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

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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 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 its use?

RQ3. What actions can be taken to change the discourse around inquiry in interactions between teachers and students?

Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple Levels:
1. The school
2. The classrooms
3. 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

Implications

Embracing the Unknown

"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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