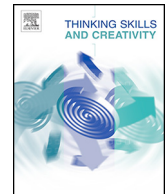




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The multimodal texture of engagement: Prosodic language, gaze and posture in engaged, creative classroom interaction



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ABSTRACT

This article explores the texture of engagement, a necessary foundation for creative thinking, and examines that texture through a multimodal lens. The article reports on research examining pupils' face-to-face interaction, achieving rigour through systematic application of a multimodal discourse analysis framework to discover more about the nature of collaboration in class. The focus in this article is the work of two boys in an exam preparation class where the task is to transpose Macbeth Act 1 scene 7 into a modern context. The multimodal micro-analysis of extracts from the interaction allows for an understanding of the work of embodied modes of gaze, posture and gesture alongside spoken and written language. In particular, it highlights the work of embodied modes in engaged collaborative classroom interaction and the poetic, or prosodic, aspects to gaze and posture as well as language in everyday classroom communication. It conceptualises engagement as a process rather than a state or reaction. Building on these insights regarding the multimodal texture of engagement in collaboration, the article argues that it is important to understand engagement as a process rather than a state or response and discusses some implications as to what teachers need to take account of when implementing collaborative activities.

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1. Introduction

In the field of education the term engagement is used widely and implies different meanings in different contexts. For some engagement is seen as an indicator of student satisfaction (in different national contexts, for example, the UK National Student Satisfaction Survey, the US University of Indiana survey of student satisfaction, and the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE, 2015)). For others, student engagement is an indicator of effective teaching (such as in the UK, the Department for Education and the inspection body for schools, the Office for Standards in Education, OFSTED) or indicated by attendance (such as the OECD/PISA (2003) global survey of education). This article, rather than setting out to quantify or measure engagement, arises from a telling moment in a research project investigating student-to-student interaction in the classroom. This significant moment stood out from a series of lessons because, in contrast to their prior dispositions, two students were profoundly engaged in their classroom learning. This prompted a deep probing of what exactly engagement consists of, asking the question “what is the texture of engagement?”. The use of a multimodal approach to examining the data at micro-level enabled me to uncover what engagement *is* by examining the work of multiple modes employed by students in their face-to-face interaction as it unfolded. It is from this perspective, following rigorous investigation

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Concept	Engagement as a state.	Engagement as a reaction.	Engagement as a process.
Focus	Intrinsic to individual	Extrinsic to individual	Collaborative
Realisation	Comprising behavioural, emotional, cognitive components eg Trowler (2010)	Response to pedagogic strategies, materials, media, contexts Eg DfE (2014), Ofsted, Rodrigues (2007)	Co-constructed, fluid, evolving, participatory, involved, emergent.
Pedagogic Interest	Measuring learners by attainment and attendance	Measuring teachers through student attainment and attendance	Noticing engagement through interest and enjoyment in the moment.

Fig. 1. Three Conceptualisations of Engagement.

using a multimodal discourse analysis framework, that a thick description of engagement as a dynamic process, emerging through the employment of a range of semiotic resources, can be provided. This paper offers an original contribution to education research in its close examination of the texture of engagement and, as a result of this, in advocating consideration of engagement as a multimodal, fluid, evolving process, in contrast to more performative conceptualisations of the notion.

The aim of this article is to closely examine the work of semiotic modes in an engaged collaborative interaction in order to understand engagement better. It begins by outlining three possible conceptions of engagement and argues there is a need for research which explores engagement as a multimodal process. The study is grounded in social semiotic theory and sociolinguistics. It is positioned to regard interaction, or talk, as the communication of meaning achieved through the employment of a multimodal ensemble of semiotic resources. It draws upon the notions of interest (Kress, 2010), intertextual reference (Tannen, 2007), common purpose (Goffman, 1963), conversational inference (Gumperz, 1977) and poetry and prosody (Tannen, 2007). Following explanation of the methodology and context for research in Section 3, data is presented from close multimodal micro-analysis of extracts from one instance of ethnographically contextualised classroom interaction between two pupils working on the transposition of act one, scene seven from *Macbeth*. The implications and significance of the findings are discussed in the final section.

2. Conceptualising engagement

Education research concerned with engagement takes a variety differing stances. I begin by outlining two of the more dominant perspectives on engagement in education before explaining the conceptualisation of engagement as a multimodal, collaborative process. Insights from sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, multimodal discourse analysis and linguistic ethnography informing the understanding of engagement in interaction are then outlined.

It is possible to identify three dominant positions associated with engagement (see Fig. 1), namely engagement as a state, as a reaction and as a process.

2.1. Engagement as a state

In regarding engagement as a state, Trowler (2010) identifies three aspects to engagement, namely the behavioural, the emotional and the cognitive. That is to say engagement requires some form of compliant behaviour, emotional investment and is conceptualised as individual attributes. This view of engagement regards it as intrinsic to the learner and linked to psychological notions of motivation and self-belief. This conceptualisation of engagement is one that can be and is measured, through pupil attainment and attendance figures. For example, the OECD (OECD/PISA 2003) measure of engagement globally used barometers of Participation and Belonging measured through attendance. This conceptualisation of engagement positions the individual at its centre.

2.2. Engagement as a response

In the second conceptualisation, there is a shift from concern with the individual state of engagement to concern with factors which impact upon or provoke a response from the individual. From this focus on extrinsic factors, engagement

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