Classroom discussion

and the production of absurdities

Isabella Paoletti PhD

Communication Sciences Department, University of Bologna

Italy

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Abstract

This study explore some features of classroom discussion in a primary school class. The data refer to the videotape of a classroom discussions in a year 3 classroom in a Primary school in Australia. Aim of the study is to show how the power relationship and in particular the unequal distribution of conversational rights in the classroom discussion shape the development of the conversation, allowing the production of absurd discourse, that would be certainly sanctioned in ordinary conversation.

Teacher's conversational power

The school context is characterized by specific interactional practices teacher/students. Initial studies of this institutional setting, particularly in the ethnomethodological approach described such practices as characterized by the a triplet structure question-answer-evaluation (Mehan, 1978; 1979a; 1979b; 1985; McHoul, 1978). The teacher ask a question, a student answer, the teacher evaluate student's answer. The teacher's negative evaluation, a correction, or just the absence of a positive evaluation produce a further search for the correct answer, Mehan, (1979a) talks of "continuation acts", while a teacher's positive evaluation close the sequence of adiacency pares, it represents a "terminal act", and a new question is generally asked.

Through questioning the teacher manages the classroom conversation traffic and coordinate the collective verbal interaction. Above all teacher has the control over turn taking. The teacher can choose the student who speaks next in different ways: naming him/her, pointing, inviting students to rise their hands and choosing among them, allowing self-selection. After the student answer, the turn goes back to the teacher, it is rare that a students select another students to speak

Teachers have formally "all the power" in conversational terms (Henry, 1984; Young, 1980). They have the power to determine who will get the next turn at talk (Mehan, 1979a; Edwards, 1981). They decide the topic of conversation and the structure of the activity that will be carried out during the lesson (Heyman, 1986; Hammersley, 1974). They determine when a topic has been exhaustively treated and can be changed (Edwards, 1981; Heyman, 1986). They define "what has been said" for all practical purposes (Edwards, 1981). Teacher are seen exercising their unequal conversational rights, while the students are trying to understand what they are supposed to be doing (Heyman, 1986, 40).

Teachers' questions result often problematic to answer for students (French & McLoure, 1983; Harker & Green, 1985; Willes, 1981). In ordinary conversation, a question acquire its definite meaning in relation to the actual context, the identity of the interlocutors, it is possible to have an idea of the possible reasons that have motivated the question and on that base the responder formulates her/his answer. Teachers' questions are different. They are often false question, question of which the teacher knows the answer aimed at testing students' knowledge (Baker & Perrott, 1988; Mehan, 1979a; Edwards, 1981). Students, therefore, cannot rely on this ordinary inferential base, that is the context, interlocutors' identities and possible motives for the question.

When the teacher asks a question has a precise answer in mind, but it is often not the only possible answer, nor the only formally correct one (French & MacLure, 1983) The "right" answer for all practical purposes, though, is the one decided by the teacher (Hammersley, 1974). Students' replies appear often wrong mainly in relation to the ambiguity of instruction they got in order to produce an answer (Mehan, 1974a). Students find a chronic difficulty in answering teachers' questions, not only in finding the "right answer", but also producing it in the "right way" and at the "right moment", respecting the rules of classroom interaction (Mehan, 1984a). Often teacher use preformulators (French & MacLure, 1981), that is questions that focus students attention on particular aspects of the material of the argument that is discussed. The teacher trough preformulators define a field of shared knowledge where the answer can be found. Contestualization cues (Gumperz & Field 1995) are also used by the teacher to guide the student to find the right answer. In particular McHoul (1990) describes how teachers use contestualization cues in order to elicit students self correction. Teachers producing a contestualization cue, after a student's answer, imply a negative evaluation. The answer is wrong or only partially correct, therefore, they offer the students an opportunity for self-correction.

There are other strategies used by the teacher to guide students to the right answer (Mehan, 1979b). Teacher decompose or reformulate the question, that is, teachers modify the initial question in simpler questions, or more specific question, or limite the number of possible answer,

formulating it in a yes or not question. Students' answers can be accepted or rejected by teachers not only on the base of their content but also in relation to the way they were produced. The students need to learn not only school contents and knowledge, but all an array of interpretation skills in relation to the specific context and school culture, in order to participate effectively in classroom lessons. Moreover Hammersley (1974) observed regarding students' participation that they seemed to use the lesson as a background through which they pursued their own ends: relating to each other, having fun, etc. This students' use of the lesson appear evident in the transcripts that are analysed below.

The teacher is the guardian of coherence and relevance of what is said in classroom. In ordinary conversation formulations are often used to maintain a shared sense of what have been said and are often contested and refused by interlocutors in the course of the verbal exchange, a shared version is actively negotiated. In classroom, Edwards says: "occasions when the achievement of orderly discourse becomes a topic in its own right are dominated by the teacher. It is almost always he who says, in so many words, what has happened, is happening and will happen, and who regularly sums up what has been achieved so far." (Edward 1981, 302) .

Since students have no control over turn taking, they have no control over sense making in classroom conversation: they cannot ask for clarification, nor they can provide them, unless the teacher ask them to do so. It is difficult to exercise sense making, without right to reply. I argue that the unequal distribution of conversational rights in the classroom allows teachers to control the classroom conversation traffic and to carry out orderly classroom activities, but at the same time stops the possibility of a real discussion; a discussion in which students can exercise their logic deductive skills. Therefore, in actual classroom conversation it is not unusual the production of absurd discourse, that would be certainly sanctioned in ordinary conversation.

In this study I argue that the strategies that allow the teacher to maintain order and control in the class are the same ones that stop the students from discussing topics of interest to them, and that bring them and the teacher to produce absurdities.

The data

The data analysed in this article are part of a large corpus on classroom interaction (Paoletti, forthcoming 2003; 1990b). This study was conducted in a primary school, Year 3 class, in New South Wales, Australia. I videoed a total of eight classroom discussions during a period of two months and I interviewed extensively the teacher and the students. The transcripts analysed in this article are taken from the first child-based discussion videoed. Through a detailed conversation analysis, within an ethnomethodological approach, of a transcript of a videorecording of an actual classroom discussion, I show how teacher's attempt to have a "real" discussion on topics that could interest the students and contrast with teacher's need to control the conversation and the ordered development of the classroom activity, that is, the conversation structure undermine the scope of the educational activity. .

The teacher valued the students' ability to discuss: to be able to talk, argue and clarify points. The child-based discussions were intended to give an opportunity to the students to exercise these skills (cf. Baker & Perrott, 1988, 19). Moreover, the teacher had the genuine will to make of this classroom activity something stimulating for the students in which they could discuss their own problems and interests. The topic of discussion is - what would happen in 30 years time? The students are stimulated by the teacher to propose how things would change when they would be grown up.

The students have suggested various things that would change, mainly related to technology, when Frank intervenes with a new topic: big buildings.

Frank: This is a different one. Could be new buildings and tall ones, different kinds

Teacher: Would that be a good thing do you think?

Students: No

Teacher: why not George?

George: there would be a shadow, on the city?

Teacher: Are there any advantages in big buildings?

Sally: There wouldn't be much sun

Teacher: (Summer), normal rules of debate, the hands are raised so we know who's talking. Zara?

Zara: Buffalos would be extinct

Teacher: No, no are there any advantages in big buildings?

Nancy: You wouldn't exactly take up as much room if

Teacher: I can't hear you

Nancy: You wouldn't exactly take up much room if ( )

Teacher: um, are there yeah the advantages of a smaller space, it takes up less room.

(Video 1)

Frank introduces his answer with a qualification as, *a different one*, that it, his answer is not a development of somebody else's previous answer but a new one. In this way he shows an uncertainty relating to what he is supposed to be doing: developing previous topic or introducing a new one. With his question, *Would that be a good thing do you think?* the teacher ratify the new topic "big building" as the current one in the classroom discussion. George's answer *there would be a shadow, on the city?*, is followed by a new teacher's question, *Are there any advantages in big buildings?*, retrospectively works as a negative evaluation of George's first reply. In fact the teacher ask to develop the topic of the advantages of big building. Sally's answer, *There wouldn't be much sun*, develops the argument of the lack of sun, introduced by the previous student, George. The teacher ignores Sally contribution and comments on the way the students are participating, reminding them to wait for their turn, *normal rules of debate, the hands are raised so we know*

who's talking, this works as a reminder of the rule (McHoul, 1978, 199). Then the teacher selects the next speaker, *Zara?*, "going back to the rule".

Zara introduces a new topic, *buffalos would be extinct*. This is not what the teacher want to hear. But after the teacher's interruption to re-establish control of turn taking, the teacher has not given any clues to the students whether to continue developing the current topic (big buildings) or to introduce a new one, so the dismissal of Zara's answer seems partially unjustified. Nancy gives the answer the teacher wants to hear, *You wouldn't exactly take up as much room*. The teacher confirms Nancy's answer by reformulating it, *the advantages of a smaller space; it takes up less room*. In ordinary conversation anyone is allowed to introduce new topics, topic choice and topic duration is jointly managed by interlocutors (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974), but in the classroom the teacher has the control over topic management (Edwards, 1981) and the students have to understand what argument and in which light the teacher wants to pursue in order to produce the "right answer". More than a discussion we have a "guessing game", a "take your chance" game (Perrott, 1988). As we will see, further on in the analysis is such a "guessing exercise" that brings students and teacher to produce absurd discourses. In fact the students are not working on the basis of their common sense as they might normally do, they are guessing which answer the teacher is expecting, but in actual fact children can be skilled discussant as it is shown in the analysis of the transcript that follows..

Children are able to discuss

The next passage is the only one in the whole session in which the students appear involved in what is commonsensically considered a discussion. The conversation continues on the argument of big buildings.

Teacher: Are there any other advantages, Sally

Sally: There wouldn't be any sun ( ) um, burn ( ) make shadows

Teacher: Is that an advantage?

Sally: Yes it is.

Frank: This is a comment on Sally's, no but, the sun is so big the whole of one little town, the whole of Sydney could see it.

Sally: Yeah but you could see the sun but the sun couldn't get on the city because of all the buildings

Students: ( )

Frank: It depends where you were in what angle, plus the building might be here and you're here ( )

Sally: ( )

Teacher: um, let's look at some other things that are likely to change

(Video 1)

Children are able to discuss and they can make a lot of sense (c.f. Phillips, 1983)! Sally and Frank show great articulation and ability to take into account the details of each other's arguments. In fact Frank questions Sally's precise expression, *there wouldn't be any sun*, by arguing that the sun is too big for that to happen, *the whole of Sydney could see it.* Notice again the qualification, *This is a comment on Sally's*, at the beginning of his turn. This student appears particularly aware of the pitfall of classroom discussion, that is of producing a contribution not in line with the teacher's expectations. Sally is up to the discussion. She partially agrees with Frank, *you could see the sun*, then answers back specifying her idea, *but the sun couldn't get on the city because of all the buildings*. Subtly Frank replies pointing out the relevance angle in relation to sun light, *it depends where you were in what angle* The teacher intervenes to stop the two students arguing their points,

changing topic, *let's look at some other things that are likely to change*, to give somebody else the floor. Discussing among students produces a disruption of the ordered development of the classroom activity.

The biggest contrast between this piece of conversation and the rest of the classroom discussion is that here these two students are articulating their thoughts and bringing evidence for their arguments. There is a clear effort in making sense and in taking into account each other arguments. In the rest of the classroom discussion, the students are constrained into an answer pattern controlled by the teacher that does not allow them to produce articulation for argument amongst each other, but only minimal reply (Young, 1980, 68). The teacher has purposely organized the classroom discussion to develop children's argumentative style, their logic-deductive skills, but in order to develop an orderly classroom activity he has to maintain control of the turn taking. In fact the teacher has to interrupt the two students discussing, for two main reasons: the discussion could easily degenerate into a personal argument creating disorder and confusion; and he has to give space to other children and make sure that all the students have their turn. The teacher appear in a bind, to have a real discussion seems in contrast with having control over turn-taking and assuring the ordered development of the classroom activity.

Classroom discussion as battle ground

In the next passage we can observe that a similar mechanism stops the teacher and the students discussing things that seem very exciting for the children. The teacher asks what students would ideally like to have disappear from the world, this question produce great interest and excitement among the students.

Teacher: What would you like not to keep, to get rid of?

((all the children screaming "yeah" and raising *hands* at the same time))

Helen: I want to get rid of my two sisters

Students: (Mr. Brown!)

Teacher: Paula

Paula: my brother

Student: Oh:::::: what did you say to me?

Teacher: Yes?

Rachel: My brother

Teacher: Yes please?

Student: my sister

Zara: all the boys

Stud.(f): yeah

Studs.(f): yeah!!

Stud.(m): all the girls

Student: Dentists.

Teacher: apart from people ah, that are relatives of yours, or general people what things would you like to ((pauses and a student interjects)) to take away from the earth.

(Video 1)

The excitement and the interest of the students on this topic is evident, *((all the children screaming "yeah" and raising hands at the same time))*. Helen saying, *I want to get rid of my two sisters,* express the need to talk about issues that are probably very meaningful to her, that is the relationship among her family. Another student's reply, *(Mr. Brown),* is clearly provocative. Can the teacher allow the students to discuss this topic in their own terms? Evidently not, if he wants to maintain the control over the class and the development of an ordered activity. There is something more, however: the students are not worried if they are making sense or not. It appears as they are

manly having fun. The statements, in particular, *all the boys*, that is strongly supported by other female students and *all the girls*, have a provocative flavour and suggest that the classroom discussion could be used as a battle field for these two classroom components. It could be seen also as a statement on the state of affairs: being silly is a characterisation of a silly situation; to get silly could be seen as a power strategy that students can use, a form of "resistance" (Foucault, 1982, 225). The next two passages from the same classroom discussion exemplify further the children unconcern about making sense.

The production of absurdities

The following passage is a good example of the production of absurdity in classroom discussion. Lilian introduces a new topic, she makes a prediction about cats and dogs.

Teacher: yes Lilian

Lilian: cats and dogs may be extinct

Teacher: any comment on that?

Student: (no)

Teacher: or would that be a good thing?

Students: no!

Teacher: does it have to happen?

Students: no!

Teacher: How is it likely to happen? What would be things that would cause that, Sally?

Sally: Several things because, they're such a popular animal they wouldn't get extinct ever probably, they're such such a popular animal

Teacher: Can you see any case where is likely to happen?

Student: Someone might em put em poison, em in some dog food or cat food and, there might be ((laughter)) someone might buy it like they do in, plain food and they might buy, some em, pet food and the dogs won't eat it but they might do it to lots and lots, they might do it to lots and lots of supermarkets ((Teacher interrupts))

Teacher: Can you think of another situation where cats and dogs are likely to go extinct any other cause?

Helen: It could be a type of disease to do that goes around

Student: Yeah, like AIDS

Teacher: Any other cause?

Nancy: Um, you wouldn't you, the dogs and cats wouldn't exactly die out because you find wild cats and wild dogs um, in the bush and you can easily break them ((Teacher interrupts))

Teacher: Going back to you Lilian, you said that cats and dogs might be extinct. Can you see it as likely to happen? Can you see any sort of why this is likely to happen, obviously you are the one that might?

(5.0)

Lilian: Because sometimes

Teacher: Louder pet I can't hear you

Student: yeah

Lilian: Sometimes dogs just wander off and they keep on getting the pound's people ( )

Student: Yeah they get put down.

Rachel: Yeah some people just run over dogs and they ( )

Teacher: Can you, what do you think, what would you like to see in the world in the future, what would you like to keep? What things would you like to keep? Can we have just a run around of things that, in the future, that we have now that you'd like to keep, can we?

(Video 1)

At the beginning of this passage, Lilian reintroduces the topic of the animal extinction that has been already raised a few times, probably considering it a safe guess, *cats and dogs may be extinct*. The teacher starts with a sequence of rhetorical questions whose answers are obviously no, *would that be a good thing?, does it have to happen?* And he gets the expected negative answers from the students. Consequently, when the teacher asks the next question, *how is it likely to happen? What would be things that would cause that?* The children should be clued in to giving a negative answer; that is not likely to happen and consequently that there are not things that could cause the extinction of cats and dogs. The teacher might have wanted the students to develop the impossibility of such an event. The clue towards a negative answer contrasts with the fact that generally the teacher takes up and asks them to develop only those answers that he thinks are relevant. Sally's answer clearly and cleverly reveals such an ambiguity. Sally responds positively, *several things because they're such a popular animal*, and then she adds cautiously, *they wouldn't get extinct ever probably, they're such a popular animal*. But the other students start to produce a variety of possible causes for cats-and-dogs-to-be-extinct. Nancy, who wants to give a negative answer, *the dogs and cats wouldn't exactly die out*, feels the need to qualify her answer and to bring justification for her argument talking about the possibility of wild cats and dogs which could be broken in to domesticity, *because you find wild cats and wild dogs um, in the bush and you can easily break them.*

The teacher's intentions of demonstrating the absurdity of Lilian's answer are undoubtedly revealed in the ironical remark, *Can you see any sort of why this is likely to happen, obviously you are the one that might*. But certainly Lilian is not the only one to think that cats and dogs could become extinct. In fact almost all the students intervening have found causes for it. Lilian produces another cause, *they keep on getting the pound's people*, a student comes to her support and, *yeah they get put down.* Rachel produces a new possible cause, *people just run over dogs*. At

this point the teacher gives up and changes subject, c*an you, what do you think, what would you like to see in the world in the future, what would you like to keep?*.

From this classroom discussion the teacher and students have produced many reasons for the possible extinction of cats and dogs. It appears to me that the content of such a discussion does not hold too much sense at a commonsense level. Moreover the teacher himself, as it has been shown in the analysis, constructs the discussion as absurd. The teacher attempts to direct the conversation towards showing the unlikelihood of this eventuality, but without much success. The absurd discourse appears produced by the mechanism of clue-production and interpretation that governs the teacher controlled classroom discussion (cf. Hammersley, 1977, 82). Between the two contradictory clues produced by the teacher- give a negative restrictive answer, versus develop only topics of relevance, the second has prevailed. So that the students, instead of arguing for the irrelevance of Lilian's suggestion as wished by the teacher, have produced many causes for cats and dogs becoming extinct. The teacher's control of the turn taking and topic choice allows him to have an ordered progression of the classroom activity, but, at the same time, it is precisely this same control that kills the possibility of discussion and produces absurd discourse. A similar production of absurdity can be observed in the next passage. Here it is clear, however, that the students are playing the game and purposely forcing the rules, "resisting" as Foucault (1982, 225) would call it.

The question posed by the teacher is - *what would you do now (...) that could make the world better for when you're my age?*. One of the students answer is, *money, make some more money*. They are now developing the subject.

Teacher: now how, what can you do that you can see in the next week to do that

Alan: You could get some money out of the bank and that

Teacher: could you do that?

Alan: ( )

Zara: I know what you can do

Teacher: can anybody suggest how Alan could make more money in the next week, or do something so he could eventually make some more money? Paula?

Paula: no, no

Teacher: just a moment, Alan?

Frank: Um, I could ring up the Prime Minister and ask to give him ( ) country ( )

Teacher: no seriously, are you going to be able to do that in the next week

Students: no not really

Bert: Oh yes, if he goes to the mint.

Teacher: In the next week?

Students: ( )

Teacher: Would you be able to go to the mint and back by the middle of next week?

Student: yeah yes

Teacher: no come on seriously, would you be able to go to the mint?!

Student: yes

Teacher: excuse me would you be able to go next week?!

Bert: yes

Teacher: in other words your mum and dad if you went home tonight and said "I want to go to mint next week" they'll say "OK"

Bert: I don't know

Teacher: I do (hh!) I tell you the answer will be no

Bert: yeah I know

Teacher: I mean seriously, it would be, I'm saying what can you do personally here now, not if you were Bob Hawke or if you were [( ) yeah

Student: [(incredible)

Frank: Mr Brown he couldn't get money from the mint because when I went there the mint has all, freshly made dollars and fifty cents and every sorts

[( )

Teacher: [I think I think we've killed the mint question, because he can't go there.

Student: Kill it

Teacher: Sally?

(Video 1)

The teacher asks Alan to develop his idea, *now how, what can you do that you can see in the next week to do that*. Student's answer, *you could get some money out of the bank and that,* does not satisfy the teacher, his next turn appear as a other- initiated repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks, 1977), soliciting the students , *could you do that?* In particular the lack of student's answer and the teacher's reformulation of the initial question, *can anybody suggest how Alan could make more money*, are evidence that teacher question is meant as a negative evaluation of Alan's intervention. The teacher gives again the turn to Alan, but again he gets no reply. Frank intervines suggesting a way for making money, *I could ring up the Prime Minister and ask to give him,* The teacher's comment, *no seriously, are you going to be able to do that in the next week*, is evidently appealing to students' common sense. Some students in fact align with the teacher, *no not really*. Bert's contribution align with Frank's and proposes a new possibility of getting more money , *oh yes, if he goes to the mint*. The following teacher's question are other-initiated repair that are resisted from the student. There is a crescendo in teacher's questions, he starts with a simple question, *in the next week?,* then he add more details implicitly appealing to commonsense and to the actual possibility of such an eventuality, *would you be able to go to the mint and back by the middle of next week?* At the third question he explicitly appeals to commonsense, *no come on seriously*, and repeat the question, *would you be able to go to the mint?!* Still he does not get the student capitulating. The teacher repeats again the question introduced by an ironical, *excuse me*. The teacher reformulate the question in reference to the student's dependence from his parents, in other words your mum and dad if you went home tonight and said "I want to go to mint next week" they'll say "OK". Only

at this point, after four teacher's question Bert gives up, and only partially, expressing doubt, *I don't know.* The teacher takes his chance to answer his own question, *I do (hh!) I tell you the answer will be no*. Finally Bert align with the teacher, yeah, *I know,* Again, appealing to common sense, the teacher riproposes the initial question, *I mean seriously, it would be, I'm saying what can you do personally here now.* Frank riproposes the topic of the mint, *Mr Brown he couldn't get money from the mint because when I went there the mint has all, freshly made dollars and fifty cents and every sorts,* that get dismissed by the teacher, *I think I think we've killed the mint question, because he can't go there.*

Because the teacher has the right to qualify what is proper information, when he accepts an answer, or asks for it to be developed, nobody dares to question the answer (Young, 1980, 66). In fact for example nobody expressed doubts on the fact that for Alan to make more money would improve the world's welfare. The unspoken rule of the game is: anybody has the right to his/her say. So they can play with it. Alan suggests get some money out of the bank, Frank wants to ring up the Prime Minister and Bert wants to go to the mint. While the first two students give up easily after hearing the teacher's doubts, Bert capitulates only after four repeated questions by the teacher. Is he not having fun? or forcing the rules? The teacher's expressions *no seriously, come on seriously*, are undoubtedly appealing to the student's common sense. When the teacher cuts Frank saying, *we've killed the mint question because he can't go there*, the students remain with the information that you can go to any bank or even better to the mint, get a lot of freshly made money, on the condition that you can obtain your parents' permission to go there.

For the students in the classroom it is not the same as when they are with their peers and they have to make sense, otherwise they would be considered fools and nobody would take them seriously again. But in school the "moral duty" of making sense doesn't apply as there is the teacher who supervises and decides what is acceptable and what is not. Consequently the normal interplay of making sense is not there to stop the production of absurdity. The children have realised it and they play with it. The responsibility of making sense is delegated to the teacher, as

the children do not have the normal conversational rights to exercise it, that is the right to ask and give clarification; consequently they can play around and have fun. The teacher on the other hand cannot criticise every single word that comes out of the students' mouths; how could he possibly have a discussion if he did so?

The imbalance in the allocation of conversational rights in classroom discussion kills the possibility of having a worthwhile discussion. The students are engaged in an interpretation of the teacher's clues in order to find the next "right" answer, there is no space for them to articulate their points of view, sustain them and discuss topics that are relevant to them. The teacher cannot reach his educational aims and involve the students in interesting and stimulating discussion and he cannot understand why, unless he attributes the fault to the students who are not making sense: but, how could the students possibly make sense given such a conversational structure?

The teacher, exercising his unequal conversational rights, defines himself as the person in control in the class and he is able to conduct an orderly classroom activity. On the other end, the childen are trying to "win the guessing game", while resisting the order the teacher is there to impose by "being silly" and producing absurd remarks. Foucault notices that: a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and inventions may open up. (Foucault, 1982, 220) The same creative energy that can be put into a collaborative action can produce resistance. The children, in the classroom discussion, are both collaborating and resisting.

Conclusion

In this article I highlighted contrasts between the structure of communication in the classroom discussion with educational aim of the activity The teacher's control over turn-taking allow him the production of ordered classroom activity, but at the same time it also make doubtful the value of the educational experience implicated in the classroom discussions. The teacher's control of the conversation in the classroom discussion contrasts with his attempt to have an open child-based discussion, both logically and psychologically. In fact teacher's control over turn-taking does not allow students to argue effectively among each other, they cannot ask their mates for clarification nor they can provide arguments for their position, unless asked from the teacher. Above all, such a conversational structure appear to have an effect on sense making. Students don't seem to feel the moral duty to making sense that holds in ordinary conversation. They appear to use the classroom discussion as a background to pursue their own ends: having fun and interacting among each other().

Transcript notation

. or ,	stop or pause in the rhythm of the conversation
?	rising intonation
!	excited tone
...	part of the transcript has been omitted
( )	words spoken, but not audible
(dog)	word or phrase whose hearing is doubtful
(with/we)	word(s) whose hearing is confused
and [then	two speakers [overlap
[what?	[at this point

((laugh))	transcriber's description
(6.0)	pause timed in seconds
hh!	pronouncing word while laughing
tell me=	no gaps between turns at talk
=what?	
[teacher]	word or phrase added to the transcript
-	introduces reported speech

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