

Agency and power in classroom names and naming practices

Abstract: Names are used every day in classrooms across the world as an important marker of personal and social identity but educators will, from time to time, encounter names that are unfamiliar or perceived as difficult to pronounce. The present study explores teachers' and students' language dispositions towards names and how naming practices impact learners and the social space of the classroom. It presents a collection of vignettes collected in an Australian primary school through critical ethnography. The vignettes illustrate the significance of naming for teacher and learner identities. Using analytical insights from Pierre Bourdieu and Jim Cummins, the discussion identifies naming as a pedagogical practice for empowering learners and it challenges the currently held notion of teachers as non-agential in naming practices. The study urges teachers to learn how to properly pronounce their students' real names and it offers recommendations for future research on naming practices and learner identities.

Keywords: names; naming practices; multicultural education; intercultural education; Samoan; Australia

Word count: 6,460 words

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All children have the right to a name (Article 7, Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations General Assembly 1989). Names serve a key function in distinguishing individuals, and one's name is often the first piece of information shared with and learned about others. Names are especially important in education (Bratsis 2017, Kohli and Solórzano 2012). Teachers introduce themselves by name at the beginning of the school year and they may run through a roll of student names to check attendance. Names are also important for mediating social interactions. As teachers and students become more familiar with each other, names are used frequently throughout the school day to call one's attention or as a referent to a specific individual. As an important marker of self-identity and social identity (Brooker and Woodhead 2008, Erçin 2017, Lancy 2017), every teacher and learners' name will be used countless times to fulfil personal and social functions in educational spaces.

This paper focusses on ethnographic research encounters in a multicultural primary school in south-east Queensland, Australia, which I had entered to explore how teachers, students and their parents perceived educational achievement. The principal had allocated me a room where I could base myself for research, and it was here that I met the first group of students. This encounter shifted my focus towards naming practices and the impact of "micro-interactions" not only in stressing the importance of names in education, but also in highlighting the profound effects school naming practices can have on the student experience. The following excerpt from my field notes helps illustrate this point; it is a record of this initial set of meetings with students¹:

Field notes: Mirragin State School, 14/10/14

I am sitting in my room when there is a knock at the door. I open it to a smiling young face.

‘Hello,’ I say.

‘Hello, Miss Field told me to come here.’

‘Oh, okay. What’s your name?’ I ask.

‘Titi.’

‘Titi...?’ I look down at my student list. ‘Um, I don’t have a Titi here...’

‘Oh, it’s Toaitiiti, but everyone calls me Titi.’

‘Oh, here you are.’

‘You can call me by my Samoan name.’

Toaitiiti *is* a Samoan name, I think. She says, ‘It’s Koaikiiki.’

She has just said the colloquial form of Toaitiiti.¹¹ So Titi has become her English name and Koaikiiki is her Samoan name. Nobody calls her by Toaitiiti at school.

We chat for a bit, then she disappears back to class. Five minutes later there is another knock on the door. It’s Toaitiiti again with another student.

‘This is Vicky,’ she says. I check the list and there is a Vicky.

‘Wow, Vicky. You have a really long surname, kinda like mine,’ I say.

‘Yeah,’ she says. ‘It’s hard to say.’ She is silent for a moment, then she says, ‘My real name is Foe, but nobody could say it. They called me Foo or Foh. So my Mum changed it.’

I find it difficult to believe that the sounds that comprise the name Foe (Faw-eh) are more difficult to say than Vicky. Foe is short for Faafoe and she was named after her aunt. Now she is known as Vicky, named after nobody.

Titi and Vicky take me to their classroom to retrieve another student, Steven. We seat ourselves on a bench in the main quad, and he tells me that his real name is Ioane – Steven is just his school name. Why am I not surprised?

The importance of students’ names to them and their families became more apparent as I got to know the students better. Vicky was named after her aunt Faafoe (short-form, Foe) and this family name was shared with her deceased grandmother and a cousin. The aunt after whom she had been named had died just before Vicky and her family left Samoa in 2006. She said her mother had changed Faafoe to Vicky after she had started school because of teasing from other students and because staff and students at Mirragin had constantly mispronounced Foe (shortened version of Faafoe pronounced Faw-eh) as Foh. Steven was named after the disciple John (in Samoan, Ioane) from the bible. Titi was named after her mother, Toaitiiti, but at school her name had been shortened and Anglicised. In short, all three of these students were using names other than those given to them at birth.

What's in a name?

Given the diversity of today's classrooms, most educators will encounter unfamiliar names or names that are difficult to decode or pronounce. While naming is a culturally universal human practice (Keats-Rohan 2007), people's attitudes and behaviours towards names are culturally-bound (Hagström 2012, Thompson 2006). As examples, the names Oprah, Mohamed, Li, Anna and Jorge may invoke certain images depending on one's previous cultural knowledge or experience of these names. Naming conventions are also culturally-bound. For example, in Hungarian and Chinese, family names occur before given names (Crystal 2008), but the convention followed in most Australian and other schools where English is dominant is for given names to precede family names. Recent classroom studies of names have focused on the importance of names to learner identity and belonging (Kim and Lee 2011, Kohli and Solórzano 2012, Van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal 2007), classroom discourse (e.g., Souto-Manning 2011, 2007) and literacy (May, Bingham, and Barrett-Mynes 2010, Zhang, Diamond, and Powell 2017) and how naming practices are represented in children's literature (Keller and Franzak 2016, Peterson et al. 2015). These studies confirm the critical role that teachers play in modelling naming practices and teaching students about the value of names. Nonetheless, further research is needed around teacher attitudes and practices and the impacts of name changes (Van den Bergh et al. 2010, Zhao and Biernat 2018).

This article makes a contribution by exploring the transformative pedagogical potential (Cummins 2000) of naming. It begins by discussing recent studies about naming and naming practices in the classroom, then it describes the design of the current study, including the materials and methods used to collect and understand the critical naming incidents described in the following section. These incidents are then discussed using insights from Bourdieu (1989, 1991, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) and

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Cummins (2000) into the coercive and transformative nature of naming. Concluding with a practice recommendation and some potential directions for future research, the article aims to show how teachers and students have agency, defined as “the power to act” (Cummins 2011, 14), in transforming the social space of the classroom through naming practices.

It should be noted again that data about names and naming practices was not originally the phenomenon under investigation. The broader study was about key stakeholders’ perspectives of the educational (under)achievement of Samoan students. However, it became clear that the perspectives of the students and their communities were impacted by a range of accumulating slights to their linguistic and cultural capital. This article focuses on those experienced through naming practices.

Literature review

Names and naming practices are central to individuals’ identities and self-concept. One’s name is used for ‘identification, communication, expression and identity’ in both the public and private spheres (Kushner 2009, 321). A name often holds personal meaning or cultural significance for that individual or for those who named him or her (Hertzberg 2012). For example, in traditional Samoan, Tongan and Maori cultures, names provide a baby ‘with spiritual protection and strength’ (Abel et al. 2001, 1142). When children use different names in different social contexts, they may develop ‘situated or contextualised selves’ as found in Kim and Lee’s (2011, 220) study with prekindergarten Korean American children. The children in their study copied the naming practices of the adults around them, for example, addressing their peers by Korean or English names following whichever name the adults used, thereby demonstrating the influence that parents and teachers can have on children’s naming practices (Kim and Lee 2011). The children also actively negotiated and constructed

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their own naming practices with peers in the process of developing their identities (Kim and Lee 2011). This lends support to Van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal (2007, 85) who argued that 'naming is recognition'. When learners are misnamed or unnamed in the classroom, recognition is withheld at two levels of subjectivity: universal (the social or cultural) and singular (the individual) (Van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal 2007). These subjectivities exist because names connect one to a social or cultural group through the name's meaning, its linguistic expression, the way it was selected or the way in which it was conferred. At the same time, names promote the subjectivity of the singular identity whereby one is unique within social or cultural groups (Van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal 2007). These tensions between the public and private functions of names, and wanting to belong and wanting to be individual, lie at the core of dilemmas in naming and naming practices.

The multicultural classroom has proven to be a rich environment for exploring these tensions. Souto-Manning (2007) reported a case study of a mother who gave her son Idelbrando the American name Tommy because of the negative experiences her older two sons had had with their Spanish names in their American school, and 'so that he would have a better chance to be successful in school than his brothers' (Souto-Manning 2007, 402). Souto-Manning (2007) called for the scrutinisation of renaming students with Anglicised names, claiming that this 'social and political practice' was symptomatic of wider societal issues related to negative stereotypes of bicultural and/or bilingual learners. More recently, Marrun (2018) and Kohli and Solórzano (2012) have interpreted the mispronunciation, Anglicisation and (re)naming practices as acts of racial microaggression, defined as:

Subtle verbal and non-verbal insults/assaults directed toward people of Color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously;

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Layered insults/assaults, based on one's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or name;

Cumulative insults/assaults that take their toll on People of Color. In isolation, racial microaggressions may not have much meaning or impact; however, as repeated slights, the effect can be profound. (Kohli and Solórzano 2012, 447)

Naming satisfies every level of this definition; names may be used as subtle insults, as a layered insult of one's language, accent or name, and it may be a cumulative insult occurring frequently or over a period of time. Research grounded in critical race theory has also suggested that naming and naming practices have potentially transformative value for schools and school communities (Kohli and Solórzano 2012, Marrun 2018, Souto-Manning 2011) if used appropriately. When teachers are critically conscious of how naming practices impact students, this may influence their attitudes, beliefs and pedagogy to make their classrooms more inclusive and welcoming to all student identities. However, there are few published examples of this transformative effect in action in academic literature.

Affirmative evidence has, however, been found for the pedagogical value of names for literacy learning. There is evidence that a child's earliest forays into reading and writing is through their name (Bloodgood 1999, May, Bingham, and Barrett-Mynes 2010, Zhang, Diamond, and Powell 2017). Because names are used at home and at school, young children are more familiar with the phonology and orthography of the letters in their name, and this promotes emergent literacy skills (Gunn, Brice, and Peterson 2014, Zhang, Diamond, and Powell 2017). In terms of reading, critical literacy studies have suggested that, 'Children's books can provide entryways into critical and transformative practices which challenge . . . colonising discourses' (Souto-Manning 2011, 115). Books and stories that discuss naming and naming issues can empower students and develop cross-cultural understandings (Peterson et al. 2015). Thus the

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literature establishes that names can be a catalyst for literacy as well as cross-cultural teaching.

The teacher is central to the success of these activities, but their role in names and naming practices is often cast as passive or indifferent. Studies focused on student perspectives (e.g., Kiang 2004, Van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal 2007) showed while teachers' actions are significant to students, teachers are often unaware of the effects their naming practices have. Two recent studies even highlighted the negative portrayal of teachers in multicultural literature. Keller and Franzak (2016) examined ten children's picture books depicting children negotiating their identities around names.

They found that:

Although some of the texts we studied include supportive teachers, we found that the prevailing pattern in most of the picture books is an absence of teacher characters who actively acknowledge, sympathize with, or support the child to assert their named identity. We believe it is significant that teachers in this set of books are mostly depicted, not as allies, but as adults who are uninformed, culturally disconnected from their students, and absent or neglectful. In these works of fiction most teachers are depicted as abdicating their responsibility to mitigate the feelings of fear that children experience when faced with the possibility of losing their name and perhaps their identity. (Keller and Franzak 2016, 185)

A similar point was made by Sembiente, Baxley, and Cavallaro (2018) in their study of how immigrant children's names were used to characterise acculturation experiences in picture books. They argued that, '[m]any teachers are reluctant to engage in potentially controversial dialogue or use social issues literature in the classroom, thereby practicing censorship to "protect" children from realities that exist around them on a daily basis' (Sembiente, Baxley, and Cavallaro 2018, 39). Thus, teachers are portrayed as culturally negligent and conformist to dominant values and practices with naming and naming practices. Positive published examples of teacher roles appear to be rare.

This brief overview of the literature shows that names and naming practices are inextricably entwined with an individual's sense of belonging and individuality. It

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further establishes the potential for naming practices to have transformative effects in multicultural educational contexts. Because teachers are perceived and often portrayed as part of the problem, more affirmative examples are needed of teachers enacting the process of critical consciousness and transforming the dynamics of their classrooms with naming practices. Therefore, the current study asks ‘what are the language dispositions of teachers and students with regards to naming, and how are these used in mediating relationships to transform the social space of the classroom?’

Materials and methods

This critical ethnographic study was conducted in south-east Queensland, Australia. The suburb where the study was conducted only had one state primary school, Mirragin State School (pseudonym), and according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), Samoan was the most common language spoken at home in this suburb besides English. Mirragin had opened in the late 1970s, and it had between 900 and 1,000 students. The multicultural student body included 30 ethnicities and 45% of students were reported as having a language background other than English, with 35% requiring English language assistance. According to the school’s 2014 annual report, around 10% of students identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Indigenous), 10% African, and more than 50% identified as Pasifika or Pacific Islander, mostly of Samoan heritage. This latter group were the focus of the current study.

Information-oriented purposeful sampling was used to select the research participants (Flick 2009, Patton 2015); that is, Mirragin’s principal and a teacher chose potential participants with the expectation that specific cases would yield rich and informative data. This method of sampling was considered appropriate to maximise the usefulness of the data that were obtained for this size study. There were around 100 staff at the school, 14 of whom participated in the research, yet this study focuses on

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two teachers whose classrooms I observed the most. Both teachers had taught at Mirragin for over a decade, and they were both recommended as capable and respected teachers by the principal. Twelve students participated in the broader study, but the experiences of five students are focused on here due to their experiences with the phenomenon of naming practices. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants, but for illustrative purposes student pseudonyms share linguistic properties with their real names.

A range of ethnographic tools was used to collect data between September 2014 and October 2015. This included informal ethnographic interviews, semi-structured interviews, and *talanoa*, a Pacific Island style of discussion (see Vaoleti 2016). I also observed classroom lessons, collected artefacts of teaching and learning, kept field notes and a daily research journal.

Data were analysed by theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) drawing upon the ideas of Bourdieu (1990, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and Cummins (2000). Bourdieu's theoretical concepts structured the coding scheme, which led to an emphasis on 'the habitus of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type of social and economic condition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 107). The habitus of research participants was further analysed through Cummins' (2000) Intervention for Collaborative Empowerment framework which focused on the micro-interactions between stakeholders. These micro-interactions form an 'interpersonal space' where teachers and students generate knowledge and negotiate identities that reproduce societal structures by either reinforcing coercive relations of power or by promoting collaborative relations of power (Cummins 2000). Synthesising Bourdieu's and

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Cummins' approaches offered a multi-layered perspective of the data and grounded the analysis in critical theory.

All appropriate ethical approvals were gained and when I entered Mirragin State School for research, the environment was one of busy efficiency. It was three-quarters of the way through the Australian school year, the weather was getting hotter and the staff and students interacted with a familiarity that only comes from spending a sustained amount of time with each other. Entering the school site so far into the school year offered the advantage of observing teachers and students at their most comfortable, without the first-day jitters of the beginning of the year or tensions associated with assessment periods.

Returning to the classroom

The classroom teacher of Toaitiiti, Faafoe and Ioane, introduced at the beginning of this paper, was Ms Summer. Ms Summer was an Anglo-Australian teacher who had been described to me by other staff as 'the only one that will wear cultural dress on multicultural days'. When I asked Ms Summer if she knew that Titi's name was actually Toaitiiti or Koaikiiki, she looked puzzled, asking 'So why have we been calling her Titi?' I explained what Titi had told me, that her name had been shortened and Anglicised for school, and Ms Summer said that was the first she had heard of it. She then asked me to pronounce the name while she repeated it after me several times.

Some weeks after our discussion, during a classroom visit, I observed Ms Summer using Toaitiiti's name as we had practised. The rest of the students in the class were also using Toaitiiti instead of Titi. These are the notes from after that class:

Field notes: Mirragin State School, 28/10/14

Teacher [Ms Summer] reports that after chatting with me, students have decided they want to use their real names. They also wanted her to use their surnames but teacher said, 'We're going slowly.'

Clearly, Toaitiiti and some of her classmates preferred to be addressed by their 'real names'. That students also wanted Ms Summer to 'use their surnames' implied that these too were being mispronounced. Students seemed encouraged enough by Toaitiiti's success in having her Samoan name pronounced correctly to request from the teacher that their names also be pronounced correctly. Ms Summer's response that they would 'go slowly' showed her willingness to accommodate her students' wishes, but at a pace that she found manageable. She told me in a later interview:

Teacher interview: Mirragin State School, 2/12/14

You have to have an interest in who they are and what they do. I tell my kids I love them . . . if they say stuff I say 'You're my kids, I love you', you know, so they know that.

After observing Ms Summer with her students, chatting with her casually and interviewing her formally, the adjustment of her naming practices was interpreted as part of a strong pedagogy of caring that she had cultivated over the many years of working at Mirragin.

What happened in Ms Summer's class was a critical but isolated incident. In most of the other classes I observed, teachers mispronounced students' Samoan names more often than not, and students responded to these mispronunciations, referring to them as their 'school names'. One incident, however, highlighted a counterpoint naming practice. Jerome was trying to get his teacher's attention so his hand was raised and he was calling out 'Miss, Miss'. His teacher, Mrs Winter, replied with a stern look, 'My name is not "Miss". Use my proper name, please, Jerome.' Corrected, Jerome called her 'Mrs Winter' for the rest of the lesson (Classroom observation 27/10/14). Later, Mrs Winter explained to me that over the years, she had learned that students would call her 'Miss, Miss' because they did not know her real name and 'every teacher was Miss'. She always insisted, therefore, that students call her Mrs Winter, her 'proper' name (Interview, 2/12/14). For Mrs Winter, her family name appeared to be significant in

distinguishing her from other teachers, so this individuality was also to be recognised by her students.

One student in Mrs Winter's class appeared to resist naming her at all. Matthew was a quiet student who appeared passive and disinterested in any classroom activity, avoiding eye contact with Mrs Winter and myself and covering up his work anytime either of us approached (Classroom observations 27/10/14, 6/11/14 and 18/11/14). In our final interview, Mrs Winter told me:

Teacher interview: Mirragin State School, 2/12/14

He [Matthew] started crossing my name out at the top of all his worksheets. Whenever we print things, we put our name at the top and any tests and assessment tasks have our names. He crosses my name out, and he's done this about five times now, and he writes Mr McRieve's name . . . And then when I say, 'Oh Matthew, do you want to be in Mr McRieve's class? I see you crossing my name out' then he just gets all embarrassed because he doesn't like me.

Mrs Winter's recollection of Matthew replacing her name illustrates that students and teachers were quite aware of the powers of naming and un-naming. Yet it is her response in declaring Matthew's actions publicly that reinforces who has the power in the naming norms of the classroom.

Discussion

The incidents described above highlight that naming may have transformative potential depending on whether teachers seek to empower their students or to maintain coercive practices (Cummins 2000). Both teachers, Mrs Winter and Ms Summer, wielded power in the classroom that was proportional to the recognition of authority that they received from their students (Bourdieu 1991). This recognition of authority was described by Marrun (2018) who explained why she could not correct a teacher who mispronounced her name:

As a child, my family instilled the importance of respecting my elders; this included my teachers . . . In the aforementioned story, I would not have corrected my teacher even if I had been fluent in English because I was taught not to

question her authority and to respect the values of the school. Respect for teachers in the Latino community prevents many students and their families from questioning teachers for (re)naming their children.

The same could be said from a Samoan perspective where respect for elders and those in authority are a cultural value (Slade and Yoong 2014). Mrs Winter used this recognition of authority to enforce the correct pronunciation of her own name, while Ms Summer used it to enforce the correct pronunciation of her students' names.

That students answered to their Anglicised names in the classroom indicated that Samoan names were not 'school names'. As the teacher could not pronounce their Samoan name, this would have confirmed for students that their names were unusual and difficult to say (and perhaps spell). The name changes captured in my observations (using Titi rather than Toaitiiti, Vicky rather than Faafoe, and Steven rather than Ioane) lends support to the idea that the Anglicisation of students' names may constitute 'linguistic colonisation' (Souto-Manning 2011) because the English language or pronunciation is privileged over others. The students' Anglicised names also confirm the experiences reported in the literature of parents changing their child's name to conform to dominant practices (Souto-Manning 2007). Given the impact that names have on learners' public and private identities, the renaming of learners warrants further attention.

Learners who have a home name and a school name develop 'situated and contextualised selves' as argued in Kim and Lee (2011), but as Ms Summer's classroom showed, these selves need not be completely separate. The students in Ms Summer's class seemed eager to have their full names pronounced correctly, indicating that her Samoan learners preferred that their home names and school names were one and the same. The correct pronunciation of names may contribute to a young student's sense of belonging to the school environment because their name is spoken consistently across domains (home, school, church etc.), thus affirming student identity. Moreover, it may

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affirm a student's language, particularly when teachers make an effort to correctly pronounce sounds in a child's name which are graphophonically different from English, as Ms Summer was willing to do with the vowels in Toaitiiti's name. If 'naming is recognition' (Van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal 2007, 85), then through the adjustments to her naming practice, Ms Summer had recognised both her students' subjectivities: the universal – that her students were Samoan, that their Samoan name was important to their social and cultural identities, that being Samoan with a Samoan name would be normalised in her class, that students had the right to be addressed how they wanted to be addressed; and the singular – that her students' names were specific to their family or circumstances, that the student was a unique and individual learner.

The actions of both teachers reinforce the key role that teachers play in modelling naming practices. As Bourdieu (1991, 239, emphasis in original) wrote:

It is the most *visible* agent, from the point of view of the prevailing categories of perception, who are the best placed to change the vision by changing the categories of perception. But they are also, with a few exceptions, the least inclined to do so.

Bourdieu (1991) therefore intimates that in the educational system, teachers (the most visible agents) have the most power to redefine power relationships within the classroom. As one of the 'few exceptions' (Bourdieu 1991, 239), Ms Summer *was* inclined to change her own pronunciation of Toaitiiti's name, despite the fact that it was three-quarters of the way through the school year. This change affected her whole class as Toaitiiti's classmates, following their teacher, also adjusted their pronunciation of their classmate's name. Toaitiiti's (re)naming had a further effect on the 'categories of perception' of the students. Whereas before, the students had accepted the mispronunciation of their names, when Ms Summer opened up the possibility of (re)naming, students were keen for her to use their real names. This indicates that the matter of student names was important to the students themselves, and given the

opportunity, they wanted to choose and change their own names to control their identities (Hagström 2012, Kohli and Solórzano 2012). Considering that the students were in Year 5, and had been using ‘school names’ for at least four full school years, they could have graduated from Mirragin State School without ever having their names pronounced correctly. Yet, as shown, the transformation of norms at school only takes the actions of one visible agent, such as Ms Summer, who is inclined to ‘change the vision’ of the social world represented by and within the school.

Beyond the transformative potential for the classroom that was demonstrated, the incidents at Mirragin confirm the importance of reflecting on naming practices. Should teachers reciprocate the expectations of naming they have of their students, including accurate spelling and pronunciation? How do teachers feel when their names are crossed out, shortened, spoken with an accent, or completely changed? As Keats-Rohan (2007, 347) wrote:

Further insights will come from considering our own experience of names and naming. Amongst the things we will notice is how our own names change over time, in relation to different people and situations. We will also notice the offence taken when someone gets our name wrong; our identity is being challenged at a primal level. So much so that misusing, misrepresenting or mispronouncing a name are all strategies that are used deliberately to upset, injure, or show contempt for other people.

The literature from critical race theory has illustrated these points well. However, I would argue that reflecting and acting upon naming practices are part of a process of critical consciousness. If disempowering naming practices are framed as ‘micro-aggressions’, then empowering naming practices might be termed ‘micro-interactions’ as per Cummins (2000), or even ‘micro-empowerments’, small but significant interactions that empower learners. These terms offer a way forward that does not portray teachers as lacking agency in how they mediate relationships with their students.

The vignettes presented in this study show that teachers and students have agency with naming practices. Naming does not have to be a disempowering experience

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in educational and other public spheres. In fact, considering the amount of time and effort people put into naming a new child, and the centrality of names to identity and self-concept, the normalisation of disempowering naming practices should be questioned. Ms Summer and her students demonstrate the alternative normalisation of micro-empowerments. With positive teacher effort and intentions, naming practices can affirm students' pride in their personal and cultural identities. School can become a place which extends students' identities, rather than excluding them. Naming practices may be a small but important part of making the social space of the classroom inclusive and empowering.

Implications

Every day, teachers ask their students to learn new concepts and ideas, so this article challenges teachers to learn and perfect a list of specific words and sounds – their students' names. This issue is pertinent not just for multicultural students, but for any student whose name does not conform to English rules of orthography or phonology. Ku'ulani, a participant cited by Kohli and Solórzano (2012) offered two simple questions that teachers could ask: 'Is that how you pronounce it?' and 'How do you pronounce it?' (458). These questions can be posed to learners or their caregivers. Current technology also allows teachers to record unfamiliar student names as spoken by the student or their caregivers. Teachers could then practice after the recording to perfect their pronunciation. The 'quasi-magical power to name and to make-exist by virtue of naming' (Bourdieu 1985, 729) is a power within every teacher's grasp.

In terms of future research, we do not yet know enough about teacher attitudes to student names and the extent to which naming practices impact on learner identities or their educational achievements. Studies along the lines of, for example, Van den Bergh et al. (2010) have quantified a connection between names and educational

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experiences, but ethnographic research can potentially reveal deeper insights into teacher and student interactions. There is also scope for research into students' naming practices with each other, extending the work carried out by Kim and Lee (2011) and exploring to a fuller extent how learner identities are constructed, restructured or destructed by names and naming practices in educational settings.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article challenges the reductive perception of teachers as disinterested or neglectful of their students' names. The original research question was 'What are the language dispositions of teachers and students with regards to naming, and how are these used in mediating relationships to transform the social space of the classroom?' Based on ethnographic observations and recounts, this article demonstrated the agency that teachers and students have in transforming the social space of the classroom through naming practices. Students in this study, with the aid of their teacher, Ms Summer, negotiated their learner identities by choosing how they wished to be named. Ms Summer also found value in changing her naming practices so late in the school year, demonstrating teacher capacity to change their language disposition towards names. Her adjusted naming practice transformed the social space of the classroom as more students wanted their names (and therefore their identities) corrected. Therefore, micro-interactions that empower learners in the classroom may not have to be centred around the curriculum and measures of academic achievement. Transformative pedagogical practice may include the mundane, day-to-day micro-interactions, such as naming, that help students assert their linguistic and cultural identities and make them feel like school is a place where they belong and they can succeed.

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Author Final version

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ⁱ Pseudonyms are used in place of students' real names.

ⁱⁱ In Samoan culture, the colloquial form of one's name is commonly used by family and friends.

Both the colloquial and polite forms can be used interchangeably, depending on the context.