

INTERACTION, MEDIA CULTURE AND ADOLESCENTS AT SCHOOL

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1. Focus

This paper describes the findings of a project that focused on an existing data-set of radio-microphone recordings, interviews and fieldnotes, collected in two London schools in 1997-8.² The analysis provided a significant base for the research we are currently carrying out within the ESRC's Identities & Social Action Programme.³ The project that we report in this paper aimed:

- to map some of the principal ways in which young people spontaneously draw media culture into their daily lives at school
- to explore some of the ways in which this either complements or conflicts with the instruction from their teachers.⁴

In studying the encounter between school and media culture, our analysis spans three time-scales (or *durées*): the historical, the quotidian, and the momentary. More specifically, in the search for answers to particular questions, we consider:

- i) historical and communicative processes in society at large
- ii) the ethos in particular schools and classrooms
- iii) the cultural resources and dispositions that individual students bring with them (their wealth, linguistic abilities, educational expectations, and positioning within (sub-)cultures of consumption)
- iv) the positioning of individuals at school and within the peer group
- v) discourse strategies within specific communicative events, and the local interactional affordances of particular media

¹ We would like to thank the Spencer Foundation for their generous support for the project on which this report is based. The data presented, the statements made, and the views expressed are, however, solely our own. We'd also like to record our gratitude to Annie Gillett and Jurgen Jaspers for their role in formulating the plans for this project, and our greatest debt is to the pupils and teachers whose media-oriented interactions we attempt to describe.

An earlier version of this paper was published in 2002 as *Working Papers in Urban Language and Literacies 20*, and can be found at www.kcl.ac.uk/education/wpull.html. More elaborate analysis of these data can also be found in Rampton B (at press) *Language in Late Modernity: Interaction in an Urban School* (Cambridge: CUP).

² The project described in this paper lasted one year from October 2001 to September 2002, with Dover employed as Research Associate on a half-time basis. The recordings we submitted to secondary analysis were themselves made during an ESRC-funded project entitled 'Multilingualism & Heteroglossia In and Out of School' (R 000 23 6602).

³ The new project is called 'Urban Classroom Culture and Interaction' (RES 148 25 0042). It runs from March 2005- March 2008, and the project team comprises Ben Rampton (Director), Roxy Harris, Caroline Dover, Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Constant Leung and Lauren Small.

⁴ The research is ethnographic rather than pedagogic, and we are not principally concerned with the *teaching* of popular and media culture, or with the use of media for teaching purposes. Compare e.g. Oldham 1999 and the *English and Media Magazine*.

2. Methods

To engage with (i) to (v) in our analysis of specific issues, we have drawn on:

- the literatures in education, media and cultural studies,⁵ particularly as these relate to the claim that media culture has induced historical shifts in communicative relations both generally and in schooling;⁶
- ethnography, particularly as this relates to school, media and adolescent identity;⁷
- interaction analysis and the ethnography of communication, relevant both to classroom and to media-engagement processes.⁸

Our data-analysis involved a process of progressive focusing, moving from (a) to (c):

- a) an ethnographically oriented survey of the media-related activity of 9 students,⁹ in over 80 hours of radio-microphone recordings of interaction in lessons (70) and in lunch- and breaktimes in two schools.¹⁰
- b) Intensive case studies of the media engagement of individuals over several continuous periods of 2-4 hours, where possible also drawing on fieldnotes and interview data.¹¹ These permitted more focused analysis of how an individual's tastes and styles of engagement with media culture connected with their demeanour in class, their peer-group positioning, and their trajectories of self-identity (Giddens 1991).
- c) Interactional sociolinguistic transcription and micro-analysis of key episodes, focusing on the ways in which media-oriented discourse meshed with the classroom interaction order and local social relations of talk.
- d) In addition, we engaged in recursive planning, reporting and analysis at regular research team meetings (19 in all).

In adopting procedures (a) to (c), we have sought to overcome a major lack of ethnographic and micro-interactional analyses in research on media, youth and schooling,¹² and indeed we know of no other studies using comparable methods to analyse a corpus of this size and type.

3. Findings

The two questions guiding our analysis are:

- A. Who engaged with what aspects of media culture, how, when, where at school, and against what background obstacles and opportunities?
- B. How was the relationship between students' affiliation to media culture and teachers' commitment to curriculum instruction actually negotiated in classroom interaction?

⁵ Research team academic backgrounds: Dover - anthropology, media studies; Harris - education, cultural studies; Rampton - sociolinguistics, education.

⁶ e.g. Castells 1996:374-5; O'Sullivan 1998; Eco 1990; Hartley 1997; Sefton-Green 1998:12; Holmes & Russell 1999.

⁷ e.g. Willis 1977; Woods 1990; Foley 1990; Silverstone & Hirsch (eds) 1992; Gillespie 1995; Sefton-Green (ed) 1998

⁸ e.g. Goffman 1974, 1981; Gumperz 1982; Macbeth 1990; Rampton 1995; Scollon 1998; Hutchby 2001.

⁹ 2 White Anglo descent (1 male, 1 female), 5 South Asian (3M, 2F), 1 African Caribbean (F), 1 African (M).

¹⁰ The substantial listening task involved in this survey was construed as a form of mediated ethnographic observation, and in taking this perspective, (a) we were guided by our theoretical concern for the local ecologies of media-cultural activity and for the specificity of particular episodes, and (b) we sought to combine Dover's listening task with Harris and Rampton's direct experience of participant-observation in the schools being investigated. In line with this methodological decision, every case of TPC-involvement was in the first instance summarised in a brief descriptive vignette, and only then coded, tabulated and enumerated. The availability of these vignettes was essential when team members were less familiar with the particular parts of the corpus, and it also facilitated subsequent analysis of what the quantitative data might mean.

¹¹ The interviews were not designed with media culture specifically in mind.

¹² Moores 2000:148-150, Buckingham 1999:7

We can begin to answer these questions by describing the clearest findings from our survey so far.

3.1 Survey findings:

Rather than targeting any one particular media type in advance, we started with a broad search, and our survey of 82½ hours of spontaneous interaction in two schools identified c. 275 episodes¹³ where talk orients to - refers, alludes, performs - music, TV, film, PCs, electronic games, telecommunications [phones, mobiles, pagers], newspapers and magazines. From this, it emerged that:

a) patterns of media-involvement among the youngsters in our sample broadly conformed to the findings of a much larger 1997 self-report survey of young people in the UK (Livingstone & Bovill 1999:56), in so far as at school:

- music and TV featured much more frequently in young people's everyday talk than other media¹⁴
- boys' talk oriented to PCs and electronic games to a greater extent than girls¹⁵
- mobile phones, the internet and email did not yet have widespread currency among young people in 1997-98.¹⁶

So there were no *prima facie* reasons for supposing that we had selected an idiosyncratic group, and that our findings could have no wider relevance. At the same time, the preponderance of music and TV meant that our subsequent analysis focused more on popular and mass media culture than on new technologies.¹⁷

b) Pupils oriented to media culture at some point in most of the lessons that we recorded (in 51 out of 70).

c) Even so, students generally treated media culture and the school curriculum as normatively associated with separate cultural realms.¹⁸ Teachers did occasionally make film, TV, print-media or computers an important focus for discussion in class, and they also made a few incidental references.¹⁹ However,

- inside class, in 166 episodes of media-oriented talk among peers, youngsters attempted to use media culture in a serious contribution to curriculum work on only 3 occasions.
- outside class, students linked media culture to curriculum work in only 8 out of 84 episodes of media-oriented talk (and vocalisation) among peers²⁰

¹³ An episode was defined as a sequence of talk introducing and often sustaining a media-cultural theme, bounded by periods of talk and activity devoted to other matters.

¹⁴ The figures were: music - 130+ episodes; television - 68; film - 43; PCs - 12; electronic games - 3; telecommunications - 5; newspapers - 4; magazines - 6. Compare Livingstone & Bovill 1999:29.

¹⁵ 12 engagements across 4 boys (median: 2.5), compared with one among 4 girls. Cf Livingstone & Bovill 1999:40,41

¹⁶ Livingstone & Bovill 1999:29; compare Annual Childwise Monitor (*Childwise Insights: Boys Kick the Reading Habit*. <http://www.childwise.co.uk/reading.htm>. Consulted 9/5/02): "In October 1999, one in three young people aged 13-16 had their own mobile, up six fold on the previous year."

¹⁷ In the terms of our initial proposal, we have been led to focus more on the 'popular' than 'techno' side of techno-popular culture.

¹⁸ Although of course subtleties and qualifications were subsequently added to this by the interactional micro-analysis (see below).

¹⁹ Teachers introduced media culture as an issue in 13 (out of 70) lessons. In three of these, they made it central, in four, they made it significant, while in six, it figured in only incidental references.

²⁰ Seven of these consisted of a boy humming the theme tune of Zeffirelli's *Romeo & Juliet*, which they had been watching in class (see 3.4 below)

- out-of-class environments were generally more conducive to interactions oriented to media culture, particularly at West Park ²¹
- d) Pupils at inner city Central High oriented to popular media culture more often than pupils at suburban Westpark, as well as in noticeably different ways
- At Central High, media-oriented activity featured in c. 90% of the lessons surveyed, while at Westpark, it featured in c. 60%.²²
 - In peer contexts during lessons at Central High, episodes featuring media occurred at an average rate of 3.8 per hour, whereas between peers during lessons at Westpark, the rate worked out at 1.7 episodes per hour.²³
 - The difference between lessons and recess (break-time and lunch) as occasions for media-oriented talk appeared to be more sharply observed by students at Westpark than Central High.²⁴
 - Our survey distinguished between (a) 'performative' invocations of media culture - mimicry, tapping, humming and singing - and (b) explicit references to it as a topic. Performative invocations were much more frequent at Central High - 2.8 per hour (74 episodes) compared with 0.5 per hour at Westpark (18).²⁵
 - More particularly, there was a great deal more (unofficial) music-making in class at Central High.²⁶
- e) Overall, the survey so far suggests:
- that since young people (a) treated media culture and school as separate, while (b) engaging in media-oriented talk in class, there was a potential tension between school and media culture, as many commentators have proposed
 - At the same time, media culture obviously impacted on classroom interaction in different ways, to differing degrees, in different places.
- Two salient questions arise from this:
- what could account for the differences between Central High and Westpark?, and
 - how was the relationship between media culture and the curriculum actually negotiated, particularly at Central High since this was where it seemed to intrude on classroom talk most frequently in the survey?

3.2 Preliminary characterisation of classrooms in the two schools

²¹ At Central High, there were 116 media-oriented episodes in 26.25 hours of lesson recordings (an average rate of 4.4 per hour), and 55 episodes in 10.5 hours of out-of-class data (average rate of 5.2 p.h.). At Westpark, there were 78 media-oriented episodes in 38.75 hours of lesson recordings (2 per hour), and 28 episodes in 7 hours of out-of-class data (4 p.h.). (The figures for lessons include media-oriented pupil-teacher interaction.)

²² In 28/31 lessons at Central High (introduced by teachers in 6), and in 23/39 lessons at Westpark (introduced by teachers in 7)

²³ Central High: 100 episodes of media-oriented peer-talk in 26½ hrs of lesson time recordings. Westpark: 66 episodes in 38¾ hours of recorded lesson-time.

²⁴ At Westpark, peer-peer talk in class oriented to media culture at a rate of 1.7 episodes per hour, as opposed to 4 per hour out of class. The figures for Central High were 3.8 episodes per hour in class, and 5.2 outside.

²⁵ The average rate of explicit references was broadly comparable - 1.2 per hour at Central High (33 episodes), and 1.4 at Westpark (53 episodes).

²⁶ Central High students engaged in informal music-making episodes in c. two thirds (20/31) of the lessons we recorded (taught by 7 different teachers), at an average of 2.5 episodes per hour (67 episodes in all). In contrast, there were only 13 episodes of singing, humming or tapping at West Park, occurring in c. a quarter of the lessons (10/39), taught by 6 teachers, averaging 0.3 per hour (13 instances).

Judged by objective indicators, Westpark was both more affluent and more successful in exams than Central High,²⁷ and from participant and mediated observation, classrooms at Westpark also appeared to be much more orderly.

At Westpark, there were relatively few problems of classroom order. Teachers could generally talk to the class for substantial periods of time, relatively free from interruption or distraction by the students, and they had few difficulties maintaining the conventional IRE structure of classroom discourse.²⁸ Unauthorised talk between students was largely hidden from the teacher, and in some regular classes where students were working through textbooks, there were protracted periods of total silence. The five students we focused on were by no means always equally interested in the content of their lessons, but for the most part, they made a public show of willingness to participate in class.

In contrast, at Central High, it was usually quite difficult for the teacher to use his or her voice to develop a topic free from interruption or distraction. Students could often be seen and heard talking to each other about other matters while the teacher was trying to address them, and there were a lot of comments called out across the class unbidden by the teacher. One of the Central High informants that we focused on was a top student, but he often disrupted the conventional IRE structure in his displays of enthusiasm and attentiveness (see below). At the same time, two of our focal students routinely declined to answer questions from the teacher, and they spent substantial periods of class-time talking to each other about issues unrelated to the lesson.

Such observations, however, say little of the processes involved in spontaneous media-oriented activity in class, and so to illuminate these, our analysis turned to interactional micro-analysis.

3.3 Interaction analysis

Our interaction analysis focused on Central High pupils' impromptu classroom music-making, the most common single media-related practice in our data-set.²⁹ More particularly it addressed three issues:

- i) the disciplinary regime which tolerated these outbreaks - how did the pupils get away with it?
- ii) the way in which song fitted with a more general dynamic at work in the lessons - what made the class an occasion for song?
- iii) the specificities of music - what was it that music in particular offered the pupils?

3.3.1 *The disciplinary regime which tolerated musical outbreaks*

a) First, spontaneous music making was most commonly occurred in interludes between periods of officially focused classwork, in 'open states of talk' (Goffman 1981:134) when low-levels of informal chat were licensed by the teacher.³⁰ As a result, it normally posed no

²⁷ About ¼ of students at Westpark received free school meals, compared with more than ½ at Central High. In 1999, when informants took their 16+ GCSE exams at the end of compulsory schooling, > 60% of Westpark students got 5 or more GCSE A*-C results, while at Central High, the figure was <20. Conversely, while a little over 15% of Westpark students were registered as having special educational needs, the figure for Central High was almost a third. There were also high levels of geographical mobility among the students at Central High, and almost a third belonged to refugee and asylum seeking families.

²⁸ IRE: teacher Initiates => pupil Responds => teacher Evaluates the response.

²⁹ Singing and humming at Central High represented c. ¼ of all the media-oriented episodes in our corpus (covering *both* schools). At the same time, our reliance on audio- rather than video-recordings made it more tractable to analysis than e.g. pupils' involvement with computers.

³⁰ e.g. on first entering the class early on; during periods when pupils were reseating themselves for group work; while they were packing up at the end of a lesson

direct threat to curriculum order. This accounted for a great deal of the humming and singing in our Central High data-set, among both boys and girls.

b) But this could not account for every instance of music-making. On several occasions, for example, one of the boys blurted out a brief snatch of loud falsetto while the teacher was speaking to the class as a whole, and on others, during ‘open states of talk’, a group of them sang together very noisily. But at least two factors played a crucial part permitting this. First, instructional authority in whole class instructional discourse was normally pluralised, and in this class, pupils - especially boys - contributed to turns-at-talk that tend to be the exclusive preserve of the teacher in traditional classrooms (as well as at Westpark). With little mitigation from the speakers and with very little censure from the teacher, they regularly offered words and phrases to complete the teacher’s current utterance, they provided overt evaluations of their peers’ responses to questions, they produced calls to order and they reprimanded their peers for causing distraction.³¹ Second, many of these interventions supported the teacher, carrying the instructional project forward. These were by no means all just deceptive ‘making out’ games, designed in bad faith by the boys to spice up otherwise dreary curriculum learning (see Foley 1990, 1991). Instead, these boys were often seriously interested in the subject-matter on hand (see Candela 1999), and their teachers were often much more concerned about the conspicuous lack of interest displayed by other members of the class, particularly some of the girls, than by exuberant contributions from the boys (see 3.4 & 4.1 below). So overall, it was much easier for them to get away with noisy outbursts of singing than it might have been in more teacher-centred classrooms.

3.3.2 *Song’s congruence with a more general dynamic in classroom interaction*

In general, instructional discourse relies extensively on students’ ability to process and produce semantic and referential propositions, and at least in its academic ideal, it aspires to carry participants beyond the here-and-now into the realms communicated in the lesson content (cf Goffman 1981:166).³² In contrast, the boys in the Central High dataset often oriented to other aspects of the central instructional discourse. Using parallelism (repetition with contrast), they frequently recoded pieces of classroom talk into forms that were both conspicuously different and contextually incongruous - utterances were turned into German, into melody, into non-standard accents, into a different tempo, prosodic contour, word-stress etc. In this way, they treated prior utterances as opportunities for formal linguistic transcoding rather than as contributions to the construction of intersubjective mental models of the curriculum topic (Heap 1985). In ‘echoings’, they also appreciatively recycled anomalous utterances - musical blurts, bits of German, incongruous back-channellings - iconically revivifying a comic or dramatic moment, savouring some aspect of the very recent here-and-now.³³ Both practices (a) entailed close tracking of discourse on the main classroom floor (consistent with the hyper-involvement outlined in 3.3.1.b),³⁴ while also (b) displaying an interest in ‘platform performance’ as an option within the unfolding of the

³¹ They also reiterated the teacher’s reprimands and calls to order; provided the teacher with outloud backchannel cues (response cries and both brief and elaborated clarification requests); complained to the teacher about having their bids to respond ignored, contested the teacher’s implicit criticism of them, and criticised the teacher’s instructions.

³² Of course, teachers often make metalinguistic comments and attend to the poetic functions of language (Jakobson 1960), but when, for example, they commend a pupil’s utterance for its formal felicity, its thematic relevance to the topic on hand is also likely to be a major consideration.

³³ Echoings were often performed with a half-laugh, co-constructing the salience, memorability, amusement value of the original (cf Tannen 1989:64).

³⁴ cf also Graham & Jardine 1990

lesson.³⁵ In all, these boys often seemed to be weaving a contrapuntal aesthetic into the texture of instructional discourse, intensifying their enjoyment of the lesson, not by tuning out but by embellishing it. This was generally achieved through words and talk rather than song, but it is quite possible to imagine this mode of participation producing the experience of dynamic collectivity that Frith attributes to musicians performing together.³⁶ ‘Musical fellowship’ of this kind was most obvious when they did actually start singing together, but the main point is that among these boys, music was congruent with a focused aesthetic exuberance that was much more general, expressed across a range of modalities.³⁷

3.3.3 *What did music offer them?*

It is notoriously difficult to describe the interiority of musical experience in words (Frith 1996), but the insistent appeal of particular tunes, the way we “absorb songs into our lives and rhythm into our bodies” (ibid. 121), was amply attested in the chronic humming and soft singing sometimes captured on the lapel microphone. Solo humming could operate as a pleasurable soundtrack overlaying visual and proxemic experience when students were on their own (walking in a corridor, working on some classwork), and it was also interspersed with flurries of talk, the resumption of a tune being one alternative to lapsing into silence (Goffman 1981:120). But humming was also a display of both interactional demeanour and musical taste, and it generally (though not invariably) projected a relaxed confidence that such expressions of interior involvement in a particular tune would be acceptable to those immediately on hand (normally good friends).

Beyond that, when compared with conversation, humming and singing provided opportunities for a particular kind of sociability, with friends ‘joining in’ of their own accord, coming alongside in active appreciation of a particular song. Canonically in conversation, a turn-at-talk is addressed to a particular recipient, it claims some relevance to him/her/them, it makes reference to the world around, it is internally organised with local situational exigencies in mind, and very often, it expects - and sets up the lines for - a reply from the interlocutor(s).³⁸ In contrast, the words of a song are normally pre-formulated, created in a setting apart from the context of its revoicing, and usually, the internal organisation isn’t locally tailored to require a reply. For processes of reciprocation around song, this means (a) that singing in company can often be ignored as exuded rather than intended expression (Goffman 1959:14); (b) if it is taken as targeted to an audience, it invites an appreciation rather than requiring a reply; (c) when someone *does* reciprocate in kind, this is likely to be experienced as ‘joining in’ in a display of non-obligatory attunement. In contrast to conversation which creates a mandatory exchange structure, a song ‘catches on’ and ‘spreads’, and there were several episodes of this among the boys (see 3.3.3 above), with one

³⁵ According to Bauman, in performance “the act of speaking is put on display, objectified, lifted out to a degree from its contextual surrounding, and opened up to scrutiny by an audience. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of speaking and gives licence to the audience to regard it and the performer with special intensity. Performance makes one communicatively accountable: it assigns to an audience the responsibility of evaluating the relative skills and effectiveness of the performer’s accomplishment.” (1975:293). Parallelistic utterances were acts of performance, while echoings displayed the audienceship which performance requires. On platform events, see Goffman 1983:7.

³⁶ “What I want to suggest... is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities... but that they only get to know themselves *as groups* (as a particular organisation of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) *through* cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement... [musicians experience] a simultaneous projecting and dissolving of the self in *performance*... in the moment of enactment of musical fellowship” (Frith 1996:110).

³⁷ Erickson 1995 considers the musical organisation of classroom talk, but focuses on interactions which have a simpler ‘melodic contour’, more closely aligned with the main instructional content.

³⁸ See Goffman 1981:Ch 1 for some qualifications.

person's solo humming being gradually amplified into joint performance and discussion. Such conduct was also facilitated by other properties of song, which allowed the performers (i) to juxtapose and combine a particular tune with other motifs - new lyrics, for example, being improvised on a melody in circulation - while (ii) both risking but escaping the teacher's censure through the skilful variation in loudness, pitch, duration and interactional timing.

The analysis in this section points to some of the systemic possibilities afforded both by the classroom interaction order at Central High, and by song as an expressive modality. But it says little of the particular student and teacher relationships, biographies and tastes involved in the uptake of such possibilities (see Foley 1990:Ch 4). At this point, more wide-angled ethnography is required.

3.4 Case studies of individuals

Case studies of two of the students in the class at Central High illustrate additional factors affecting young people's engagement with media culture at school. Hanif and Joanne³⁹ engaged in media-related talk with approximately the same frequency (c. 4½ episodes per hour), and they both hummed and sang a lot in class.⁴⁰ But different friendship patterns and orientations to school affected the ways they did so.

Hanif held a leadership position in the dominant, multi-ethnic male peer-group in the class and he was one of the top students, happy to talk in front of the rest of the class and, without being submissive, he was very attentive to the teachers. He often hummed and sang to himself in the 12 hours of radio-microphone recordings,⁴¹ but surrounded by a fluctuating group of non-intimate peers (only 1 or 2 of whom he socialised with after school), he switched to words to account for these displays of personal taste on a number of occasions (five). Only once did a (relatively peripheral) member of the group join in spontaneously, while on at least three occasions, Hanif actively exhorted others around him to sing along too. There were also a couple of instances when he mocked the musical taste and ignorance of other boys. Hanif was a major contributor to the contrapuntal aesthetic described in 3.3.2, and the exuberant appropriation of curriculum materials was also evidenced when he spent half-a-day humming and whistling the theme from the film they'd been watching in the English lesson.

In contrast, Joanne was receiving extra literacy support, she disliked speaking in front of the rest of the class, felt alienated from school, and spent most lessons sitting with her close friend Ninnette.⁴² They passed a great deal of their time chatting quietly and sharing sweets, and they also talked about exchanging popular media artefacts (tapes and posters). Like Hanif, Joanne also had tunes 'stuck in her mind' during the 7½ hours of r-m recordings, but within the intimacy of her relationship with Ninnette, she evidently felt no need to justify these verbally, and Ninnette sometimes joined in of her own accord, on one occasion in quite a sustained duet. Joanne often transcoded words and topics into song, but it was invariably

³⁹ Hanif (male) was of Bengali descent, and Joanne (female) was white Anglo. These are pseudonyms.

⁴⁰ Hanif: 28 spontaneous music-making episodes in 8hrs; Joanne: 21 in 5.

⁴¹ 'I shot the sheriff', the 'Romeo & Juliet' theme tune, 'Sitting by the dock of the bay' (Otis Redding, Pearl Jam), a Hindi song he couldn't name, 'Staying Alive' (Bee Gees), a jingle for Skips crisps, one or two others which we couldn't identify, and some local improvisations.

⁴² African-Caribbean descent.

peer-peer talk that she sought to embellish, never the talk between students and teacher. Indeed, none of her songs originated in, or were cued by, official curriculum activity.⁴³

Joanne and Hanif's school and peer group positioning intimately affected both the style of their engagement with media-culture, and the manner and extent to which they contributed to, or participated in, the interactional dynamics described in 3.3. Without any doubt, gender was also a major factor structuring these differences,⁴⁴ and we return to this in Section 4.

4. **The significance of the findings**

Our data-set on spontaneous interaction is exceptional both in its size and intimacy, and over the longer term, by working across several levels and *durées*, (a) we will be better able to theorise the ways that media-related phenomena - types of practice and styles of use - actually work out within situated activity; (b) we will increase the validity and explanation of particular findings. Meanwhile, in the analysis to date, three outcomes seem especially significant.

4.1 *A different type of pedagogic settlement*

Investigating media-oriented talk at Central High, it became clear that authority in instructional discourse had been de-centred (3.3.1). But since the students who were most active undermining the traditionally monologic discourse of teachers were often enthusiastic rather than disaffected learners (cf Candela 1999), this was different from the kinds of subversive pupil activity commonly described elsewhere in the UK.⁴⁵ Working from particular instances, some US commentators have advocated the hybridisation of school and media practices as a way of transforming learning and social relations in class,⁴⁶ and teachers did seem to use student role-play and performance more at Central High than at Westpark.⁴⁷ But instances of hybrid discourse need to be seen in their wider contexts. At Central High, there were negative dimensions to the interactional dynamic in which these practices were embedded, and the de-centring of teacher talk facilitated the reproduction of gender inequalities. Teachers worried about girls' lack of participation in whole class activity,⁴⁸ but the systemic characteristics that opened the classroom to media culture also made it much harder for girls to contribute. More specifically, working in difficult circumstances in very mixed ability classes where there were some seriously dis-engaged students, teachers valued the interest displayed in the (loud) contributions of enthusiastic pupils (generally boys). As a result, these pupils were often over-active trying to stop their teacher attending to the non-involvement of disaffected peers (often girls), and as these teacher-supportive comments

⁴³ Joanne's repertoire included 'I Believe I Can Fly' (R. Kelly), 'It's Gotta Be You' (3t), 'You're Gorgeous' (Babybird), the theme tunes from the film 'The Bodyguard' (Whitney Houston) and the TV soap 'East Enders', 'Bohemian Rhapsody' (Queen), 'My Gang' (Gary Glitter), plus one or two others we were unable to identify.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Baxter 2002, Myhill 2002

⁴⁵ e.g. Willis 1977, Woods 1990. Conceivably, minority ethnicity and family histories of migration might be significant factors influencing this difference - see Fuller 1980

⁴⁶ e.g. Giroux & Simon 1988, Gutierrez, Rymes and Larson 1995, Kamberelis 2001.

⁴⁷ Outside drama lessons themselves, preparation and performance of student role-playing was a focal curriculum activity in 4 of the 31 lessons recorded at Central High, and in none at Westpark. There is also one extraordinary example a difficult lesson being transformed by the switch to a talk-show format.

⁴⁸ They were generally much more concerned about *under*-involvement (of girls) than the hyper-involvement (of boys) - in one episode at the start of an English lesson when the boys were being (hyper-)dialogical in their co-construction of the lesson, the teacher nominated girls to speak on 4 occasions and reproached them on 8, compared with 2 nominations and 3 reproaches to boys.

often took the form of unmoderated, sometimes very sexist, criticism directed at the source of this distraction, they themselves helped to intensify these disaffected girls' alienation.⁴⁹

4.2 *Popular media culture as a catalyst for new pedagogic relations?*

Our guiding questions invite us to engage with arguments about media culture's historical role in the development of new authority relations, and overall, our data support the view that popular media culture is only one among a number of processes contributing to the informalisation of socio-communicative relations in society at large.^{50 51} Within this, however, it was clear that at Central High, traditional teacher talk had become a distinctively problematic genre - students were far more biddable in role-play, group-work, writing tasks and tests - and in an attempt to identify at least some of the specifically communicative dynamics contributing to this difficulty, we have hypothesised that for students who are tuned to the communicative relations prevailing in contemporary media consumption, traditional teacher-talk constitutes a form of platform performance that may often be aesthetically distasteful. In contrast to what students can engage with on e.g. the TV or radio, teacher talk may seem semiotically thin and monotonous, and regardless of choice, each audience member is vulnerable to being spotlighted. In most kinds of popular platform performance, it is the audience that evaluates the performer, but in class, the audience's personal judgement is de-legitimated, and it is the teacher-performer who makes the assessments, issuing these in what may be experienced as an enervating flow of evaluations that are both insistent *and* relatively inconsequential (compared with assessments of writing). All of these features of whole-class teacher talk were challenged by students at Central High (see 3.3 & 3.4), while they are much more muted in role play, where students were a good deal more compliant. Clearly, multiple factors contribute to the emergence of pedagogic settlements such as we found at Central High, but we are developing a theory capable of nuanced exploration of the intersection between teacher talk and media culture.⁵²

4.3. *Government efforts to re-establish whole class teaching.*

It has not been possible to identify or weight all the processes involved, but it is clear that at Central High, (a) there was systemic organisation in pupil-teacher talk relations, and (b) that this was likely to have multiple determinants, some of them extending to general cultural and demographic factors well beyond the teacher's control. In recent years in the UK, central Government has committed itself to re-establishing whole class teacher talk as a central didactic procedure,⁵³ and it has tended to treat classrooms like Central High's reductively, as

⁴⁹ The only lessons where speaking turns were equally distributed among males and females was the foreign language class, which was setted for ability and almost wholly teacher-led. See Lee 1996:Ch 3 on comparable classroom dynamics, & eg Gilbert 1988 on the reproduction of gender in equalities in student-centred literacies.

⁵⁰ General processes of informalisation were identified in schools themselves long before they became a major issue in studies of the media (Bernstein 1971, 1996).

⁵¹ The striking differences between Westpark and Central High make it obvious that any media influence is mediated by many factors. Even within the de-centred pedagogic settlement found at Central High, teachers' educational philosophies and the varied dispositions, abilities and backgrounds of students were also contributory influences. There was also no evidence of students' media invocations being particularly potent as rallying clarions/emblems of opposition to asymmetrical pedagogic relations. For some relevant critique of theories of the autonomous effects of another medium (literacy), see Street 1984 (also 1999).

⁵² Foley's 1990 study of classroom conduct attributes "a new kind of 'deep' linguistic socialisation" to popular culture, and he uses a theory of performance to explain this (pp 176-81, 194). But (a) his view of 'performance' is insufficiently differentiating, failing to distinguish its pervasiveness in Goffman 1959 from the special aesthetic dimensions in Bauman's conceptualisation (e.g. Foley 1990:181), and (b) the students he describes were almost invariably bored by their curriculum, whereas ours were quite often excited.

⁵³ See Lawton 1994, and e.g. DFEE 1998.

simply the chaotic outcome of incompetent teaching. Such attempts to change the classroom interaction order are, however, likely to be both ineffective and unfair to all of the participants if the complex adaptive processes around (a) and (b) are not adequately recognised. The concepts and insights developed in this project can bring both subtlety *and* realism to these debates, properties currently in rather short supply.

5. Relations to previous & anticipated work

5.1 The data-set derives from an earlier project focusing on code-switching between different language styles and variety, and it complements research on dialect stylisation and on globalisation and language education policy.⁵⁴

5.2 Future outputs:

In the short-term, we can use the analysis described in this Report for activity in three fields:

- in media studies, where our multi-level perspective (1 & 2 above) is unusual, and where the spontaneous *re*-production of media discourse, outside immediate contexts of reception, remains relatively under-explored.⁵⁵
- in applied and socio-linguistics, where the theory of teaching as platform performance (4.2) merits elaboration
- in education, where there is an urgent need for careful discussion and analysis of different kinds of pedagogic settlement (4.1, 4.3), and where we are planning a programme of consultation with local teachers.

Over the longer term, a number of other issues and phenomena have emerged which deserve close attention:

- media-oriented talk, musical taste, ethnic networks and classroom order at Westpark
- episodes of media-oriented activity in class initiated by the teacher
- media-oriented talk within wider patterns of consumption (including food and dress), and the relationship between young people's pupil, consumer and gender identities in an increasingly digital culture.

The corpus we have analysed provides some purchase on these issues, but it would be preferable now to move beyond secondary analysis to new fieldwork, (a) using the current project as a point of historical comparison and (b) treating it as a pilot, maintaining the integrated perspective outlined in Sections 1 & 2, but adding video-data and more topic-relevant interviews and retrospective commentary to our repertoire of methods.

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⁵⁴ See e.g. Rampton 2000, 2002; Harris, Rampton and Leung 2001

⁵⁵ See Spitulnik 1999.

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