Visible Pedagogies, Visible Learning: A Case Study of a Collaborative Inquiry Partnership

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Recently in the US, UK and Australia educational policies have focussed on improving the quality of teaching and school leadership as the prime strategies for addressing issues of educational inequality, measured by standardised national tests, specifically in literacy and numeracy. Such a policy position has in turn, produced inquiry and debate over what constitutes effective classroom teaching, methods of teacher education, and teacher professional learning, and school leadership to ensure classroom effectiveness. Although educational neoliberalism has taken a different focus in national contexts, researchers across the globe have raised concerns about the impact of high stakes international and national testing on teachers and students in the most disadvantaged communities (see for example, Barrett, 2008; Hursh, 2013; Smith & Kovacs, 2011).

This paper describes a collaborative co-inquiry partnership designed around the principles of visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000) and visible learning (Hattie, 2012) with 12 schools in one low socio-economic, culturally and linguistically diverse district in Queensland, Australia. Through an analysis of interview, focus group, survey and learning attainment data, I explore how the partnership brought research and practice together in a highly contextualised problem solving process. I track the design partnership process from data generation and analysis to rethinking and replanning curriculum and pedagogy to needs-based professional learning design to enable instructional innovations, and evaluation of the effectiveness of such innovations. The complexity of collaborative co-inquiry research work is discussed in the light of current theoretical debates about the performative role of researchers in interrupting educational inequalities within globalizing neoliberal educational policy regimes.

The paper contributes to literature in the sociology of education, and sociology of critical policy studies by extending theoretical work on policy enactment and performativity (Ball, McGuire & Braun, 2012). I draw on Basil Bernstein’s (2000) concepts of recontextualisation, pedagogic discourse, and pedagogic models to explore knowledge flows in dialogues around student assessment data to design instructional innovations. I suggest that an analysis of collaborative co-inquiry work designed to improve student learning outcomes in low-socioeconomic school communities necessitates attention to the ways in which policy actors navigate and negotiate ‘dilemmatic spaces’ (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013), anxieties and affects/feelings (Moore, 2006) in the current globalising policy context of high-stakes national testing, new public sector managerialism, and accountability regimes.