
Individual support as Motivation
• The experiences target definitions of engagement
  – high cognitive
  – high affective
  – high operative

  – “Insider” classroom processes – helping students see themselves as an important part of a reflective learning community

(Fair Go Project Team, 2006)
## Engaging messages for low SES students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>&quot;We can see the connection and the meaning?&quot;</td>
<td>Reflectively constructed access to contextualised and powerful knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>&quot;I am capable&quot;</td>
<td>Feelings of being able to achieve and a spiral of high expectations and aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>&quot;We can do this together&quot;</td>
<td>Sharing of classroom time and space: interdependence, mutuality and ‘power with’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>&quot;It’s great to be a kid from&quot;</td>
<td>Valued as individual and learner and feelings of belonging and ownership over learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>&quot;We share&quot;</td>
<td>Environment of discussion and reflection about learning with students and teachers playing reciprocal, meaningful roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivation

Understanding the factors that impact on individual student responses and energies (Martin, 2007, 2009) – which we represented here as supporting individuals, for example:

What support for individuals to develop a belief and confidence in one’s own ability to succeed at school, overcome challenges and perform at their best?

Is there pedagogy that promotes effort and persistence?

Are there practices that help students manage or minimize maladaptive behavioural dimensions such as self-handicapping and avoidance?
The MeE framework

‘E’ngagement
(outcome and whole school focus)
“School is for me”

Teachers as Messengers –
personalising and helping
students adapt to messages.

‘m’otivation
Individual focus

Realisation of engaging
classroom messages.

‘e’ngagement
Classroom and pedagogy focus
High Cognitive classroom experiences

Classroom experiences are intellectually challenging

Teaching and learning are the focus of sustained and ongoing classroom conversations
High Cognitive/ English: Classroom experiences are intellectually challenging

The intellectual challenge for which we were looking needed to manifest itself in both content and in the nature of student thinking being operationalised. Neither higher order thinking tasks on trivial content or simply copying notes on significant content open up the full possibilities of intellectual challenge within a curriculum.

Means application of knowledge: student creation (Getaway unit/ short stories based on texts read)

(Sawyer, 2014)
High Cognitive/English: Classroom experiences are intellectually challenging: Culture of inquiry

‘Relentless’ Questioning – NOT IRE, but to
  probe further
  prompt background knowledge
  revise
  work towards key vocabulary and concepts
* re-conceptualise how ideas/themes are seen/understood
(Teacher) would have students consider a concept through a number of possible representations:

- ‘Does anyone see this differently?’
- ‘How else could we look at this?’
- ‘How could we represent it visually? In writing?’
- ‘How else could we end this piece? What would be a highly effective way of doing it?’
- ‘How does any of this connect to (poet)’s other work? How can we bring them together?’
**English: Effect of ‘relentless questioning’**

- lead students towards higher order thinking
- create intellectual space for student voice
- have students question own conclusions/think critically/appreciate a range of perspectives on a topic
- create a ‘risk-accepting’ zone (modelling assisted here)
  - * create a particular disposition towards knowledge: some knowledge is open to challenge/ all knowledge is open being interrogated
High Cognitive/ English: Classroom experiences are intellectually challenging: **Conversation**

**Teacher-student dialogue** (not IRE, answers not ‘evaluated’)

**Class and group discussion:** teachers saw students working together and talking to each other was the opposite of ‘lowering the intellectual ante’

Douglas Barnes: ‘It is precisely the teachers who value social relationships who also value intellectual exchange’ (Barnes 1976: 145).
High Cognitive/English: Classroom experiences are intellectually challenging: **Content**

- text analysis/creation
- text’s context, its values, its representation of experience and its appropriation into other times and places
- ‘how’ and ‘why’ of textuality
- assessment tasks set to draw out higher order responses
- analysed language features and evaluated their effectiveness
- literary terminology and terminology from film study and visual representation a natural part of the classroom conversation.
Why is this even worth saying?

**Teese & Lamb (2009):** in response to standardised testing of the sort now pervasive nationally in Australia, low SES schools are particularly susceptible to concentration on the ‘basics’. Since public perception of schools based on league tables particularly disadvantages low SES schools, the consequence is a focus on ‘performance’, rather than ‘achievement’

**Luke (2010)/Luke et al (2010):** teachers in low SES schools in Queensland spend more time on direct alphabetic instruction and drill of grapheme/phoneme generalisations than their middle or high SES counterparts. Far from students in poorer communities lacking ‘basic skills’, they in fact receive more work on decoding at the expense of other critical aspects of reading and literacy

**Darling-Hammond (2010):** poor districts ...offer stripped down drill-and-practice approaches to reading and math learning, rather than teaching for higher-order applications (p. 52)

critical thinking and problem-solving; collaboration...effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; curiosity and imagination. The kind of curriculum that supports these qualities has typically been rationed to the most advantaged students in the United States (p. 54)
Decades of research have shown that teachers who produce high levels of learning for initially low-and higher-achieving students alike provide active learning opportunities involving student collaboration and many uses of oral and written language, connect to students’ prior knowledge and experiences, provide hands-on learning opportunities, and engage students’ higher-order thought processes, including their capacities to approach tasks strategically, hypothesize, predict, evaluate, integrate and synthesize ideas (Darling-Hammond, 2010:55)

A key common factor was an emphasis on having students think, solve problems and apply knowledge. Simply reporting back knowledge or practising formulae outside of the context of application was unusual. Teachers strongly saw their role in the classroom as challenging students, rather than ‘spoon-feeding’ information (Ayres, Dinham & Sawyer, 2000, n.p.)
Teachers researching in TFG

- write about their practice on engagement (as part of the application/selection process)
- agree to be the subject of a case study, but also to be a co-author of the case study itself
- to read and respond to the case studies of other teachers on a project intranet
- to take part in an intensive cross-case analysis over 6 days at the conclusion of all the case studies (Munns et al, 2013)
Cross-case analysis days

- Review contextual challenges and how they are being met *(Reviewing data)*
- Having the kids buy into high expectations *(Interrogating the taken-for-granted)*
- What high cognitive/affective/operative experiences and ‘insider classroom’ processes looked like within Grades *(Coding and categorising and re-considering previous categorising/ Interrogating the model’s explanatory force)*
- Metaphors/sayings/stories *(Re-conceptualising the data)*
- Mapping findings against Haberman’s ‘Good teaching is…’ *(Mapping findings against literature)*
- Considering literacy/technology/creativity *(Taking different ‘cuts’ through the data)*
- Terminology *(Defining key terms)*
Ofsted put the school in special measures, and the fine details of her job were suddenly dictated by the borough council, via the school's management (aka senior leadership team). [The teacher] was handed lesson plans from above, and instructed to stick to them.

"They actually said, 'Now do this, now say that’. The basis of it was being told exactly what to do. There was a geography lesson I wanted to teach, on 'Connecting yourself to the world'. I got told off, because I contacted someone in America who had the same name as me, and I got my whole class to write to her. We took photos out of the window, sent emails, and she replied. I thought it was great: she was in New York and we were in Dagenham. But I was told it wasn't appropriate because it wasn't what was on the lesson plan" (Harris, The Guardian, 2014)
Lingard & Renshaw: researchly disposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research-based profession</th>
<th>Research-informed profession</th>
<th>Considers teacher professional discretion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-based profession</td>
<td>Evidence-informed profession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translators or interpreters of research done elsewhere</td>
<td>Researchly disposition among teachers</td>
<td>Pedagogical disposition among researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects of research</td>
<td>Teachers and academics as ‘co-researchers’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
...and teacher collaboration

HSC study: the most effective teachers operated against a background of highly effective Faculties (Ayres, Sawyer & Dinham, 2000)

AESOP study: the most salient feature of our findings (Sawyer, Brock & Baxter, 2007)
One set of Phase 1 questions: Primary

Students disengaged or ‘invisible’, low expectations of themselves

The *focus question* was:
- What are the benefits of student self-assessment and how do these affect student motivation, engagement and achievement?

The *contributing questions* were:
- How can opportunities for self-assessment and peer assessment be incorporated into teaching? What scaffolds are needed?
- What is the effect on learning achievements and learning relationships when students are given more control?
- How might action learning involve a community of reflection and especially metacognitive reflection?
- Can all students use the metalanguage of task rubrics after consistent use and modelling, rather than the language of compliance and behaviour?
One set of Phase 1 questions: Secondary

Students, though largely compliant, not fully engaged: some capable, but silent.

Her beginning focus question was:
• What can I do to improve the learning outcomes of students using the MeE Framework? In particular, how can feedback be used effectively?

Her contributing questions were:
• How can feedback influence students’ attitudes to learning?
• How can I develop good teaching practices about the use of feedback through collaboration and mentoring?
• How can I give critical feedback without damaging esteem?
• How can teacher feedback enable more student ‘voice’?
I walk into 1/2H and see a classroom full of engaged learners, using Edmodo to collaborate and encourage each other in learning. Students are talking about what they have been learning because they are looking at photos on the web platform or arcades they have made. This is a significant change to the students I met at the start of the project. They are focused, self-directed and excited to be at school.
Julia on mentoring

Having someone to support me by regularly communicating and discussing ideas encouraged me to be creative and innovative in my classroom practice. Feedback on lessons and ideas allowed me to grow as a teacher... The mentoring relationship ... ensured that I reflect on my own teaching practices. ... The conversations that Beth and I had via email and in person about the MeE Framework helped me to have a clear understanding of how the students in my class learn and what I can implement to assist them in their learning. We continually discussed where students could go to next in regards to Edmodo and how to use it as a tool to build student voice and encourage student control.
Re-framing teachers’ intellectual work: research as agency

- teachers giving an account of themselves on their own terms
- resisting/ speaking back to deficit framing/ bypassing of teachers
- teachers themselves speaking back to deficit framing of low SES kids
- research as a social, collaborative phenomenon: presenting and (re-)conceptualising ‘stories of our practices’: moving from an individualistic mindset in relation to your class/your data >>>
- ‘developing more general insight and transferable knowledge about teaching and learning processes...not simply to improve practice locally, but to create a body of knowledge about learning and teaching that can inform theory and practice generally’ (Lingard & Renshaw 2010, 36).
Students as researchers

- Participating as researchers significantly alters student subjectivity – from consumers to producers of knowledge

- Teachers build on students’ personal experiences and cultural resources as a bridge for introducing more abstract ideas and conceptual knowledge (where necessary) (Comber, 2016: 65)

- Scaffolded from this engagement is the ‘learning of the cultural codes...needed for success in mainstream curriculum work’ (Hattam et al, 2009: 307) - what McNaughton (2002) calls ‘building on the familiar and unlocking the unfamiliar’ (pp.27-28).
Boomer : Pedagogical reform for *Disadvantaged Schools Program* schools

...premised on the fact that human beings are born with questing, rule inducing minds. In my imagined good schools, I would hope to see:

- Group Assignment/Tasks
- Project-Based/Research-Based Assignments
- Skilled Performance-Production (Making and Doing)
- Problem-Posing/Problem-Attacking
- Designing, Planning- > Goals
- Self-Evaluation (Sharing Evaluative Criteria)
- Higher-Order Thinking (Questioning, Hypothesising)
- Application of Culturally Significant Media (beyond language...)
- Teacher Demonstration Demonstration/Coaching
- The Apprenticeship Model
- The Classroom as Democratic Workshop – ‘The Productive School’

(brought from) a new kind of tough-minded fighter for a better deal for the disadvantaged, who has dispelled the worst effects of soft edged romanticism while keeping alive visions of a better society based on hard-won principle.

(Boomer 1991/1999)
References

- Doecke, B. (forthcoming) ‘What kind of “knowledge” is English? (Re-reading the *Newbolt Report*)’ *Changing English*
- Fair Go Project Team (2006) *School is For Me: Pathways to Student Engagement*, Sydney: Priority Schools Programs, NSW Department of Education and Training.
References


• Newbolt, H. (Chair), (1921) The Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Education to inquire into the position of English in the educational system of England (1921) *The Teaching of English in England*, London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office.

References