

Inquiring into the Unknown: Reconstructing Classroom Contexts through Mediated Discourse Analysis

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Background

"And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Purpose:

- The purpose of this study began with my desire to gain insight into the **relational practices between elementary school teachers and students**, around the concept of **inquiry**. It ended with an examination of the **potential changes to classroom context** as a result of the intentional disorientation, examination, and utilization of informed instructional practices.
- What is so special about inquiry and how would a deeper exploration into the concept improve either my own pedagogy and practice, and/or the larger educational system in a manner that would benefit teachers and their students?
- Like Foucault (1992), I want to analyze discourse as a way of illuminating, and ultimately changing, the powerful way knowledge and truth are **used as oppressive forces in society**, where decisions about learning are decided by a few, and where goals are created **without the voices** of those most involved.
- What might it look like to create a place where students and teachers confront their learning through inquiry and seek **to implicate and change normative assumptions** around teaching and learning by recognizing their role in creating and being changed by discourse and context?

Theoretical Framework:

Context	Discourse	Inquiry
Dewey (1934) A place of potential meaning making (not truth)	Jones (2012) Language in use to do something	Garrison (1997) Begins in doubt
Foucault (1972) Connected to previous and future events	Scollon (1992) Is a social action	Dewey (1938) From genuine interest
Rogers (2011) Constantly changing	Bakhtin (1986) Created in anticipation of future responses	Van Manen (2014) An openness for discovering what can be thought

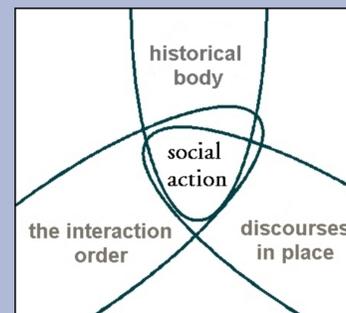
Research Questions:

- RQ1.** What mediated actions occur between teachers and students during interactions around inquiry? How do these actions take place?
- RQ2.** What is the role of discourse in interactions between teachers and students around inquiry? By whom is it produced, why is it used, and what motives are behind it?
- RQ3.** What actions can be taken to change the discourse around inquiry in interactions between teachers and students?

Methodology

I used **Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA)** in my attempts to highlight the connections between discourse and actions around the concept of inquiry. (Scollon 2001)

- All actions and all discourses are **mediated**.
- The mediated action, which is the focus of mediated discourse analysis, is not the discourse itself, but the **social action** carried out by social actors.
- MDA looks at the **relationship between social practices and discursive practices** and *"seeks to keep them alive in our interpretations of mediated actions"* (Scollon 2001).



Research Site and Participants

Elementary school (K-5) [located in a large suburban school district in the Upper Midwest]
 4 Teachers (Experience, 1+, 5+, 10+, 10+ years)
 Grades 1, 2, and 3(2)
 2 teachers had additional school wide instructional responsibilities

Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple Levels:

- The school
- The classrooms
- The teachers and their students

Overall I observed five main ways that inquiry was taken up as a mediated action among all four teachers and their students.

First, they showed up in every classroom multiple times and in very similar situations and uses. This allowed me to pull from a large amount of data in order to find patterns within similar inquiry types.

Second, they each had unique features that I was able to analyze and discuss. Their unique qualities provided space to have rich discussions about the consequences of their use.

Emergent Interpretations

5 Inquiry Patterns Inquiry as a mediated action

Inquiry Pattern	Determining the procedure	Collecting experiences	Guessing what the teacher thinks	Finding the "known"	Encouraging curiosity
Site of Engagement	1. Set up an activity 2. Reminder	1. Introducing new material 2. Creating class consensus	Check for understanding	Check for understanding	Within moments of class discussions
Historical Body (of social actors)	Teacher and students Embodied "ness" (body language of teacher) Formal, sitting, pointing	Teacher and students Student to student Informal, leaning in	Teacher and students Informal, standing	Teacher and students Formal/informal, sitting, leaning in (joining)	Teacher and students Rested, leaning back
Interaction Order	Teacher = director [Authority] Student = receiver	Teacher = strategic collector/ "curator" (facilitator) Student = sharer (passive/waiting)	Teacher = carrier of knowledge [Authority] Student = searcher (need to "know" the teacher/thinker)	Teacher = "searcher" [Less obvious authority] Student = searcher [some authority]	Teacher = "settler" [authority] Student = director [authority]
Discourses in Place Oral and visual... (What gets foregrounded?)	Teachers using declarative statements Charts/lists	"stack your thinking," and building, connecting, listening, responding, and creating	What else? What's another? Not quite Almost Getting closer "direct clue"	Where can we go to find this?	Why? Tell me more...

Implications Embracing the Unknown

Purposefully Practical:	Potentially Prophetic:
1. Be intentional (how)	1. Inquiry is love
2. Be strategic (when)	2. Inquiry is cooperative
3. Be specific (what)	3. Inquiry is disruptive
4. Be aware (why)	

"So we may be suckered into thinking, well if we want children to succeed in this very unpredictable world, what we need to do is give them higher and higher levels of very specific academic skills. The irony however, is to get to good outcomes, sometimes you do better by not trying to get to those outcomes and instead, not worrying about outcomes at all."

~ Alison Gopnik

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