

MOKYKLOS IR KLASĖS ETNOGRAFIJA SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM ETHNOGRAPHY

How Language Defines “Learning”: A Classroom View

Allison Wynhoff Olsen

Montana State University

Email: allison.wynhoffolsen@montana.edu

Abstract. *“Learning” is defined and constructed in classrooms as teachers and students interact through the use of language. As such, “learning” is situated language practices. Theories of socially-constructed uses of language and interactions provide foundation for this work. Through a microethnographic discourse analysis, the findings show a teacher and students constructing shared cultural models of “learning,” holding each other accountable to particular academic and pedagogical practices as well as uses of academic language. The teacher employed linguistic strategies to make visible and engage students in the academic language and “thinking” practices that counted as “learning.”*

Keywords: *discourse analysis, microethnography, classroom discourse, learning as social process, argumentative writing.*

Introduction

In this article, I explore how a microethnographic discourse analytic approach might theorize “learning” in classrooms. My research question asks the following: how do teachers and students co-construct “learning” in and through class conversations and interactions?

There are numerous definitions of learning from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives; despite these diverse perspectives, they share being “etic” definitions. They are definitions from outside the situation(s) and setting being researched. In the focal classroom, learning is taken to be emic, a socially and linguis-

tically constructed practice. That is, the word “learning” is viewed as an open sign system and what it comes to mean within a particular situation is dependent on what and how people in interaction with each other construct that definition.

While it may be the case that participants are explicitly aware that they are constructing a definition of “learning,” observations suggest that more so they are not aware that they are doing so – nor what the definition is, or how they are constructing it. Nonetheless, their social constructions of “learning” have implications for what teachers and students do, what meaning their actions have, and for what/how they hold each other accountable.

I focus this study on a ninth grade, English language arts classroom in the United States, where the teacher and students are focused on “learning” argumentative writing. Many US school districts follow The Common Core State Writing Standards’ emphasis on argumentative writing (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers 2010) and expect argumentation to be taught across grades K-12; as a way to meet the standards and prepare students for subsequent testing, it is typical for teachers to instruct argumentative writing in discreet, a priori units of curriculum deemed appropriate for a grade level (Newell, Bloome & Hirvela 2015). The focal classroom in this study provides a telling case (cf. Mitchell 1984), because this teacher approaches argumentative writing over time (across the school year) and because her teaching moves involve academic practices and academic language that are both new to students and explicitly distinct from the students’ non-academic life.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework builds on Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto & Shuart-Faris’s (2005) discussion of microethnographic discourse analysis, which builds closely on theoretical framings in interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1986; Schiffrin 1996), the ethnography of communication (Gumperz & Hymes 1972; Hymes 1974), linguistic anthropology (Duranti & Goodwin 1992) critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992; 1995; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Joseph 2005), discussions of lan-

guage and literature associated with the Bakhtin Circle (Bakhtin 1935; Volosinov 1929), the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Gee 1996; Street 1984; 1985; Mills 2010; Pahl & Rowsell 2012), and scholarship that has theorized how these foundations might be applied to the study of classroom education – and how the study of classroom education might enrich those foundations (e.g., Cazden, John & Hymes 1972; Green 1983a; 1983b; Green & Wallat 1981; Michaels, Sohmer & O’Connor 2004; Wortham & Rymes 2003; Street 2005). These theoretical foundations emphasize the centrality of culture as a process (cf. Street 1993) and people’s use of language as inherent to those cultural processes (Erickson 2004).

The fundamental unit of analysis within this theoretical framework is people acting and reacting to each other (Bloome et al. 2005). People act and react to each other primarily through language. They may react to a contingent action or to something that happened earlier or that is anticipated to happen later, and as they do so the meanings they construct reflect and refract what has happened before and what will happen later (cf. Volosinov 1929). The actions and reactions people build may involve connections to other events and contexts or to other texts (what Bloome et al. refer to as intercontextuality and intertextuality, respectively). The key to how people act and react to each other is that they must make their intentions and evolving meanings public and shared. As they do so, the meanings become “visible” to researchers observing and recording these interactions. This “visible” material is the data researchers can use to explore the in-

teractional social and linguistic processes that teachers and students use to construct meaning and significance (and how that meaning and significance evolve over time). From this perspective, meaning lies less in people's individual heads and more so in the "visible," constructed material of social interaction.

From this perspective, explorations of "learning" in classrooms require researchers to examine how teachers and students use language in their interactions with each other to assign a meaning to "learning," how that meaning evolves over time, and how they use a particular meaning (construction) of "learning" to accomplish various social, cultural, economic and political agendas (by "political" agenda, I am referring to the structuring of power relations among people, communities, and social institutions). Such explorations require careful and detailed descriptions and analyses of the actions and reactions of people in interaction with each other: a type of thick description (cf. Geertz 1973). Such thick descriptions are warranted by the recording and systematic moment-by-moment analysis of the "visible" data made available in a social, interactional event(s) by teachers and students.

The interpretation of the descriptions is warranted in part by the theoretical perspectives brought to the analyses but more so by the tension created by the dissonance between the data, the descriptions, and the theoretical perspectives brought to the research. In brief, the data made visible in interactional events rarely fits unproblematically in the descriptive or interpretive systems generated by a given theory or set of theories. If such problematics – such dialectics – are taken seriously, research-

ers can ask, "what are the implications of these problematics for revising, replacing, or defenestrating extant theories?" The result is an understanding of the classroom social events that lies closer to an emic perspective as well as a problematizing and perhaps even a reworking of a theoretical framework.

Methods

This research is part of a broader study of argumentative writing across 33 high schools in the Midwest of the United States. The focal classroom is an English language arts (ELA) class embedded within a 9th grade humanities course in an urban high school. Forty-three students (63% female, 37% male; 51% white students, 49% students of color) self-selected their enrollment, for which there were no requirements other than grade level. The ELA teacher, Ms. Cook – a self-identified white female – was in her 13th year of teaching ELA. All her teaching experience was within her school district, and she had a local reputation for excellence among her colleagues and from the students. I selected this class as a focal classroom because the teacher instructed argumentative writing over time (across the school year).

I observed the target ninth-grade class an average of two days per week over a six-month period. Fifteen days of a seventeen-day unit on argumentative writing were video recorded. Sessions three and fourteen were not recorded and not observed. During observations, I sat in a desk at the back of the classroom taking field notes, verbally conversing with both students and the teacher before and after class. A video camera was placed near the back of the

classroom and was moved when students rearranged to work in small groups. When students were in small groups, I sat with or near a small group, depending on the preference of the students being observed. In addition to class session video recordings, my full data corpus includes field notes, audio recorded interviews with the teacher and four case study students, a collection of teacher assignment sheets and power point presentations, and students' written products (note-making sheets, rough drafts, and final copies of essays).

Curricular Sequencing

The first six days of the unit included an introduction to two focal paintings: Ford Maddox Brown's *Work* (1852–1865) and Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry: Man and Machine* (1932–1933), individual observations and class collections of evidence from each painting, published readings: Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* and an excerpt from Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, and an introduction on how to write argumentative essays with a focus on claim statements. Analysis for this manuscript focuses on an excerpt of instructional conversation from day seven of the seventeenth day unit.

Three instructional activities took place during the fifty-five minute class period on day seven. Each activity consisted of multiple interactional units (each of which involved a shift in participant structures). The first activity concerned evidence building: The teacher led the students through a review of a sample argumentative essay and the class discussed *Bartleby the Scrivener*. The second instructional activity concerned the analysis of symbols,

again focused on *Bartleby the Scrivener*. The third instructional activity concerned claim construction.

Analysis

To select my focal analysis – minutes 37:00 to 43:40 – within the third instructional activity, I followed “funneling” procedures (Spradley 1979). An analysis revealed a recurrent pattern (Bloome et al. 2005) in how this teacher and students constructed a definition of “learning” to write an argument as well as a shared accountability for engaging in particular pedagogical, academic, and linguistic practices. Upon selection, I transcribed the six minutes of video by parsing the talk into 185 message units, 20 interactional units, and 3 instructional phases (Green & Wallat 1981).

To illustrate, I provide an example of my analytic procedures (Figure 1). The first three columns provide an example of my analytic transcription procedures: each numbered line is a message unit¹ and is determined by procedures described in Green and Wallat (1981), focusing on how verbal, non-verbal, and prosodic contextualization cues signal the boundaries of the message unit. The five lines together (lines 116–120) constitute an interactional

¹ Transcript Key

- Pauses are indicated by an approximation of the length of the pause in seconds shown in parenthesis (1.0);
- A rise in inflection is noted with †;
- Overlaps are indicated by □ marks showing the location of the beginning of the overlap; Ventriloquisms and quoting others is surrounded by quotation marks;
- A colon within a word indicates the speaker's elongation of sound;
- Descriptions of nonverbal behaviors and general activity are placed in parentheses.

#	SPKR	MESSAGE UNIT	PE	AL	AP	AS	IX	CO	IN	AC
116	T	alright Laura	X							X
117	Laura	I chose <i>Work</i> and like		O	O	O			O	O
118		(laughter across the classroom)					O	O		O
119	Laura	um like you can see how clearly divided the class systems are		O	O	O			O	O
120	T	okay								

Figure 1. Analytic procedures

unit, a bounded interaction of give-and-take with a beginning, middle and end – one in which conversational implicature is addressed.

The remaining columns in Figure 1 reveal patterns found during a continued analysis of the message units. Both within my focal analysis, as well as class talk and interactions within the broader corpus, I noticed patterns of the teacher’s and students’ interactions oriented around the cultural themes of pedagogical processes and practices (PE), academic language (AL), academic processes and practices (AP), academic substance (AS), and intertextual substance (IX). I also noted references to community processes (CO) and individuals (IN) as well as statements that made accountability visible (AC). The definitions of each of these patterns are provided in Table 1.

Findings

In this microethnographic discourse analysis, the findings are a combination of descriptions – of the ways that the teacher and students construct what is happening – and interpretations of those findings grounded in particular social situations. I offer my findings in three sections: the first

concerns the relationship of the individual and the community, the second concerns accountability, and the third concerns linguistic structures. Each section illustrates a prominent dynamic in the social construction of “learning” during the third instructional phase of the lesson.

Direct context for this third instructional phase is the homework students had been directed to complete “#1: My claim. What I am looking for here is the idea through which you will interpret the text [...] both print and nonprint.” Throughout the findings, transcript excerpts illustrate students’ responses to this task and the teacher’s reactions to them.

Individual and Community

The teacher and students make references to both individuals and to the community throughout the third phase. Sometimes, these references are made through pronoun use and sometimes through the use of names and nominalizations. What I describe and interpret to be happening is that the teacher and students are constructing a complex relationship between both the teacher and the students being individuals and being members of the community

Table 1. *Definitions developed and used in analysis*

Aspect of Interest	Definitions
Pedagogical Processes and Practices	Those social processes and practices (usually constituted with language) associated with organizing a lesson, classroom management, and “doing school.”
Academic Language	Using the language of a particular academic discipline or domain (including lexical items, grammatical structures etc.).
Academic Processes and Practices	Those social processes and practices associated with a particular discipline or academic domain (e.g., displaying an analytic practice associated with literary criticism, sociology etc.).
Academic/Argumentative Substance	Academic content employed in an argument or instructional conversation.
Intertextual Substance	References to those other texts that are viewed as appropriately related to the topic being discussed and to the particular situation.
Community	Direct or indirect reference to classroom community, home community, or any collective; or, the process of building such community(-ies).
Individual	Direct or indirect reference to a particular person that defines that person primarily as an individual rather than as a member of a community or collective; or, direct or indirect references to a cultural or social ideology of individualism.
Accountability	Direct and indirect public statements that reference the socially constructed processes, practices, and cultural models to which teacher and students are expected to adhere; and the sanctions imposed by the teacher and students when they are violated.

(both their classroom community and an academic community, such as people engaged in argumentative writing).

Pronoun analysis indicated variance in first person usage. In the first fifteen lines of transcript, the teacher says “I” four times. All of these uses are embedded in a directive to focus the students to their task as well as to command attention. In the remainder of the transcript, the teacher continues using “I” (albeit with different uses) and expands her first person usage from singular to plural. To offer a specific count, the teacher uses the first person (“I,” “me,” “we,” “us”) eleven more times, seven of which are embedded in pedagogical moves and two that are embedded in

ventriloquating, revoicing, and displaying models of language use for particular argumentative practices. The teacher’s first person pronoun shift from “I” to “us” indicates a change in her positioning. It also marks when she is voicing her authority as the individual teacher and when she is participating as a member of a community, articulating interpretations and claims about the paintings.

Analysis of the pronoun “you” revealed multiple uses to position the teacher and her students. One use is the singular reference: a reference to the individual homework and thinking each student is required to do. Another is using “you” to refer to a plural antecedent: the entire class. As the

teacher shifts across the uses, the two layer upon one another. The following lines offer an example:

- 09 Teacher what I want you to do
10 is you are going to take this information and we're gonna construct
11what is called an ABCD claim

The teacher's "I want" clause takes up an authoritarian position, yet the verb "want" softens it, suggesting a relational aspect between the teacher and her students. The first use of "you" is plural. The teacher is speaking to the whole class, marking them all with a shared task, yet she distinguishes their expectation with the next "you" (line 10) – each individual student is expected to think about the information built in previous class sessions and his/her idea about it. Then, the collective "we" will *construct* an ABCD claim. The transition from individual student work to a joint construction signals that "learning" in this classroom is a combined effort. While individuals are each expected to have work done, they do not learn alone. Rather, their claim statements and subsequent essays will be individual products filled with tracings of shared conversations and shared texts (Wynhoff Olsen, VanDerHeide, Goff & Dunn 2018). The teacher does serve as an authority figure, but she makes efforts to expand the academic community to include her students as fellow writers and thinkers.

Accountability

Throughout the third instructional phase, the teacher and students attend to three as-

pects of accountability²: accountability to task, accountability to text, and accountability to classroom community. While coding, I marked the accountabilities with the same "AC," often making note as to the dominant aspect of accountability; other times, accountability is present yet is secondary to other codes. Regardless of dominance, there is a rich overlap between the various aspects of accountability as the teacher and students construct knowledge together.

Multiple occurrences in the conversation evidence accountability to task. The teacher indicates her expectation, "everybody get your paper out so that you're following along," and there is uptake: students rifle in their folders or bags and Kane, who does not have a handout to retrieve, requests one. Each student who raises a hand to participate and engages in conversation surrounding claim formation is accountable, yet this does not suggest that those who do not verbally participate are not. Field notes and video files reveal students looking at the teacher or student speaker, students periodically jotting down notes, and students sitting at their desks without holding sidebar conversations. Also, intermittent laughter across the session and classroom suggests that students are listening to the verbal conversations and are responding to them.

Accountability to task is also indicated as the teacher evaluates claims (e.g., "so that's really good, that's really good") and

² Michaels, O'Connor & Resnick (2008) describe such uses of language as "accountable talk." Although my perspective and approach to accountability differs from theirs, I acknowledge the influence of their scholarship here.

labels students' claims as arguments (e.g., "that's an argument"). With these verbal moves, the teacher marks the "learning" that has occurred and the task that students have correctly completed.

Given the homework task, accountability to text is an embedded, required component. Through talk, students build claim statements about their paintings, informed by their previous conversations and readings of published literature. Their accountability to text is also present on students' homework sheets and their final essays—often in the same form as the claim statements they were verbalizing on day seven (For a more developed exploration of "intertextual traces," see Wynhoff Olsen, VanDerHeide, Goff & Dunn 2018).

Accountability to classroom community is the most typical. First, the teacher makes her expectations public as she opens the floor for students to verbalize their claim statements – "okay so let me call on you um just a couple of people want to volunteer." Her shift from "let me call on you" to "want to volunteer" suggests that she does not need to direct student participation; rather, she is part of a classroom community in which students will participate. Secondly, accountability to classroom community is also illustrated in the teacher's conversations with Laura:

Transcript of Laura's Claim Response

- 116 Teacher alright Laura . . .
117 Laura I chose *Work* and like
118 (laughter across the class
room)
119 Laura um like you can see how
clearly divided the class
systems are
120 Teacher okay

The teacher's tone and use of "alright" in line 116 signals that a new interactional unit is beginning. In the teacher's initiation, she does not need to specify the task to which Laura should respond because it has been made public in previous interactions. In part, the ellipsis reveals a shared public assumption: students know how to participate both procedurally and substantively.

In line 116, the teacher is managing the classroom turn-taking system (and holding Laura and the class accountable for appropriate participation in it). In line 117, Laura begins to explain her claim, using appropriate academic language and the academic practices the students have previously made public. But she is doing so as an individual (her use of the first person singular is part of the evidence that this is an individual rather than classroom community dynamic) responding to the academic practice.

The laughter in line 118 is a side conversation. In the immediate past interactional unit, the teacher told John that he "better work"; so Laura's use of *Work* in line 117 is received as indexing that interaction and is also sanctioning John. In part, the laughter shows that students (a) are paying attention to what is happening even if they are mostly silent, (b) know the shared expectations for classroom participation, (c) hold all class members accountable for following those shared expectations, and (d) will sanction each other when expectations are violated. In line 119, Laura completes her claim using language from previous lessons (e.g., class systems) and is addressing what she is individually accountable for (namely, having a claim and

articulating it in a manner consistent with the academic practices, language, and pedagogical practices established).

An example across the three aspects of accountabilities is made visible with John, the only non-volunteer the teacher calls on in this instructional phase.

Transcript of John's Claim Response

87 Teacher John
 88 what's yours?
 89 John (.4) um I think that (.1)
 90 it's like
 91 (.3) um:m, I'm thinking
 92 Teacher I'm glad ↑
 93 (laughter across the class
 room, including John)
 94 Student (.4) tell us what you're
 peer thinking ∇
 95 Teacher Okay, I'll come back ∇
 96 John because it's like
 97 Teacher okay
 98 go ahead
 99 John because like um robots and
 stuff
 100 (laughter across the class
 room)
 101 Peers what?
 102 Peers ro:bots?
 103 Teacher okay robots and stuff
 104 John dehumanizing
 105 Teacher robots are dehumanizing?
 106 John yea (laughs)
 107 (laughter across the class-
 room)
 108 Peers what?
 109 Teacher why ↑ don't you work on
 that?
 110 John you can tell I wasn't paying
 any attention
 111 Teacher why do you think I called on
 you?
 112 John (laughs)
 113 Teacher (laughs)
 114 Teacher I'll come back to you though
 okay?

115

so I've got three people
 ahead of you so you'd
 better work

As lines 89–96 reveal, John's efforts to actively engage in the conversation reveal hesitant, slow responses, suggesting that though ill-prepared, John knows a response is required. Not only does the teacher call John to task (lines 87–88), but a peer also makes a request, “tell us what you're thinking” (line 94). In lines 110–111, John and the teacher state the violations that make the accountability clear. John's remark (line 110) is explicit and indexes his knowledge of classroom expectations for accountability. John also attempts accountability through intertextual links: “[...] robots and stuff” (line 99) and “dehumanizing” (line 104). While it is possible that John may be indexing Maisie's topic of dehumanizing stated earlier in the conversation or making use of the sample topic of dehumanizing on the homework packet, he may also be indexing his observations (“robots”) of the painting that he shared on day two. His peers' laughter and questions (lines 100–102) indicate a violation when John explains his claim as “robots and stuff” – suggesting that a claim equivalent to his original observation (day 2) does not showcase learning (on day 7). The teacher tries to repair John's bid in line 109, “why ↑ don't you work on that?” and John responds with his admission of inattention. The teacher does not discipline him, nor does she score him a zero for incomplete homework; rather, she verbalizes his need to work (109) and states when she will return for his prepared response (lines 114–115). It is not an option for John to opt out of this “learning” opportunity; he must be accountable to his task, the text being analyzed, and his classroom community.

Near the end of the class session, John accepts this requirement and tries to insert himself into the conversation before the teacher is ready to hear him (line 185). John raises his hand until called upon, and when given the floor, takes up the linguistic structures of the academic community, uses intertextual links to previous shared texts, and receives validation from the teacher. John's repair and opportunity to create a fitting response suggest that various levels of accountability position students to be active participants, engaged in the instructional activities surrounding them. "Learning" is present.

Linguistic Structures

A third theme of how the teacher and students constructed "learning" is indicated via publicly displayed linguistic structures. The teacher and the students hold one another accountable for cultural and linguistic practices for argumentation; in so doing, there is a way to be a part of the argumentative writing discourse. It is not enough for students to have an idea and academic substance; rather, they must formulate their thoughts into linguistic structures appropriate to argumentation and argumentative writing. Two recurring structures are ventriloquating and revoicing. By ventriloquating, I refer to conversational moves in which the teacher takes on and displays someone else's voice. Revoicing occurs when the teacher takes a student response and restates it using a linguistic structure associated with the academic language practices appropriate to how they are doing argumentative writing (see O'Connor & Michaels 1993 for a discussion on revoicing).

During the focal observation, the teacher employs ventriloquating as a way of modeling the construction of claim statements; notably, she ventriloquates voices of students in the class. For example, when Laura is working to develop her claim statement, the teacher stops her and asks: "so what what would be your claim about that?" Before allowing Laura to answer, the teacher ventriloquates: "you know Steve's like 'oh well that's the way it was and they're not unhappy with it' / 'or at least they're they're they're earning a living through that class system.'" By offering Steve's ideas, the teacher models how to conceptualize the academic context of the argument; though she affirmed it minutes prior when in dialogue with Steve, her ventriloquation reifies that Steve's structure is a fit for expectations and could be helpful to Laura.

The teacher also uses revoicing as a way to alter students' linguistic structures, as illustrated in her conversation with Maisie:

Transcript of Maisie's Claim Response

- | | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 65 | Maisie | De <i>Detroit Industry</i> and how it's being dehumanizing people |
| 66 | Teacher | okay |
| 67 | | the De um the <i>Detroit Industry</i> |
| 68 | | <i>Man and Machine</i> |
| 69 | | is an example of how |
| 70 | | say that again |
| 71 | Maisie | dehumanizes |
| 72 | Teacher | okay how what dehumanizes |
| 73 | Maisie | the people |
| 74 | Teacher | people ah |
| 75 | Maisie | workers |
| 76 | Teacher | work or the what? |
| 77 | Maisie | machines |
| 78 | Teacher | like the industrialization of work |

79 um dehumanizes people is
 that what you're thinking?
 80 Maisie yea

Though Maisie begins her claim with the required structure [naming the title of the painting], the subsequent conversation with the teacher reveals a conversational breakdown. The teacher asks Maisie for the agent, “what dehumanizes” (line 72), and Maisie offers the object, “the people” (line 73). Maisie then shifts to “workers” (line 75), and then to “machines” (line 77). Though Maisie moves closer to an agent, she does not successfully structure her claim; instead, the teacher (lines 78–79) revoices her ideas into a more appropriate linguistic structure (Wynhoff Olsen et al. 2018), giving Maisie an agent, a verb, and an object. Maisie’s response to this interactional work is “yea” (line 80); it is unclear whether “yea” is taken as evidence of “learning” or is merely employed to end the interactional unit and move the lesson forward.

Later in the lesson, Marie offers a claim statement in the appropriate linguistic structure: “I’m going to look at Ford Maddox’s painting *Work* as a celebration of the worker; however, a critique of the treatment of the lower class” (line 179). Part of what is important to the microethnographic discourse analysis here is examining Maisie’s and Marie’s turns at talk as contexts for each other; that is, employing a post hoc analysis provides additional layers of description and interpretation to exploring “what is happening here?” Looking across Marie’s claim statement (line 179) and the teacher’s earlier lexical phrases “celebration of the worker” (line 130) and “critique of the class system” (line 131), we see how Marie has revoiced and reformulated earlier

statements to achieve her claim. Instead of suggesting that Marie was basing her claim on the teacher’s ideas rather than her own, the teacher accepts Marie’s move with her repeated use of “okay” and a final evaluation, “that’s really good, that’s really good.”

Another linguistic technique the teacher uses is a dramatization of imagined argumentative conversations:

143 Teacher because I can say “nuh-uh
 they are too fair” (.1)
 144 Student Ms. C
 145 Teacher “we must have our workers
 somebody’s got to work at
 McDonald’s”
 146 haven’t you ever heard
 people say that before?

In these lines, the teacher is not providing specific linguistic structures to be used but is providing a “thinking” practice at two different levels. First, she is making central to the students’ construction of the “learning” of argumentative writing the concept of contested claims without using technical terms. Second, she is illustrating how students can use their own experiences to anticipate contested claims. It is also significant to note that the teacher’s tone and facial expressions during this dramatization are distinct and catch the students’ attention.

Discussion

Throughout the focal instructional phase, this teacher orients the students into a particular community, engaging in a particular set of thinking practices (argumentation) oriented to a particular genre (argument) indicated by a particular product (argumentative writing). The microethnographic discourse analysis approach views “learning”

as a cultural construct, a sign; given the broad debate about what “learning” is, it can be viewed as an open sign system. In this paper, I presented instructional conversations focused on argumentative writing and made visible cultural themes and linguistic strategies that the teacher and students were using to build an evolving definition of “learning.” I argue that how “learning” is defined (what counts as “learning”) in a classroom is socially constructed by teachers and students through their conversations and interactions.

In part because of space constraints, there are limitations to this analysis. I recognize the limitations of examining one interactional unit within an instructional conversation and making a claim about what is happening there. But even a few lines, such as those in Figure 1, offer a glimpse that both the teacher and the students are holding each other and themselves accountable to various cultural models, and that there are complex issues of individualism and community woven throughout the conversation. Any analysis is a partial analysis, and I do not claim to have the complete “truth”; nonetheless, I assert that partial views can be powerful in providing insights about what is happening and in theorizing how “learning” and other cultural models are constructed.

Nonetheless, there are insights here for understanding what happens in classrooms that are worthy at both a practice level and a theoretical level. At the level of practice, the descriptions and interpretations are not prescriptions for others nor do they constitute “best practices.” Rather they need to be read, discussed, and reflected on by teachers who need to recontextualize the insights within the contexts of their own

classrooms, schools, and communities. At the level of theory, the descriptions and interpretations add a layer of discussion about how “learning” in classrooms might be theorized, where that theorizing is located, who is involved, and what such theorizing might look like.

In this focal classroom, the teacher’s positioning of the students as individuals and as members of various communities is part of the process of accountability, is part of the process of validating knowledge, is part of the process of establishing social identities through shared, community-based linguistic practices. Accountability, while located in part in the teacher’s institutional authority, derives in part from the establishment of the classroom community as well as the establishment of an academic community (the academic community associated with argumentation in the humanities, in this case). Thus, authority is as much about becoming and being members of these communities as it is about institutional power. And it is through the use of particular sets of linguistic practices that students display their membership in these communities.

This teacher orchestrated interactional constructions of “learning” through a series of linguistic strategies, including directives in setting academic tasks, modeling expectations, uses of pronouns, revoicings, ventriloquations, and dramatizations. These strategies were not used in isolation of student engagement; rather, they were used as part of a collective engagement for bringing students into classroom and academic communities. Even within the few minutes of the targeted segment, the teacher and students display, make visible, and acknowledge the students’ movement

towards membership in those communities. For example, Marie's statement in Line 179 ("um I'm going to look at Ford Maddox's painting *Work* as a celebration of the worker, however, a critique of the treatment of the lower class") is rendered

in a tone that suggests confidence. Marie does not a question or search for approval, but rather publicly affirms her writing focus and that her claim is appropriate in this classroom: in other words, her statement displays what Marie has learned.

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KAIP KALBA APIBRĖŽIA MOKYMĄSI: VAIZDAS KLASĖJE

Allison Wynhoff Olsen

S a n t r a u k a

Mokymasis apibrėžiamas ir konstruojamas klasėse, mokytojų ir mokinių sąveikos vartojant kalbą metu. Todėl mokymasis yra situacinės kalbos praktikos. Šio darbo pagrindas – socialiai konstruojamos kalbos vartosenos ir sąveikos teorijos. Mūsų mikro-etnografinio diskurso analizės radiniai atskleidė, kad mokytoja ir mokiniai konstruoja bendrus kultūrinius mokymosi modelius ir tikisi abipusės atsakomybės

dėl akademinės ir pedagoginės praktikos bei mokslinės kalbos vartosenos. Mokytojos taikomos kalbinės strategijos išryškina ir įtraukia mokinius į akademinės kalbos ir mąstymo praktikas, kurios prilygsta mokymuisi.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: diskurso analizė, mikro-etnografija, klasės diskursas, mokymasis kaip socialinis procesas, argumentacinis rašymas.

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