DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 935 SO 029 856

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TITLE An Emerging Methodology for Cultural-historical Perspectives on Literacy Learning: Synchronic and Diachronic Dimensions of Social Practice.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Research; Diversity (Student); Educational Environment; *Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Heuristics; *Literacy; Multicultural Education; *Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS Learning Environments; Situated Learning; *Theoretical Orientation

ABSTRACT

This paper begins from the premise that, while there is much to be learned from research, it should also be recognized that there is a need for research methodologies and theoretical frames that provide the possibility of more local explanations for the dilemmas and problems facing urban education. The paper contends that situated understandings of education provide insight into the cognitive and social consequences of educational policies and practices. To accomplish this, the paper examines critically the theoretical constructs that currently underlie the educational treatment of students in general, but particularly of linguistically and culturally diverse students, and of the routine practices of urban classrooms and schools. The goal of the research discussed in this paper is to provide a language for describing urban schooling and its literacy practices, and to provide a critical analysis of their outcome. Drawing on a body of research on urban education, literacy learning and its social organization, and the relationship of the literacy learning to the practices of the local community, the paper proposes a syncretic framework for the study of literacy in formal and nonformal educational settings. According to the paper, the theoretical and methodological approaches outlined for the study of classroom literacy practices are heuristics intended to provide a measure of clarity to more traditional ways of viewing formal and informal learning settings. (Contains 3 figures and 54 references.) (BT)

An Emerging Methodology for Cultural-historical Perspectives on Literacy Learning: Synchronic and Diachronic Dimensions of Social Practice

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The significance of developing a deep understanding of schools and their social organization is that it can inform policies and practices of urban education. While there is much to be learned from research for example, critical theory, that has helped to locate educational problems in the larger social context, we also recognize the need for research methodologies and theoretical frames that provide the possibility of more local explanations for the dilemmas and problems facing urban education. Situated understandings of education provide insight into the cognitive and social consequences of educational policies and practices. We endeavor to accomplish this by examining more critically the theoretical constructs that currently underlie the educational treatment of students in general, but particularly of linguistically and culturally diverse students and of the routine practices of urban classrooms and schools. The goal of our research, then, is to provide not only a language for describing urban schooling and its literacy practices, but also to provide a critical analysis of their outcome. We draw on our body of research on urban education, literacy learning and its social organization, and the relationship of the literacy learning to the practices of the local community to propose the following syncretic framework for the study of literacy in formal and nonformal educational settings. Syncretic here refers to the principled and strategic use of a combination of theoretical and methodological tools to examine individual actions, as well as the goals and history of those actions.

In our studies of literacy learning and development, we have attempted to account for the reciprocal relationship between literacy learning and the social practices of the classroom. In doing so, we have begun to recognize how much we have underestimated the complexity of classroom life and its relationship to literacy development (Gutierrez, 1992, 1994). Classrooms, as institutional settings, have a social and cultural history that allow them to have both stable and emergent characteristics (Gutierrez, 1993; Stone, 1994). Further, classrooms are constitutive of

multiple activity systems that interact to promote learning. Learning, however, is not always a benign activity and, thus, conflict, tension, and contradiction contribute to the idiosyncratic nature of learning activity (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). To capture the complex, persistent, and emergent character of classroom social practices, we utilize a cultural-historical theoretical view of learning and development to understand socially and culturally organized phenomena such as literacy practices in classrooms (Cole, 1991; 1995; in press; Engeström, 1993; Moll, 1990; Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). From this theoretical perspective, learning is not an individual process but rather a "transactional" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) process mediated by the use of cultural tools such as writing or spoken language as people participate in routine activities in communities of practice, e.g., the classroom (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997; Lave, 1988; Stone, 1994, 1996a). Participation in social interactional processes promote individual knowledge production.

In this paper, we will discuss how cultural-historical theory as an overarching frame affords us the possibility of bringing to bear a range of theoretical lenses that yield a repertoire of methodological tools to examine the mutual and interdependent relationship between the individual and the social world. We will also illustrate how we utilize a syncretic approach as a principled means to make visible and document the intricate and dynamic social processes of literacy practices. Following Duranti and Ochs (1998), a syncretic approach uses a combination of theoretical and methodological tools to examine social phenomena. This approach necessitates transdisciplinary perspectives for the theoretical and methodological treatment of the social practices of literacy learning. Specifically, our shift in focus or unit of analysis from either the individual or the larger social context to an activity system allows an examination of the interrelationship between the individual and the cultural setting. From this view, social settings are not discretely

circumscribed phenomena but instead occur as a part of laminated, overlapped, and interwoven social phenomena that occur in the moment and across time and space (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). Following Engeström (1987) and Giddens (1979), we define activity system as a social practice that includes the norms, values, division of labor, and goals of the community; this framework for activity allows us to move across and within various levels of analysis. The syncretic approach we utilize, then, systematically and strategically blends theoretical constructs from social, psychological, and anthropological theories and, yet, allows us to remain anchored in cultural-historical and activity theories of development (Cole, 1995; 1996; Rogoff, 1990; 1995; Wertsch, 1991). Specifically, we use this explanatory theory to rethink and reevaluate how we look at the literacy learning of linguistically and culturally diverse students of urban learning contexts.

Our framework, then, is dependent upon a rich theoretical network that arises from the "goodness of fit" between our theoretical constructs and the complexity of social phenomena. It is this "goodness of fit" that allows us to draw, in a principled or syncretic way, from critical social theories, developmental theories and literary and language theories to link the particular to the larger social context. Thus, methodologically we attempt to look at both the social practice of literacy learning and the moment-to-moment construction of that practice. As a consequence, we also use theoretical perspectives of such scholars as Bakhtin (1981), Bourdieu (1977; 1991), Foucault (1977), and Goffman (1959; 1961; 1974; 1981) to more richly understand social phenomena such as social identities, hybridity, and hierachies and power relations. in learning contexts. Thus, by integrating micro and macro analyses of learning environments, we are able to investigate the social, spatial, and temporal organizational dimensions of literacy learning practices, that is, diachronic and synchronic dimensions of activity (Gutierrez, 1993,1995; Stone,1996b). These

multiple layers of analyses reveal that the complex and situated nature of learning can be analyzed not only for its cognitive and social implications, but also its political consequences. Like other scholars, then, we stress the importance of dealing with units of analysis that include but extend beyond the individual.

Our syncretic perspective helps account for the complexity of social phenomena and is consonant with the broader definition of literacy as a set of practices (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez,& Alvarez, 1998). Literacy learning, from this perspective, is situated in a social milieu and thus arises from participation in a community's communicative practices, both proximal and distal. From this view, literacy practices, are constituted through cultural artifacts, values, beliefs, and normative practices, i.e., an activity system (Leont'ev, 1981). Conceptualizing literacy learning as an activity system links thinking and doing in social practices. This theoretical approach necessarily eschews more narrow views of literacy learning that do not account for the social and cognitive consequences of literacy practices in urban schools. This is an essential goal for those of us concerned with urban schools and their diverse student populations.

Thus, we study the culturally-informed and culture-producing nature of literacy practices. By using ethnography and discourse analytic methods of inquiry, we examine the meaning- making processes in which members of a community construct knowledge and a world view individually and collectively as they participate in schooling practices. The slice of life that we observe and analyze is informed by an evolving set of ethnographic questions that grow out of our body of work (See Gutierrez, 1987; 1992; 1993;1994; Stone, 1993, 1994, 1996b; Stone & Gutierrez, 1997). For example,

•What is the relationship between local practices and learning and developmental processes?

•What is the nature of the social and discursive practices in the teaching and learning of literacy?

•How can we account for developmental change through participation?

•In what ways are routine literacy practices socially and culturally constituted?

•What does the social organization of learning reveal about social relationships, hierarchies, rituals, knowledge exchanges and belief systems in particular learning arenas?

•What are the potential contributions of conflict, tension, and contradiction to literacy learning and development?

•What are the social and cognitive consequences of literacy practices on urban student populations?

•What constitutes successful instructional practices and how can they be sustained?

Guided by these questions and our syncretic framework, we look both at language and through language to examine the interrelationship between literacy, culture, and learning (Ochs, 1988; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986). Thus, the study of literacy becomes an important domain in that the practices and problems of urban education, as well as literacy learning, can be investigated in concert.

We have observed that literacy learning, its context and social organization continue to be narrowly conceptualized and examined. For the most part, formal learning arenas such as classrooms, because of their seeming predictability, have been examined in ways that have not accounted for both their stable and, yet, their improvisational character. In contrast, it is our understanding of literacy practices as complex, overlapping, and intertwined social spaces and events that leads us to view the unit of analysis in our methodological frame as taking a perspec-

tive on social activity. Thus, social practice becomes the unit of analysis that can be analyzed from various analytical perspectives. In this way, we can develop and use multiple perspectives to explain more richly the relationship between social and cognitive phenomena.

Moreover, to understand better the relationship between literacy learning and its contexts, we examine the gestalt, or the whole practice and the history of those practices *in situ.* Practices are socially and culturally organized and, thus, encode a social and cultural history. Practice becomes a rich unit of analysis because practices are constituted over time by multiple activities that stretch and change. Accordingly, a focus on practice makes visible the social and cultural history of the practice, an understanding of what is being accomplished in the moment, as well as an understanding of the future goal or object of activity. In Figure 1 below, we illustrate the relationship between the history of actions and the face-to-face interactional sequences that constitute the historical nature of those actions:

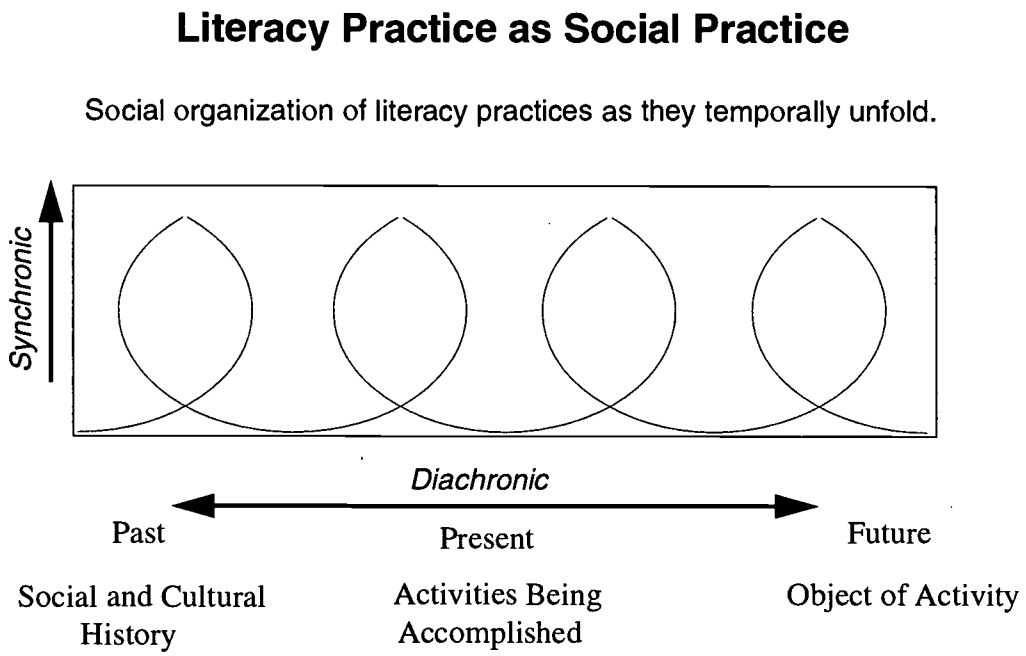

Figure 1 History of Actions

Figure 1 portrays the interrelationship between the "regularized acts" of situated practices occurring in the moment and the history of actions that constitutes background meaning or source of mutual knowledge used for the social production of knowledge (Giddens, 1979). One means of talking about the routine discursive practices of the various social spaces of learning contexts is to utilize the notion of script to account for the temporal or diachronic constitution of social activity. Script here refers to a range of recurring patterns of activity within and across events in which members' actions display stable ways of engaging with others (See Gutierrez, 1992; 1994 for a detailed discussion of script). These scripts, characterized by particular social, spatial, and language patterns, become resources that participants use to interpret the activity of others and to guide their own participation.

The notion of script has become a useful construct for understanding how these normative practices qua literacy learning provide a range of opportunities for students to participate in constructions of literacy knowledge (Gutierrez, 1992). An expanded definition of script explicates it as an orientation that members come to expect after repeated interactions in contexts with particular social and language patterns constructed in both local moments and over time. These frames of reference with their range of participation structures lead to patterned ways of being and doing in particular contexts within classrooms. Script, then, helps account for the stability and variance of the classroom, the spontaneous and repetitive aspects of the social practices of the literacy learning we have observed (Gutierrez, 1992; 1993; 1995).

Script, in our earlier work (Gutierrez, 1992, 1993), focused analysis on the diachronic dimensions of social practices. Because it focused exclusively, although not intentionally, on the temporal dimension, it privileged the official space of the classroom and, thus, a particular dis-

course and curriculum. It is not surprising that much of classroom literacy research concerns itself with classroom teaching and, thus, also focuses on official spaces of the classroom.

Notwithstanding the significance of the interlaced relationship between ongoing activities and their cumulative history, our more recent work has addressed the multiple fields of activity in the classroom. In doing so, we recognized the importance of closely examining the social organization of activities that occur simultaneously in social practices--the synchronic dimension of activity. It is an analysis of this social and spatiotemporal level that reveals how social actions during activities both produce and reproduce cultural phenomena and how cognition is distributed among participants in the social space itself (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Gutierrez & Stone, 1997; Stone, 1993, 1996b; Stone & Gutierrez, 1998). Thus Figure 1 reflects the relationship between the history of actions and their moment-to-moment construction and accounts for the various spaces in which these actions simultaneously occur.

We propose the theoretical construct of "social space" or habitus (Bourdieu, 1991) to describe the various patterns of participation that occur in overlapping and mutually informing but seemingly exclusive places where teacher and students reside and interact. We describe these as "official," "unofficial," and the "third" spaces within which various scripts or normative practices are employed (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). Representation of the official space found in Figure 2 illustrates the teacher's habitus; note that some students contribute to and participate in the teacher script or the official activity of the learning event. Those students who resist the normative institutional practices of the classroom or whose local and cultural knowledge are often displaced and form their own counterscript. It is this displacement of student knowledge that motivates a different social space in which counterscript develops, i.e., the underlife of the unofficial space (Goffman, 1961; Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). These counterscripts, however,

are neither harmonious nor necessarily overlapping. Yet, as illustrated below, counterscript in the unofficial spaces of the classroom may often be linked. These linked actions form a more sustained and inclusive counterscript (See bi-directional arrows linking student discourse.)

We have previously argued against the seeming monologism of learning spaces. Regardless of the dominance of the official script, we argue that classrooms are, in fact, intrinsically dialogical. The potential for multiple spaces exists. The emergence of a less apparent counterscript again reveals the inherently multi-voiced and dialogic nature of any learning context (Gutierrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995).

From this view, the social spaces of the classroom are constitutive of the history of the social practices of schools, the particular habitus of the teacher, and individual responses to the normative practices. Through this analytic lens, the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions that emerge within and across the various social spaces are made visible. In particular, we use the theoretical category of the "third" space to identify and describe the competing discourses and epistemologies of the different social actors in the social practice of literacy learning (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Alvarez, 1998). The third space is a discursive space in which alternative and competing discourses and positionings transform conflict and difference into rich zones of collaboration and learning. In this way, the third space provides the mediational context and tools necessary for future development. Thus, as Figure 2 depicts, the third space differs from the other spaces in that the dialogue among participants occurs as non-random associations between their scripts and is a genuine exchange of perspectives and world views. Accordingly, in these contexts, we can observe and document the collective negotiation of meaning. In Figure 2 below, we illustrate these spaces and show that while these spaces are not exclusive and are necessarily overlapping

and mutually constituted, for purposes of analysis, these spaces are identified as theoretically distinct categories.

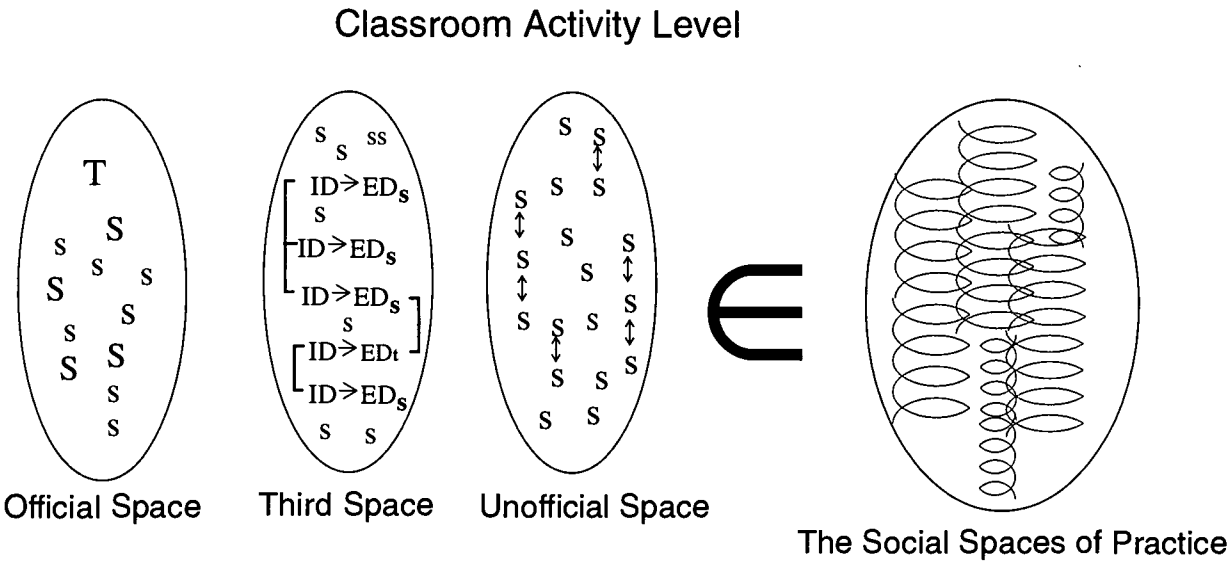

Figure 2

The Social Spaces of Practice found in Figure 2 above illustrate the laminated and conflicting nature of the communicative actions observed in classrooms and other learning contexts. Our methodology, then, affords the theoretical and methodological tools to explain how these spaces are not monologic and unidimensional but rather are complex social spaces that are inextricably related to what gets learned and how. By examining the face-to-face interaction and the resulting products, we understand both the history and, thus, the construction of the social practices of the classroom. As a result, we have access to the products and the means for assessing both the products and their processes. The significance, here, is that we challenge the limitations of the exclusive use of more traditional measures of learning and propose a more expanded under-

standing of measures of learning and achievement. Later, we will demonstrate how this view of assessment is understood within the framework of apprenticeship (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997; Rogoff, 1990).

Although we will not elaborate here, we held to ethnographic principles of research and developed theoretical categories from our corpora of data. Since our intention is to understand situated practice, our instrumentation grows out of theoretical categories that emerge from the data. For this reason, we can shift perspectives on the data while remaining anchored in the overarching theoretical orientation of cultural-historical theory. The rationale for developing and revising instruments in relation to the classroom and school contexts is eloquently stated by Miles and Huberman (1994)

> Prior instrumentation is usually context-stripped; it lusts for universality, uniformity, and comparability. But qualitative research lives and breathes through seeing the context; it is the particularities that produce the generalities, not the reverse (p. 35).

Utilizing multiple and layered data collection strategies and analytical methods, e.g., discourse and conversational analysis, we mine the data to make visible the layers of context. (c.f. Green & Wallat, 19; Schegloff, 1991). These data were specifically derived from participant-observation fieldnotes, interviews, archival data, audio and video recordings, a retrospective, dialogic analysis of classroom videos and their transcription, as well as classroom artifacts (including student-generated oral and written texts).[1]

By studying the everyday literacy activities across time and space, then, we study how lit-

1. Data reduction involves entering field notes into HyperQual2. Categories begin to emerge throughout this process. Concurrently, video tapes are segmented into analytically discrete events and summarized. Categories are further developed and refined and key segments of literacy events are identified for further analysis and transcription. More recently, these key segments are reviewed jointly with the teacher. These segments are then transcribed and coded for script, for the changing nature of student participation over time, and for the negotiation of meaning in learning events. These analyses assisted us in identifying the various scripts and social spaces illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.

eracy practices are constituted and how these practices influence teaching and learning. By analyzing the constructed script of the classroom, we attempt to account for what occurs at the individual and interpersonal levels over time. By examining the stable and improvisational attributes of scripts or the social practices of the learning context, we document how multiple social spaces come into existence in a single moment. We employ discourse analytical tools to account for what occurs in these moment-to-moment interactions among individuals, insofar as discourse analysis allows the indexing of the relationship between the larger community values and individual actions (Atkinson & Heritage, 1987; Levison,1983; Ochs, 1979).

Activity Theory (AT), in particular, allows us to examine the relationship between the interpersonal and the larger community (Engeström, 1987; 1993;Leont'ev, 1981). It is important to note that "activity" refers to the structural organization of a social practice (i.e., a cultural system) or the social plane that forwards cognitive growth and ideological views in both adults and children (Stone, 1995). AT affords the possibility of focusing simultaneously on the critical elements of learning practices: the community and interpersonal levels, the macro and micro levels.[2] An understanding of the community level accounts for how the social and discursive practices of the learning community shape what gets learned, who gets to learn, and how that learning is organized. A community's rules of production create values and beliefs that influence the habitus or social spaces of the learning context.

Following Engeström (1993), in Figure 3 below, we display the relationship of community organization to individual and interpersonal actions.

2. Others have developed a more elaborated understanding of sociocultural activity at various levels. Of particular import is Barbara Rogoff's (1995) work which examines learning and participation on several planes.

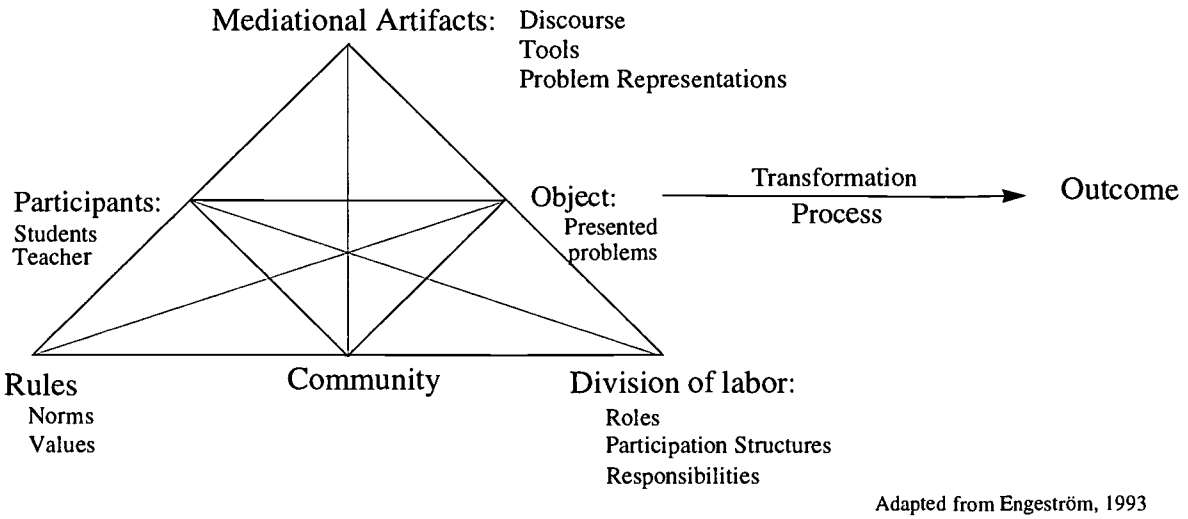

Figure 3

This diagram of a practice at the community and individual levels represents an interrelated system in which the object of activity, or that which animates social action during situated practices, motivates participants to make meaning out of a cultural object. The object of activity or larger cultural goal, here, does not in any predetermined way direct the unfolding nature of social action, which is inherently "opportunistic and creative" (Stone, 1996b). Rather, the durable qualities of practices and the improvisational nature of social actions interact to both maintain and change situated practices. This relationship between action, goal, and practice explains why cultural practices such as literacy events change over time while retaining some continuity. For this reason, as students participate in literacy events, they are both creating and recreating situated practices during the construction of literacy knowledge. Framed in this way, cultural practices and learning and development are in a reciprocal relationship.

The activity theoretic characterization of a social practice considers the pragmatic actions of students and teachers in classrooms as inextricably related to cognitive products such as the

strategies and skills of writing. In other words, the normative practices exhibit how the social production of domain knowledge is individually and collectively generated within the structure of a practice (Mehan, 1993). Further, since the unit of analysis in its broadest formulation includes the history of "patterned joint mediated activities" of a practice and their current instantiation, an examination of social interactions during literacy practices makes visible the nature of learning.

Our theoretical orientation and methodology discussed above lead us to view learning as changing participation over time as a means to document the outcomes or objects of activity in a community (Engeström, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; in press; Rogoff, Matusov, & White, in press). We draw from Rogoff's (1995) definition of apprenticeship as the mature goals of a community's social practices to examine how competence develops through co-participation in the joint activities of literacy. By utilizing AT we can document changes in roles and, thus, the changing nature of participation across literacy events. By focusing on the division of labor, access to conceptual tools, as well as the use of conceptual tools, we can account for the shifts in roles and responsibilities of participants and, further tease apart how literacy practices influence teaching and learning. In this way, we can also systematically demonstrate how literacy activity itself mediates the learning that is accomplished.

In addition, we, like Hutchins (1993), challenge more static notions of expertise that assert that the group expertise is simply the sum of the individuals' knowledge; rather, we can demonstrate and codify how students' knowledge and expertise (in the course of a literacy event or events) is distributed among participants as the nature of their participation shifts. In doing so, we challenge the commonly-held notion of expertise as being located in one individual and illustrate instead how expertise exists both in the individual and the group and their subsequent interactions; that is, to account for the ways in which thinking is distributed in social settings (Gutierrez

& Stone, 1997). Moreover, we attempt to demonstrate how knowledge is distributed when multiple forms of expertise become available to all participants. Expertise in this context is redefined as a socially and situated construct. Thus, we can utilize a framework of changing participation and apprenticeship as theoretical constructs to understand the data and have developed categories to describe the range of participation observed in learning contexts. Of significance is our similar treatment of other theoretical categories discussed earlier. In each case we utilize the particular construct while remaining grounded in our overarching theoretical orientation of cultural-historical theory.

So far, we have attempted to demonstrate that when classroom literacy practices are reframed as contexts in which cognition, activity, and situation are mutually constituted, then the striking complexity of learning and development in social settings becomes a topic for consideration. In order to capture this complexity, we offer a theoretical frame and methodology, through the constructs of social spaces, changing participation, and scripts, to take into account the essential interrelationship of the social and the individual. The dynamics and structure of literacy practices, then, reveal how direct experience occasions the dialogical construction of meaning, self, and knowledge.

In this article, we have illustrated how our theory and methodology allows for an unpackaging of the social organization of learning communities and provides opportunities to look at various social phenomena. Since literacy learning is a social and cultural process that links language and thinking in a community's practices, we have argued that what is needed is a theoretical perspective that takes into account the interaction between the social milieu and the individual. We have proposed cultural-historical psychology and a syncretic approach as a means of better understanding educational phenomena and for expanding conceptualizations of literacy.

Discussion

The theoretical and methodological approaches that we outline for the study of classroom literacy practices are heuristics intended to provide a measure of clarity to more traditional ways of viewing formal and informal learning settings. On the one hand, the historical and often mistaken identification of classrooms as relatively static settings has underestimated the complexity of classroom life and its inextricable relationship to learning. On the other hand, classroom activity and learning having been seen as disconnected or unrelated activities. As a consequence, a theoretical examination of the mutually constitutive relations between cognition and activity in the classroom arena has not yet been adequately addressed. It is for this reason that we argue for the a syncretic approach as a systematic and strategic consideration of the complexities of literacy practices in educational settings that promote learning and development. We believe that it is this combination of complimentary psychological and social theories and a multidimensional analyses that provide us with the possibility of better understanding the conflicting and contradictory practices of urban education, their influence on literacy learning, and their resulting tensions.

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