Discourses in Place as a Means for Understanding Tensions Within a German Bilingual Program in Canada

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Competing discourses within an educational setting have a direct impact on teaching practices. The nexus analysis concept of discourses in place (the ways of thinking in a social context) provides a means for understanding and determining the existing discourses, while also navigating their cycles in and out of the social practice. In my study, the social practice was the promotion of bilingualism in a German Bilingual Program in western Canada. I interviewed teachers, administrators and parents to determine the discourses in place. I observed classroom teaching, looking for these discourses in the teaching practices and in stimulated recall sessions the teachers commented on the decision-making behind their practices. These data reveal competing discourses: a tension between the strict separation of languages that is a strong discourse in immersion pedagogy and the flexible bilingualism that emerges out of the social constructivism of elementary generalist pedagogy. Some teachers perceive these tensions and attempt to reconcile the contradictions by developing a more nuanced pedagogy: a bilingual pedagogy and practice.

Through nexus analysis, I was able to identify the discourses in place, especially those of a covert or oral nature. In addition, nexus analysis provided a clearer means to understand the movement of these discourses in place. One of the strengths of nexus analysis is the understanding that interactions are multilayered. Certain discourses in place appeared stronger or weaker at a given moment. Discourses within the teaching practices intersect with the discourses each individual brings to the context and the specific ways of doing within the German Bilingual Program/elementary school. In sum, I demonstrate how discourses in place can be used to shed light on competing discourses within a complex social context.

Keywords: nexus analysis, discourses in place, bilingualism.