

Unpackaging Academic Discourse

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Studies of the social contexts of literacy learning in school contexts suggest that literacy development cannot be understood apart from the context in which it occurs. By studying the classroom contexts for literacy learning, the various ways in which students are socialized to use language and to "doing being student" are made evident. Some learning environments provide differential access to literacy activities in which using and participating in meaningful discourse is both the process and the product. This article argues that students must have opportunities to develop academic discourse, that is, both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge about what it means to be a member of a particular classroom community, in order to achieve academic competence. Students who participate in academic activities that provide few opportunities to co-construct elaborated and meaningful oral and written texts and, instead, participate in activities whose knowledge exchange system is defined and directed by teachers who are socialized to different definitions of what counts as literacy and what counts as membership in effective communities of practice.

The study of linguistic phenomena in school settings should seek to answer educational questions. We are interested in linguistic forms only insofar as through them we can gain insight into the social events of the classroom and thereby into the understandings which students achieve. Our interest is in the social contexts of cognition: speech unites the cognitive and the social. The actual [as opposed to the intended] curriculum consists in the meanings enacted or realized by a particular teacher and class. In order to learn, students must use what they already know so as to give meaning to what the teacher presents to them. Speech makes available to reflection the process by which they relate new knowledge to old. But this possibility depends on the social relationships, the communication system, which the teacher sets up. (Barnes, 1974, p. 1)

In the best case, language learning in schools might best be described as the acquisition of discourse competence.¹ In most cases, however, students acquire procedural knowledge about how to use the language of and language in the

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¹Discourse here is defined as a "socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network,' or to signal [that one is playing] a socially meaningful 'role'" (Gee, 1990, p. 143).

classroom. In the former, language development includes opportunities for socialization to academic discourse and, thus, membership into a particular community; in the latter, language development is primarily the acquisition of some forms of linguistic knowledge and behaviors needed to display right answers. What are the differences in these divergent views of language learning, and what are the implications for classroom learning?

The cross-disciplinary literature on literacy constructs a view of literacy learning that differs from that actually practiced in schools. It is my purpose here to locate the discussion of literacy learning in schools in sociocultural theories of learning. In doing so, a broader definition of literacy learning will be presented—a view that links discourse competence to academic competence. I will also discuss how narrower views of literacy have led to educational practices that have deleterious effects on students and, in particular, put at risk linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Careful examination of the contexts in which students learn, that is, what students learn, how that knowledge is transmitted, who is present in the learning activity, and which goals and motives drive the learning event and the larger curriculum suggests that the acquisition of academic discourse is a socially mediated process. Characterizing language as inherently dialogic and interactive moves us beyond acontextual models of the acquisition of discourse and beyond deficit-model explanations for variability of discourse across communities and across contexts. Studying language in the classroom is studying a particular discourse community in a particular social context, that is, studying the ways in which people use and understand language and interact and participate in communicative events constructed in the classroom. It is a study of how linguistic, social, and cultural practices help shape classroom instruction.

This kind of analysis requires us to challenge deficit-model explanations of student underachievement and, in particular, differences in language development. Often deficit-model assumptions about linguistic and culturally diverse students have led to educational practices designed to “remediate.” Quick-fix intervention programs that focus on helping linguistically and culturally diverse students make up deficiencies have become the predominant educational intervention (Cole & Bruner, 1971; Hilliard & Vaughn-Scott, 1982; Howard & Scott, 1981; Ogbu, 1982). Understanding how knowledge is socially constructed, as well as the relationship between context and development, helps us challenge current educational practices that define nonminority students’ ways of knowing and learning as models for school learning and achievement.

Current research not only calls into question the general cognitive and social benefits of many intervention programs (e.g., remedial reading and writing programs), but it also suggests that we might examine the cognitive and social consequences of these instructional contexts themselves (Cazden, 1988; Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1972; Eder, 1982; Mehan, 1979; Wilkinson, 1982). To understand how context influences learning, a sociocultural interpretation of language learning is necessary (Ochs, 1988).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

To better understand the social nature of language acquisition, a wider theoretical net must be used to capture both the cognitive dimensions of the acquisition of literacy and those aspects of language that are acquired through socially mediated experiences. Research in language socialization has identified this relationship between language and culture and has described the ways in which social and linguistic knowledge are acquired through participation in a community's communicative practices. These activities, the constructions of both linguistic and sociocultural processes, provide the contexts for development; it is in these constructed events that children acquire both linguistic and sociocultural competence. Central to performance competence, then, is the participation of novices in mediated activities and their interaction with competent others in their social group (Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). In this way, children's knowledge and use of language are both socially and culturally organized (Ochs, 1988; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1983, 1986a, 1986b).

Language acquisition is more than learning to speak; it is a process in which a child becomes a competent member of society by learning how to use language in a particular community. Language acquisition, then, is language socialization and involves the acquisition of discourse—a concept underlying all use of language, both oral and written (Macdonnell, 1986). It requires appropriating both linguistic and social knowledge.² Social knowledge, however, is not acquired independent of linguistic knowledge. Members of communities are both socialized through language and socialized to use language (Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1983, 1986a). Ochs (1988) describes this relationship:

Given that meanings and functions are to a large extent socioculturally organized, linguistic knowledge is embedded in sociocultural knowledge. On the other hand, understandings of the social organization of everyday life, cultural ideologies, moral values, beliefs and structures of knowledge and interpretation are to a large extent acquired through the medium of language. (p. 14)

Moreover, discourse is the domain in which sociocultural knowledge and linguistic knowledge interface and organize each other. For example, knowing the appropriate context for using linguistic knowledge (i.e., relating language forms and structures to context) also requires using sociocultural knowledge. Becoming a member of a discourse community and developing discourse competence requires having linguistic knowledge, as well as knowing how to act, talk,

²Mehan (1979) defines social knowledge as "the fundamental, requisite background information that people must know and have in order to function socially. . . . This socially accumulated stock of knowledge acts as a frame of reference to inform action to be taken at the present time" (p. 133).

interpret, and think according to a particular cultural or social group.³ This relationship between language socialization and the social construction of knowledge can be observed in the ways people use language to negotiate and socialize others into their understandings of culture (Ochs, 1988).

Sociocultural theories furthermore suggest that the ways in which individuals interact and use discourse represent the individual's instantiation and reinterpretation of culture. Such theories account for the inextricable link between the individual and the larger society (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, sociocultural knowledge can be linked to linguistic knowledge. If we consider that the discourse of a particular community includes both the linguistic and sociocultural history of that particular community, as well the histories of those individuals who comprise that community, then the words we speak are a microcosm of our social and linguistic experiences. Furthermore, our verbal thought, the inner speech that takes place in our heads, is never really private; instead, it contains a chorus of voices, the voices of significant others in our history (Trimbur, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978).

Literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) proposes the notion of "heteroglossia" to describe the "rich mixture of genres, professions, personae, values, purposes, lifestyles and ages which resonate against each other in language situations." Each utterance, argues Bakhtin, "tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life" (p. 293). This polyphony of voices, as he describes it, is filled with the intentions and experiences of others (Bakhtin, 1984). Thus, a sociohistorical view of language implies that language for the speaker has already become discourse (Trimbur, 1987). As Bakhtin (1984) further suggests:

When a member of a speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not as a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others' voices. No, he receives the word from another's voice and filled with that other voice. The word enters his context from another context, permeated with the interpretations of others. His own thought finds the word already inhabited. (p. 202)

In this way, the instructional conversations of the classroom influence the classroom culture and the discourse that students appropriate.

While discourse can be considered an instantiation of culture, the knowledge that individuals appropriate is not simply a duplication of the knowledge of the larger community (Duranti, 1988; Hymes, 1972a; Ochs, 1988; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Instead, individuals continually renegotiate and reinterpret their understandings as they interact and participate in conversations in a variety

³Discourse is social and, therefore, varies across contexts and groups (Macdonnell, 1986; Voloshinov, 1973).

of cultural contexts. In this way, both the individual and the community renegotiate the tensions of conflicting interpretations and understandings within the various contexts and discourse communities in which they interact (Bakhtin, 1986; Clark & Holquist, 1984; Holquist, 1983; Schuster, 1985; Voloshinov, 1973). Language, then, is a rich fabric of utterances textured by the social, historical, and cultural influences of the contexts in which it exists and develops (Bakhtin, 1981). As we become literate in the discourse of our own particular community, we are engaged in a process in which we negotiate the influences of the voices of significant others and negotiate the conflicting claims that these different voices have on our own discourse (Trimbur, 1987).

From this perspective, development is, in part, the result of the appropriation of skills and ideas generated through social interactions in socially and culturally organized activities; development occurs within social interactions in particular contexts or activities that mediate the acquisition of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1985a, 1985b; Wertsch & Stone, 1985).⁴ Therefore, the contexts in which learning and interactions are embedded are important to the process of language acquisition. It is this variation across contexts that accounts, in part, for the variation of human and language development across the different activities societies construct.

CLASSROOM DISCOURSE AND CLASSROOM COMPETENCE

There is research that helps us understand variance in literacy development and also moves us away from deficit-model explanations for human differences within and across cultures. Such research has underscored the point that human development cannot be understood without examining the contexts in which development takes place (Cole, 1975; Cole, Hood, & McDermott, 1978; Heath, 1989; Rogoff, 1981; Rogoff & Morelli, 1989; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b; Scribner, 1977; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Developmental researchers have noted the variability in an individual's skills and abilities across contexts (Saxe, 1988). Cross-cultural literacy studies have also identified the importance of observing the acquisition of particular literacy skills in the contexts or activity settings in which literacy is practiced (Scribner & Cole, 1981).

Building on the work of cross-cultural and developmental researchers, educational researchers also have begun to examine the contexts in which linguistic and culturally diverse students develop skills and acquire knowledge. Specifically, these researchers study the ways in which classroom learning activities are socially constructed events, contexts for learning created by the interaction of

⁴The activity setting concept is an integration of Soviet activity theory (Leont'ev, 1981), the behavior setting concept (Whiting & Whiting, 1975), the more recent theories of neo-Vygotskians (Cole, 1985; Rogoff, 1982, 1990; Wertsch, Minick, & Arms, 1984), and the operationalization of the concept in recent research studies (Gutierrez, 1993a; Weisner & Gallimore, 1985).

school, teacher, and student variables. By examining the larger contexts of student learning (e.g., curriculum and academic tracks), more comprehensive analyses of schools that serve diverse students also have noted that student underachievement is often perpetuated by students' differential access to high status knowledge and a "smart" curriculum (Oakes, 1985).

Other studies have examined the relationship among the language of the classroom, the participation structures that exist in the classroom, and student competence (Cazden, 1988; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981; Eder, 1982; Heath, 1982a, 1982b, 1983; Mehan, 1979; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Schieffelin & Gilmore, 1986; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Scribner & Cole, 1973, 1981). Yet other studies (Gutierrez, 1991, 1992, 1993a; Gutierrez & Larson, 1994) have examined the relationship between the development of academic literacy and the contexts in which literacy activity occurs. Specifically, these studies explore the degree of reciprocity between student and teacher and among students, the social roles they assumed, the classroom literacy activities, and the relationship of a constellation of sociocontextual features to the nature of teaching and learning of literacy. By studying activity, the focus was shifted from the individual to a focus on the following aspects of activity: (1) personnel present throughout the learning activity (who?); (2) the nature of the literacy task (what?); (3) the teachers' articulated and instantiated ideology of literacy learning (goals and values?); (4) the scripts that determine participation structures and interactions, for example, the discourse and social or physical arrangement of the classroom (how?); and (5) the nature of the literacy pedagogy used (purposes or motives?). These studies have not only contributed to our understanding of ways to scaffold literacy development for diverse student populations, but they also have provided a useful model with which to examine learning in cultural and educational contexts. Without such contextual analyses, it is difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of how context, social interaction, and literacy learning are interrelated (Gutierrez & Garcia, 1989).

Other studies that focus on the microfeatures of classroom learning examine how classroom discourse patterns influence classroom learning. If discourse is considered an instantiation of culture, then classroom discourse also can be considered constitutive of classroom culture—an instantiation of the culture of the classroom (Cazden, 1978; Mehan, 1979). Mehan (1979) has suggested that we consider classroom activity (lessons) as examples of contextually based discourse in which the link between the individual student and the culture of the classroom is revealed. This particular discourse, Mehan (1979) proposed, differs from ordinary speech:

While people produce sentences or utterances, people participate in discourse. While the presence of a sentence as a thing-in-the-world requires only one speaker, the presence of a lesson or other forms of discourse requires participants. Discourse is social activity, larger, more encompassing than any of the parties involved.
(p. 182)

In this sense, classrooms are more than speech communities representing one particular language; classrooms, like other discourse communities, not only depend on common linguistic means in the narrower sense and on common ways of using and interpreting speech, but they also depend on using linguistic and social knowledge to participate in the classroom community's activities (Hymes, 1972a, 1972b).

Classrooms, however, vary greatly not only in the kinds of social, linguistic, and content knowledge they emphasize but also in the ways knowledge is exchanged. Recent studies of the social context of literacy development in school contexts for elementary school-aged Latino children suggest that the nature of the discourse and the social and physical arrangement of literacy activities both teach and socialize children about the forms and uses of language and about the behaviors associated with successful participation in literacy learning activities (Gutierrez & Meyer, in press).

Thus, in school contexts, variance in competence might be understood to be the result of students' access to and participation in varying activities, classroom participation structures, and forms of classroom discourse. This variance in competence among members of classrooms results, in part, from the varying rules of interpretation, topics, patterns of interaction (e.g., turn-taking), and uses and forms of language in the classroom (Hymes, 1972a). Of importance, then, is the degree to which students have access to both linguistic and social knowledge embedded in and transmitted by the discourse of the classroom.

Through participation in academic discourse, students learn both the structure of lessons and the ways to talk about what they know (Mehan, 1979). However, if students are not given the opportunity to participate in legitimate learning contexts from which they can acquire the social and communicative knowledge needed to participate, they may learn very little from the classroom experiences in which they participate (Wilkinson, 1982).

In larger contexts, ethnographers (Heath, 1982a, 1982b, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981) have also observed that the variance in literacy practices across discourse communities can be related to the local expectations of the communities regarding communicative and social competence. As Ochs (1988) has suggested, "Meaning is embedded in cultural conceptions of context, and in this respect the process of acquiring language is embedded in the process of socialization of knowledge" (p. 3). Likewise, the literacy practices of schools are also constructed from historical expectations of linguistic and social competence in school settings.

Traditionally, though, schools have not recognized the links between the development of discourse knowledge, the classroom context, the cultural expectations implicit in the activities in which students and teachers participate, and academic competence. Instead, educators have defined more narrow conceptions of competence. Discourse competence in school contexts has been measured by the degree to which a student can produce fluent oral and written text, and academic competence is measured by the student's ability to demonstrate the

acquisition of discrete bits of content knowledge. However, a broader definition of competence acknowledges the relationship between discourse and academic competence, as well as how social knowledge is central to the acquisition of each. As Mehan (1979) has discussed:

Students not only must know the content of academic subjects, they must learn the appropriate form in which to cast their academic knowledge. . . . They must know with whom, when, and where they can speak and act, and they must provide the speech and behavior that are appropriate for a given classroom situation. Students must also be able to relate behavior, both academic and social, to varying classroom situations by interpreting implicit classroom rules. (p. 133)

This notion of classroom competence includes both linguistic and social competence, and it is an extension of the belief that the cultural fabric of any society is woven from the concepts, values, beliefs, patterns of interaction, and organization of that society. Hymes (1972b) uses the term *communicative competence* to demonstrate the link between linguistic and social knowledge. He defines this kind of competence as "what it is a member of society knows in knowing how to participate" (p. 66). In this sense, competence in the society is illustrated by one's ability to interact in culturally appropriate ways with other members of society who are already competent (Goodenough, 1976). Students, like members of other cultural groups, appropriate particular ways of interacting, using language, and demonstrating newly acquired knowledge from successive interactions with more competent and knowledgeable others (Mehan, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978). This intrapersonal psychological process emerges not only in but through interpersonal or social activities (Leont'ev, 1981; Luria, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985a).

Students' conceptions of the culturally appropriate ways of participating in school contexts are shaped by experiences they bring to school, by those acquired in previous instructional settings, and by the ongoing activities that teachers construct (Gutierrez, 1987). It is through these social interactions in learning activities that students are given opportunities to resolve the tensions resulting from disparities or discontinuities between ways of knowing, talking, and interacting in and out of school. In other words, students appropriate their understandings of the linguistic, academic, and sociocultural knowledge embedded, both implicitly and explicitly, in the contexts and in the interactions in which teaching occurs. Their understanding of the appropriate ways of demonstrating competence in schools is demonstrated in the ways they understand the various contexts in which they participate, define their roles and membership in the classroom community, interact, and use oral and written language.

The conception of competence as a social construct requires an understanding that classroom competence is facilitated by participation in and the appropriation of both linguistic and social knowledge transmitted through meaningful class-

room discourse. This conception of competence as a social construction provides the basis for understanding that classroom competence is not constructed by individuals; instead, competence is bidirectional, involving both students and teacher (Cazden, 1988; Gutierrez & Larson, 1994; Mehan, 1979). Mehan (1979) has further described competence as interactional competence:

Interactional competence is defined here in terms of effective participation or membership in the classroom. This definition is intentionally broad in scope. It is intended to encompass the requisites for communication with others, and the interpretation of language, behavior, rules, and normative dimensions of classroom life. (p. 127)

Historically in educational contexts, however, this socialization process has been unidirectional, a process designed for the socialization of students. Consequently, the Vygotskian notion that, for learning to become internalized, the child and the more competent adult must share reference before they share meaning is rarely instantiated in classrooms (Cazden, 1988). Instead, the process of teaching, more often than not, involves the "moving of pupils toward the teacher's meanings'" (Edwards & Furlong, in Cazden, 1988, p. 113). Thus, the construction of meaning becomes more complex for students who are simultaneously unfamiliar with classroom participation structures, social arrangements, and classroom discourse. Hymes (1972a) describes the difficulty children encounter when they enter a new discourse community:

It is not that a child does not know a word, but that he pronounces it in one social dialect, rather than another. Not that a child cannot express himself or that a thought cannot be required of him, but that he expresses it in one style of expression rather than another. Not that a child cannot answer questions, but that questions and answers are defined for him in terms of one set of community norms rather than another, as to what counts as questions and answers, and as to what it means to be asked or to answer. (xxx-xxx1)

UNPACKAGING ACADEMIC LITERACY: STUDIES ON THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF LITERACY

Research on the development of academic literacy has examined the entry of Latino children into the discourse community of schools and has examined the relationship between students' literacy development and the instructional contexts in which students participate (Gutierrez, 1992, 1993a, 1993b). These studies have suggested that the nature of literacy instruction and the ways instruction is organized and transmitted influence the nature of literacy learning for students who are linguistically at risk and culturally diverse. In particular, the social relationships constructed in activity influence the nature of student/teacher and student/student interactions and their accompanying discourse patterns. Of par-

ticular significance is that students appropriate different kinds of literacy skills from the various teaching scripts that characterize their literacy instruction (Gutierrez, 1987, 1992; Gutierrez & Meyer, in press).⁵

For example, in studies of the development of academic literacy of elementary school-aged Latino children, students performed poorly on measures of fluency and elaboration when the literacy instruction they received was embedded in a recitation teaching script. This script is characterized by teacher-dominated instruction and limited opportunity for students to read, write, and use elaborated discourse. Most often, students' classroom participation was limited to one word or brief responses to the teacher's questions. In these classrooms, students did exhibit literacy competence on recall of literal detail of the stories they read and on literacy activities for which following directions, correctness, or a right answer were emphasized and valued. In contrast, these students did not demonstrate competence when participating in activities that required them to generate sustained oral and/or written text.

Students did develop valued literacy outcomes in instructional contexts that allowed them to actively co-construct discourse, its topics, and the literacy activities in which discourse knowledge was used and developed.⁶ Central to the students' appropriation of academic discourse and skills were the following: (1) students had regular opportunities to participate in and use meaningful academic discourse (both oral and written), (2) teachers had high expectations of the students, yet knew when and how to assist students' learning, (3) students had regular opportunities to appropriate and use both the linguistic and social knowledge necessary for discourse competence in schooling experiences, and (4) teachers carefully scaffolded development by constructing learning contexts and social interactions from which students could appropriate skills and ideas and build on prior knowledge (Gutierrez, 1991).

Earlier research on the literacy development of college-aged at-risk ethnic minority students also suggests that the contexts in which students learn influences the nature of literacy learning. Moreover, this research revealed that the context for learning and its accompanying instructional script influence students'

⁵Three main teaching scripts were identified: (1) recitation, (2) responsive, and (3) responsive/collaborative. These three scripts are distinguished by the nature of the discourse patterns used, by participation structures evident in learning activities, and by the social and physical arrangements of the activities teachers construct. Recitation scripts are characterized by teacher-centered learning, while responsive/collaborative scripts are characterized by highly participatory interactions that include co-construction of the discourse and topics, for example (see Gutierrez, 1993b, for more discussion).

⁶Valued literacy outcomes were analyzed on the following linguistic and social dimensions: (1) elaborated discourse (oral and written), (2) use of evidence, (3) integrating text and personal experience into discourse, (4) developing a critical stance toward texts (oral and written), (5) participation in sustained discourse, (6) initiating topics, gaining access to floor, and so forth (for more discussion on valued literacy outcomes, see Gutierrez, 1991).

definitions and uses of literacy, as well as the development of the literacy skills themselves (Gutierrez, 1987).

A particular context for examining the relationship between the acquisition of linguistic and social knowledge and the contexts in which they develop was a 3-year ethnographic study of the writing development of 4 college students who had spent virtually all their schooling years in remedial or developmental courses in math, reading, and writing (Gutierrez, 1987). The purpose of this study was to unpackage the literacy skills they brought to the university classroom—to better understand why and how they used particular literacy skills, to study literacy acquisition in a variety of contexts in order to identify those features that constrained or enhanced the students' academic and linguistic competence.

The purpose of this particular section, however, is not to discuss in any significant detail the specific nature of the literacy development of the students I studied but rather to discuss more generally the ways in which the contexts for learning influenced the students' writing and literacy-related behaviors. The analyses of numerous videotapes of the students engaged in individual, small group, and whole class literacy activities, think-aloud writing protocols, field notes, interviews, school records, and student-generated texts revealed a relationship between the acquisition of academic discourse, classroom socialization (social competence), and the nature of classroom learning activities. As I studied these case study students reading, writing, and interacting in multiple contexts both in and outside classroom settings and analyzed the nature of their learning in both remedial and traditional classrooms over the 3 years, I observed the ways in which different classroom contexts provided differential access to the linguistic, cognitive, and social knowledge that these students needed to become competent and successful members of their academic community.

In unraveling the students' writing processes, for example, I found that they had appropriated a particular linguistic and social competence from the remedial courses in which they had participated throughout their school life. These students had been socialized to different communicative and social norms than those of the traditional classroom, and they had appropriated skills that rendered them dysfunctional in traditional and more academic classroom activities.

In order to unpackage their literacy skills and to understand their development, it became important to examine their previous literacy instruction. During their precollegiate years, these 4 students had had limited or no access to classroom communicative activities from which they could acquire a valued version of academic discourse. Data collected from their responses to two reading and writing surveys of their reading and writing attitudes, behaviors and prior instruction, as well as data collected from high-school transcripts, interviews with former high-school teachers, and review of high-school course materials revealed that their literacy instruction could be characterized as the learning of discrete reading and writing skills, that is, decoding and the learning of syntactic and grammatical rules, from individualized learning activities in workbooks and

prepackaged programs or from classroom drill and skill work. All 4 students reported that they had never read an entire book (nor had they been assigned texts to read). They had never been required to write any text longer than one page or to participate in class discussion about the texts they read and wrote. Thus, they had had little opportunity to learn the very unique communicative and social contexts of the "high status" classroom or to negotiate the tensions that their various discourses created (Oakes, 1985).

Not surprisingly, these students had difficulty recognizing the special characteristics of university classroom contexts and, in particular, contexts that demanded elaborated discourse and a highly specialized pattern of student/teacher interaction. Furthermore, they regularly demonstrated that they were unfamiliar with the appropriate protocol for classroom interactions. Thus, a lack of understanding of the social and communicative demands of their new community made it difficult for them to learn from the activities in which they attempted to participate.

As I observed these students over the 3 years across multiple contexts and activities, I learned how classroom competence is socially constructed and how classroom socialization occurs. I observed the ways in which different classroom contexts regulated the ways literacy was used and defined, as well as how the various contexts helped shape the nature of the classroom discourse community.

Of particular significance was that these students had acquired specific interactional patterns, beliefs about how people learned to read and write, and ways of demonstrating the knowledge they had acquired in their remedial courses. This repertoire of behaviors and beliefs, however, did not reflect the requisite linguistic and social knowledge needed to participate successfully in traditional classroom activities. For example, the passive posture they assumed in classroom learning events was perpetuated by their lack of knowledge about or experience with ways to initiate topics or to construct and sustain elaborated oral and written discourse (as defined by classroom norms). In regular academic contexts, they often had difficulty demonstrating the knowledge they had appropriated in the course of instruction or integrating their own understandings of topics or issues raised in the texts they read or wrote. The students also reported that literacy, as it was defined by their schooling experiences, was of little utility to them. In short, these students' understandings of literacy and its uses were mirror reflections of the ways in which literacy was used and defined in the classroom learning activities in which they had previously participated. They had successfully appropriated the curriculum and discourse pattern of the remedial classroom.

Thus, a sociohistorical analysis of their literacy development made it difficult to accept deficit-model explanations for their academic underachievement and their lack of fluency in academic literacy skills. Rather, a different understanding of the acquisition of discourse emerged from the data I collected from my observations of these basic readers and writers. What I was studying was not simply their writing development, their acquisition of a particular set of literacy

skills and a set of conventions; instead, I was observing their acquisition of academic discourse and their initiation into a new discourse community and, simultaneously, the socialization process which their entry necessitated.

However, the ways in which students appropriate and use linguistic and sociocultural knowledge in the classroom are strongly influenced by the extent to which they have had opportunities to participate in learning activities that require the production of elaborated and authentic text (both written and oral) and by their opportunities to develop appropriate ways of demonstrating the competence they do have (Mehan, 1979). The students I studied needed to replace the old voices of old remedial teachers with the assisting voices of more expert others as they were apprenticed into new ways of knowing and doing. In a Vygotskian sense, their appropriation of academic discourse was another cultural activity that required the internalization of the cultural tools (e.g., reading and writing) of that activity. Learning the language of the classroom, just as learning the language of one's own community, required both linguistic and social competence; these students needed to become socialized to the rules of the academic community, just as they had been to those of their own home community and remedial classes. These students needed opportunities to acquire the competence necessary to successfully participate in academic-discourse communities. Membership in this "literacy club" required them to acquire new knowledge in a variety of academic subjects and new knowledge about how to communicate this appropriated knowledge in appropriate oral, written, and interactional forms (Cummins, 1986; Gumperz, 1982; Mehan, 1980).

Although many students are at one time initiates into particular discourse communities of the university, many at-risk students never achieve full status, full membership in the literacy club to which members of the academy belong; instead, they retain their provisional status and function at the margins of this privileged community (Bartholomae, 1985; Gutierrez, 1987). Often these students are placed again in remedial "low status" courses that can be characterized by learning activities that neither build on their linguistic and social knowledge nor provide opportunities to participate in a learning community in which meaningful discourse is both the medium and the goal of instruction (Gutierrez & Larson, 1994).

In this particular study, the consistent tracking of these students into remedial intervention programs designed to facilitate entry into the various discourse communities of the university summarily denied them access to the very contexts necessary for the development of competence. As Jose, one of the 4 students in the case study put it: "We enter the university as undocumented workers and leave the same way, without our papers. We are the undocumented workers of the academic world."

Jose's description of his status in the academic community accurately described the frustration the case study students demonstrated during their first year in the study. The process of appropriating a version of academic discourse was

particularly difficult for these linguistically and culturally diverse students—students whose notions and uses of literacy and patterns of discourse differed from those valued in their classrooms.

SUMMARY

If the ways in which students talk and act in the classroom are appropriated from the discourse of significant others, from the contexts in which they socially interact, then we might ask: What conceptions of literacy, learning, and social competence do students appropriate from classroom activity settings and interactions? What are the educational consequences of classroom contexts and curricula that provide little or no opportunity for academically underprepared students to participate in the joint construction of meaning, to recontextualize their ways of knowing, and to be apprenticed into a new discourse community?

Ignoring the social nature of literacy development reduces students' access to and participation in meaningful discourse. When people acquire language competence—both written and oral—they also acquire a competence to use language; that is, they acquire discourse competence, not just through an abstract study of language but through actual use of and participation in the community's discourse. In this way, students can acquire academic discourse as they become competent members of their academic community.

An understanding of language as a cognitive and socially constructed phenomenon enables us to critique how academic literacy is constructed in school settings; to critique how the discourse influences the nature of contexts for learning; to examine how the discourse of the classroom—a discourse which is part of the fabric of the curriculum, the social arrangement of the classroom, and part of a larger sociocultural phenomenon—is not simply a transparent medium through which the academic curriculum is transmitted. Understanding the consequences of various instructional scripts and classroom arrangements on literacy development must become central to understanding the nature of linguistically and culturally diverse students' literacy skills and development.

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