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Socializing respect and knowledge in a racially integrated science classroom

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Abstract

In this article we examine the socialization of respect in a racially integrated science classroom in Northern California that employed a character education program called Tribes. We focus on the ways scripts derived from this program are enacted during Community Circle activities and how breaches to these scripts and the norms of respectful behavior they espouse create productive opportunities for explicit socialization in the classroom. We find that respect in this classroom consisted predominantly of controlling both bodily comportment and discursive production. Our analysis sheds light on the ways curricular initiatives, such as the one utilized in the Tribes approach, while purporting to democratize classroom learning, may in fact function as vehicles for reproducing institutional hierarchies of power.

Keywords: Respect; Footing; Breaches; Community Circle; Science education

1. Introduction

In this article we examine the socialization of respect in a racially integrated 3rd-grade science classroom at La Paz Elementary School in Bridgeport, California,[1] that employed the principles espoused by a character education program[2] called "Tribes" or Tribes Learning Communities (TLC®). The Tribes program, utilized widely in the Bridgeport School District, is designed to foster mutually respectful behavior, accountability, collaboration, and equal participation among students and teachers. In so doing, it lays out explicit rules for what constitutes respectful behavior in the classroom. Drawing on videotaped data collected in this classroom over a three-year period, we offer an analysis that illustrates the ways rules of respect dictated by the Tribes program are enacted by teacher and students during "Community Circle" activities that take place in daily science lessons.[3] While purporting to create a more equitable learning environment and to democratize classroom discourse by proposing "a new pattern of interaction" (Gibbs, 2001, p. 20), the Tribes approach paradoxically requires the reproduction of institutional hierarchies and sanctions asymmetrical forms of

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[1] We use pseudonyms for names of cities, individuals, schools, and non-registered trademark educational projects.

[2] The state of California mandates the implementation of character education programs in schools, as do several other states in the nation. See California Education Code Section 233.5(a).

[3] Community Circle resembles other forms of interaction in classrooms such as "sharing time" (Cazden, 2001; Michaels, 1981) and "the daily calendar" (Cole, 2009).

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surveillance and control. In this way, in Tribes classrooms the rules and norms of respectful behavior become both the means and ends of the teaching process.

Like many other social institutions, schools are sites for the reproduction of cultural knowledge (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Foucault, 1977; Ryan, 1991). The inculcation of rules of respectful behavior constitutes one of the primary loci of this reproduction. By defining "respect" as displays of particular modes of corporeal comportment and communicative practice, the scripts for classroom discourse and interaction offered by the Tribes program call for attention to and control of students' bodies and their talk. Inasmuch as these efforts are in large part designed to bridge cultural differences in multicultural classrooms, they function as *reculturative* processes through which students' *habitus* are explicitly made to align with social norms of the school (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 87).

To examine how rules of respect are inculcated in this classroom we first offer a critical analysis of the proffered scripts, recommended spatial arrangements, and proposed activities of the Tribes curriculum to examine how these call for control of students' talk and bodies. We then analyze instances of classroom interaction in which students *breach* these expected norms, examining the reactions these breaches provoke. Breaches bring to the foreground the norms of social behavior (Garfinkel, 1967) and thus constitute productive opportunities for explicit socialization (Baquedano-López, Solís, & Kattan, 2005; Kattan, 2008; Jacobs-Huey, 2007). Specifically, while compliant participants are selected as exemplars of appropriate behavior, non-compliant participants are singled out for collective observation and sanctioning. We conclude by considering how the inculcation of rules of respect constitutes a reculturative process in racially mixed classrooms.

2. Socializing respect: scripting words and scripting the body

2.1. Scripts and breaches in the classroom

While attention has been paid to the effectiveness of scripted curricula in the transmission of knowledge and skills in elementary school classrooms,[4] there is still much to understand about the ways that scripts of classroom discourse and practice also socialize explicit rules of comportment and behavior (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Kantor, 1992). Scripts can be understood either as the implicit cultural rules known and enforced by gatekeepers across social institutions, or as the non-spontaneous discourses that are used by social actors to effect specific outcomes and fulfill particular social roles (what teachers say, what students say). It is the latter understanding that concerns us here.

The Tribes approach, as a character education program, provides scripted language and practices for teachers and students, which aim to foster particular ideals of communal interaction. These scripts are regularly *entextualized* (Silverstein & Urban, 1996) by teachers and followed by students. While most studies of classroom discourse look at the unplanned and improvisational nature of classroom interaction (Baquedano-López et al., 2005; Cazden, 2001; Erickson, 1982; Mehan, 1979; Sawyer, 2002), attention to the use of curricular scripts also affords us a way to examine how such scripts are locally enacted and supported in classrooms.

As with other social encounters, classroom participants orient to each other and to the goals of their common interaction in ways that are historically and socially conditioned. Elsewhere we have discussed our theory of *adaptation* (Baquedano-López et al., 2005; Solís, Kattan, & Baquedano-López, 2009), which illustrates how learning is in large part driven by reactions to breakdowns in expected norms and *participation frameworks* (Goffman, 1981). In this sense, learning in classrooms is hardly a harmonious activity. Rather, it is characterized by conflict and tension as teachers and students negotiate roles and resist and/or acquire dispositions and knowledge that are both historically and locally valued and promoted. We draw on Garfinkel's (1967) notion of breaches as the disruptions or discontinuities in social exchanges that reveal the largely tacit rules underlying everyday routines and social encounters. Breaches are also quotidian occurrences in classroom interaction that, when they take place, reveal the orderliness of social interaction and the organization of expected and valued forms of classroom participation. More importantly, breaches provide productive opportunities for socializing novice participants into the rules and mores of the community (Baquedano-López et al., 2005; Kattan, 2008; Jacobs-Huey, 2007).

[4] Two well-known examples of scripted curricula are Open Court and Success for All.