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assumptions. (Contains 49 references and 3 figures.) (Author/SAH)

The Power and Problems of Viewing Civics Discussion as a Cultural Activity

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Abstract

The Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) concluded that teaching is a cultural activity. But do claims about teaching based largely in comparisons of math teachers also apply to teaching in disciplines with less well-defined problems, like civics? What is gained and what is lost when the cultural aspect of teaching becomes the focus? Two cases of teachers who participated in attempting to change the patterns of classroom discussion are compared here to consider these questions. Classroom talk was coded and graphed and then viewed through the lens of speech code theory. Speech code theory seeks to uncover cultural assumptions and beliefs often invisible to group members.

Considerable support is found for using culture as a lens for understanding civics discussion. Teachers' cultural assumptions appeared magnified but not changed by the intervention introduced here. However, questions are raised regarding the uniformity of cultural scripts in civics, as opposed to math. Further, an emphasis upon culture minimizes the considerable power of personalized cultural meanings and in our drive to change culture we may ignore the power of change "at the margins" to improve practice when it is well aligned with existing cultural assumptions.

That culture matters in the classroom is not news. Observations of the power of culture have helped us move away from a deficit model of "underprivileged" children, to an understanding that cultural assumptions permeate the work of schools and can hamper the achievement of those who do not share the school's cultural assumptions (e.g. Au & Kawakami, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Kasten, 1992; Philips, 1983/1993; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). In light of this understanding, the recent claim of James Hiebert and James Stigler (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; Stigler & Hiebert, 1998; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), that teaching is a cultural activity, might seem unremarkable. However, Hiebert and Stigler have rescued this major finding of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) from obscurity through their application of this understanding to the professional development of teachers and the reform of schools. Hiebert and Stigler note that cultural notions of mathematics appear to prevent American teachers from moving "beyond the margins" of improving their practice or from even seeing discrepancies between current ideas about teaching and their own lessons (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000). Stigler and Hiebert attribute this to the failure of educational reformers to understand that attempts to change teaching are attempts to change a cultural activity. Instead, features of instruction, such as cooperative learning or using real-life problems, become ends in themselves and miss the underlying cultural assumptions; allowing the form of instruction to change while the substance remains intact.

These are powerful findings, based in video observations of hundreds of math classrooms across cultures. But, do claims about teaching based in comparisons of math teachers also apply to teachers in disciplines with less

"well-defined" problems (Voss & Post, 1988), like civics? What is gained and what is lost when the cultural aspect of teaching becomes the focus? This paper reports my attempts to make sense of Stigler and Hiebert's claims through the examination of two cases of teachers who participated with me in attempting to change the patterns of teacher-student talk—to introduce substantive, engaged discussions—in their U.S. elementary civics classrooms. The paper is organized as follows. First, I introduce the importance and difficulty of teaching for and with discussion. Second, I briefly describe the intervention and its impact on student talk. Third, I describe the participants and the methods of data collection and analysis. Fourth, I move beyond the apparent success of the intervention to examine differences that occur beyond "the margins" of each classroom and I present 2 hypotheses to explain the differences. Finally, I interpret the findings using the questions articulated above (does the discipline matter and what is gained and lost with a focus on culture).

The Importance and Difficulty of Teaching For and With Discussion

While educators of many stripes value the use of discussion in classrooms (e.g., Dillon, 1994b; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Reddy, Jacobs, McCrohon, & Herrenkohl, 1998; Resnick, 1987; Wilen, 1990), for many civics educators, discussion takes on special importance. These civic educators not only share others' appreciation of the power of learning through discussion, they also value discussion as an end in itself (e.g. Grant, 1996; Larson, 1997; Parker, 1996a; Parker & Hess, in press). In this view, discussion is intimately related to democracy (Parker, 2001; Soder, 1999). Preparing students for "popular sovereignty (Parker & Zumeta, 1999) requires that students learn through the "daily labor of strong democracy" (Parker, 1996a, p. 200), that is, through discussion and deliberation. As Benjamin

Barber (1984) puts it, "At the heart of strong democracy is talk" (p. 173). "There is simply no day in the life of a democracy when citizens can afford either to stop talking themselves or to stop others from talking to them" (p. 193). Teaching in a democracy requires the apprenticeship of students to democratic talk.

For all its importance, students are more often on the receiving end of talk than apprentices to talk. Patterns of talk in American classrooms are well documented and they are not encouraging. Despite repeated efforts to influence classroom talk, students rarely ask questions (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1981; Dillon, 1988; Mehan, 1979; Susskind, 1979) and the talk of the teacher dominates (Goodlad, 1984; Marks, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997; Nystrand, Gamoran, & Carbonaro, 1998; Sirotnik, 1998).

The Intervention

In contrast to this nation-wide trend, two elementary school teachers and I dramatically changed patterns of talk in two civics classrooms. Teachers were asked to engage their students in deliberation as a part of their government unit. Excerpts from the elementary version of the We The People curriculum (Center for Civic Education, 1988) were adapted as the basis of the 12-lesson unit. To facilitate student deliberation in both small and large groups, the students were taught problem-solving steps, and audience roles that mirrored the problem-solving steps. The problem-solving steps and audience roles were based conceptually on the "Steps Plus Roles" process developed by Herrenkohl and Guerra (1998) in their study of elementary science classrooms and adapted for use with ill-structured civics problems. Steps Plus Roles teaches students in small groups to follow steps to solving a problem designed by the teacher. Then, during small group reports, students in the audience take on "roles" of

questioning the reporters. These roles give audience members the right and responsibility to check to see how closely the small group followed the process and to understand and even challenge the small group's thinking when necessary. The intent is to provide a scaffold (Wood & Middleton, 1975) in the social setting to support students as they learn to use what small group reporters say as thinking devices in the large group—thus increasing student engagement in the classroom discussion.

What resulted was a dramatic flip-flop of classroom talk. That is, students went from initiating 10 to 26 percent of the talk during class sessions to initiating 66 to 91 percent. Students and teachers, in effect, traded places with respect to their initiation of classroom talk (for a complete description of the intervention and its results, see Beck, under review).

The Participants

I selected the teachers for this study based upon their willingness to participate and the fact that they worked in similar settings. The focus of this study is on the cultural aspects of school change. Therefore, I worked to keep the settings and the participants as similar as possible in order to cast a more fine-tuned analysis of the subtle differences between settings. I also encouraged the teachers to take the basic framework of the intervention and adapt it to their own purposes, thus mirroring to some degree, the way teachers might adapt strategies presented by others in their regular work lives.

The teachers, Mrs. Anderson and Ms. Brazaitys (pseudonyms) were both white females teaching 4th grade students in the same suburban school district. Both teachers came recommended by their principals as teachers who might be willing and able to implement a unit on government that called for a high degree

of student engagement. Mrs. Anderson had three years experience with a B.A. from a four-year private university. Ms. Brazaitys had seven years experience with a B.S. in Elementary Education and a M.A. in Special Education.

The schools were similar as well. Elk Lake (Mrs. Anderson's school) and Olympus (Ms. Brazaitys' school) both report that 70 percent of their student population is "white." 37.1 percent of students at Elk Lake live in poverty as do 42.4 percent of students at Olympus. Available standardized test scores were similar between buildings as well.

Independently, both teachers voiced concern prior to the study about their students' ability to work in small groups. Teachers spoke about the tendency for conflict to erupt quickly in these classrooms and the need of the teachers to constantly monitor and direct these students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three sources of data were used to assess the impact of problem-solving steps and roles in these 4th-grade civics classrooms: video and audio tapes of classroom activity and presentations, interviews of students and teachers, and my observations and field notes.

Data analysis was guided by Huberman and Miles' (1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994) iterative model of data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data were reduced initially through the use of codes. Coding the transcriptions required that the "bits" of data to be coded be established. In this I followed Herrenkohl's lead (1998) and adapted Tharp and Gallimore's episode criteria (1988). I created initiation episodes involving at least two participants, each of whom took at least one speech turn apiece. "Who" created one possible boundary between episodes—whenever the speakers

changed, I noted a new episode. However, within exchanges between two speakers, I also delineated episodes. The criteria were based on the content of the speech. If a speaker changed the topic, I noted a new episode. In addition, if the speaker asked a new question about the same topic, I considered it a new episode. When speakers rephrased or explained questions I considered the speech as part of the same initiation episode. With the episodes established I turned my attention to coding the episodes.

Five coding categories were developed for student talk and 2 coding categories were developed for teacher talk (for student codes see Beck, under review). Most relevant to this report is the coding of teacher talk. The codes "authority" and "inquiry" subsumed the codes used for student talk even as they built on them. When teachers engaged with students in seeking to understand what the students meant, to challenge students' ideas, or to seek to build agreement, (separate categories of student coding) it was coded as inquiry. When teachers provided factual information, granted permission, gave directives and requested pre-specified information, it was coded as authority. The coded data were graphed to see initial patterns.

Considering issues of culture in the classroom required tools designed specifically for this task. For this I turned to the tools of speech code theory. Speech code theory examines speech with the assumptions that within speech lie the premises, rules, and meanings, in fact the culture, of the group (Philipsen, 1997). Gerry Philipsen (Philipsen, 1997) contends that speech codes are woven into speaking in four ways—patterns of speaking, metacommunicative vocabularies, explanations of communicative conduct, and rituals by which the emotion and objective of the group are made explicit. Because speech code

theory is designed for use within culturally distinctive groups over a relatively long period of time, not all of these categories are equally helpful in studying the classroom (Beck, 1998). I focused on Philipsen's final three sources of data (metacommunicative vocabularies, communicative explanations, and a type of ritual that appears often in classrooms, social dramas) as they are most readily available and helpful for reducing classroom data for analysis.

I found metacommunicative vocabularies and communicative explanation largely in the talk of the teacher. Teachers make explicit rules and expectations about communicative behavior. For example, they might set expectations in advance (e.g. "... that's fine to fight over things and argue and come up with reasons. But if it's not related, you have to nip it in the bud" (O3)). Teachers also provide feedback to students about their communicative behavior, providing information about the purposes of communication (e.g. "Okay, we have excellent, excellent ideas, you're expanding on what they're thinking" (O7)). These utterances were coded as metacommunicative talk and compiled for analysis.

Rituals in the classroom appear in a variety of places. For purposes of data reduction in this study, I focused on the category of rituals that Philipsen calls "social dramas." Social dramas are times when communicative conduct is criticized. The classroom provides ample examples of social dramas. Teachers are able to criticize in public ways that might seem offensive in other settings. The teacher enforces her expectations for communication (e.g. "Don't holler out guys.... He has no right to holler your name and interrupt you." (EL8)). Students also confront one another about their communicative behavior (e.g. "I just told you the negative and positive things." (EL11)). When there was conflict

or disagreement regarding how participants communicate with one another in transcripts of class sessions or interviews, I coded such conflicts as social dramas. I sought evidence of meta-communicative language, communicative explanations, and social dramas in the classroom transcripts, interviews, and the analytic memos written throughout the study.

Excerpts that were coded as metacommunicative language, communicative explanation, or social dramas were compiled together and searched for patterns. These patterns were used as the basis for propositions that were tested against the evidence in the data. With supportable propositions created for both classrooms, I focused my attention on the relationship between the cases. I used what I learned from the creation and confirmation of the propositions as a basis for creating "plausible hypotheses" (Ball, 1997) about why the students and teachers used the intervention differently in the two settings.

Differences in Classroom Talk Patterns

As stated above, students in this study participated at high levels in classroom reporting sessions where problem-solving steps and audience roles were in place. Important differences existed however, between the classrooms that have implications for viewing discussion and teaching as cultural activities. Here I describe the ways in which the talk differed.

In almost every reporting session Elk Lake students initiated a larger percentage of talk than did those at Olympus. After introducing and modeling the kinds of questions students might ask of reporters, the Elk Lake teacher handed over responsibility to the students for asking questions and then observed quietly. The percentage of Elk Lake teacher initiations hovered around 20%, with her students initiating approximately 80% of the talk. By contrast, Ms.

Brazaitys at Olympus *gradually* gave over the talk to the students. During the initial reporting sessions, Ms. Brazaitys initiated 54% of the talk while her students initiated 46%. Over the course of the study Ms. Brazaitys allowed her students to dominate the talk increasingly up to a high of 73% during the judicial branch reporting sessions. Olympus students never quite achieved the high percentages of initiations that Elk Lake students achieved and maintained (See Figure 1).
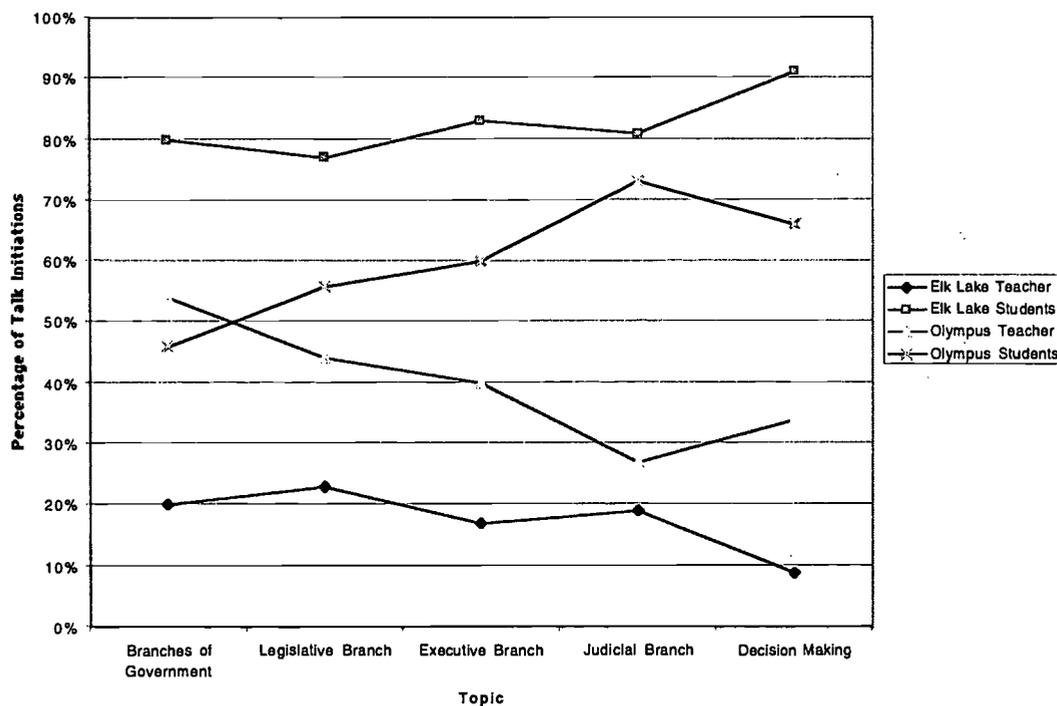
Figure 1: Initiated Talk by Topic

Yet considering only the amount of talk is deceptive. Students at Elk Lake were more likely to ask procedural questions and teacher-type questions than students at Olympus. Further, Elk Lake students were less likely to initiate challenges of the speakers than was observed at Olympus. While students at Elk Lake were initiating a far greater percentage of talk than students at Olympus,

the Elk Lake students were less likely to initiate talk that met the study's definition of engagement as using what others say as a "thinking device." Elk Lake students started out strong and became increasingly focused on more trivial talk. Olympus students, in contrast, continued to increase the percentage of initiations that demonstrated actual engagement, while more procedural questions dwindled to 4 percent of their total initiations (See Figure 2).
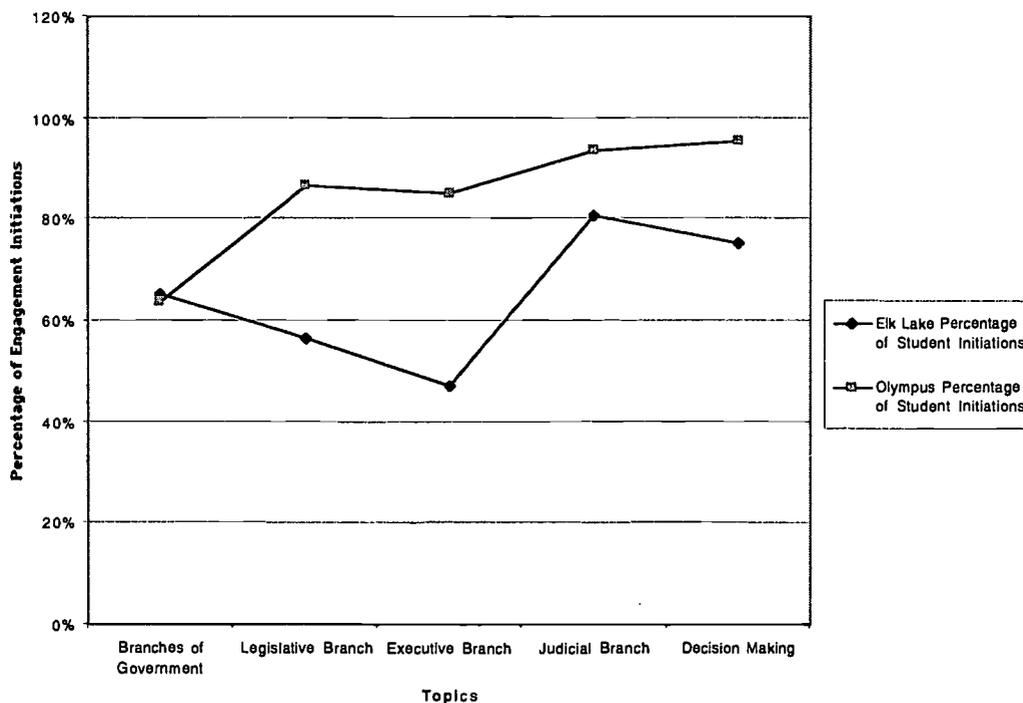
Figure 2: Percentage of Student Initiations Coded as Engagement by Topic

How might these differences be explained and how might notions of culture inform what is at play here? While a study of this type and size cannot present definitive answers to these questions, in what follows I consider two plausible hypotheses. First, the way students used the audience roles was based, at least in part, on the teacher's adaptation of the roles. That is, the most important cultural player in the classroom appeared to be the teacher. Students

were savvy interpreters and followers of the teachers' cultural lead. Second, the teachers adapted the intervention based on differing cultural metaphors that organized their conceptions of the exercise.

Teachers' Role Adaptation

As discussed above, teacher talk was coded as "authority" or "inquiry." Graphing these trends is revealing (See Figure 3). Mrs. Anderson at Elk Lake spoke largely from a position of authority. During the first three sessions where baseline coding was done, Mrs. Anderson spoke as an authority or asked "test" type questions (Nystrand, 1997) 70% of the time. In sharp contrast Ms. Brazaitys taught from the identical material but only 28% of her talk was coded "authority." For the reporting sessions Mrs. Anderson spoke less but with a greater percentage of her talk being authoritative. Ms. Brazaitys spoke more, but her talk was balanced between authority and inquiry.
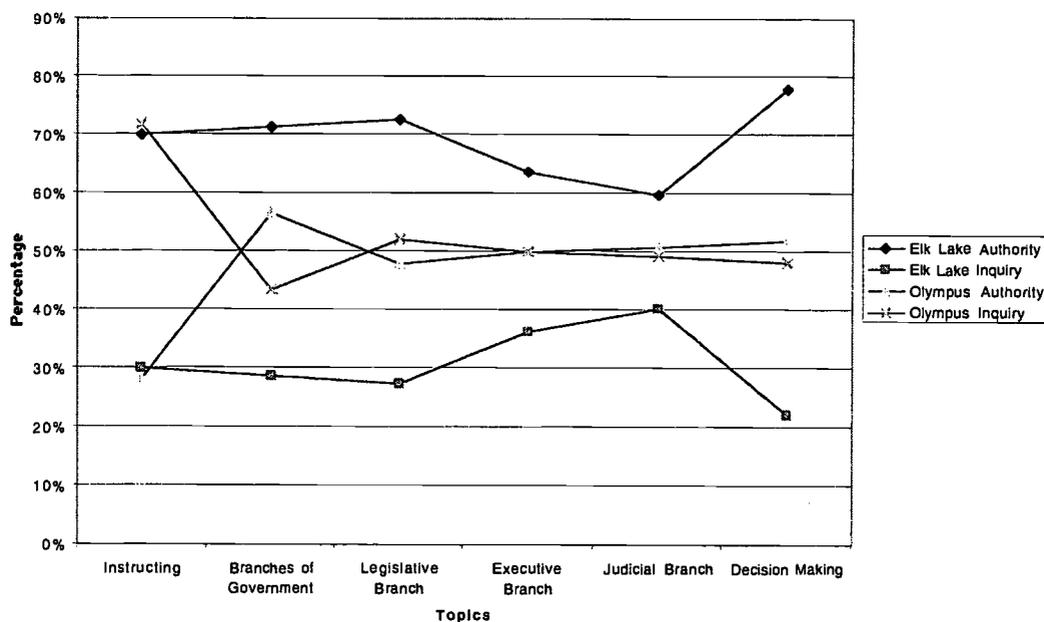
Figure 3: Teacher Talk Coded by Stance

A brief excerpt from the transcripts of each teacher provides an illustration of the differences in how the teachers spoke with their students. In these examples, the teachers are working with their students immediately after an initial readers' theater about a ship's captain and crew where the captain had unlimited power. The teachers' goal at this point was to work with the students on step one of the process: finding the problem. This first excerpt is from Elk Lake.

> Mrs. A: Let's look at the whole picture here. This is happening on one ship. But do you think it is probably happening on other ships too? Yeah? So taking care of one captain is that going to solve the problem of sailors being treated unfairly?
>
> ?: Yeah.
>
> ?: No.
>
> Mrs. A: Let's take Carl's good example. . . . Carl said it would be like treating someone who couldn't speak English in the classroom very, well, unfairly. If that was happening in one classroom in the country and we took care of one of those teachers, would that take care of all the problems?
>
> ?: It could.
>
> Mrs. A: Let's take turns. Is taking care of one captain going to do the trick (EL1/5)?

Mrs. Anderson appeared to have an answer in mind as she talked with her students. She wanted students to realize that trying to solve a specific problem would not help the bigger problem of captains having ultimate power over their crews. This is in fact an important part of defining the problem broadly. Yet her class seemed unwilling to concede the point—they seemed to have their own

ideas. Her initial question met opposing responses. So she pressed her point. After the discourse cited above, Mrs. Anderson continued returning to this question until no one disagreed with her. The point here is that Mrs. Anderson did not inquire about what students' conceptions were. Rather, she attempted to help them see and adopt her conception of the problem.

Contrast Mrs. Anderson's authoritative stance with the way Ms Brazaitys dealt with a similar issue.

Ms. B:	[Paraphrasing a student's comment.] So the captain wanted things his way so he whipped and he yelled at people. Alright. So what's the central idea . . . ? Why did he get away with doing this to people?
Ellen:	I know!
Ms. B:	Okay. Ellen
Ellen:	Cause he's the captain of the boat.
Lyle:	No.
Ms. B:	So what's that mean?
Ellen:	So that means he can boss them around.
T:	He got away with it?
Ellen:	He owns the boat.
T:	He got away with it because he was the captain of the boat. Okay. What right does that give him, him being the captain of the boat? Let's go with that idea. Don?
Don:	He's in charge of it and everybody on it needs to listen to him or they get [inaudible].
T:	Okay. . . How do you feel about that (O1/9)?

Ms. Brazaitys appeared to have an agenda as well. Like Mrs. Anderson she wanted her students to understand the dangers of unlimited power applied beyond a single example ("What's the central idea?"). Yet her approach was quite different. She probed for clarification. Once she understood the student's idea, she molded it subtly (note how her paraphrase of Ellen's remark changed it slightly) and then she suggested that the group "go with that idea." Ms. Brazaitys inquired after what her students were thinking rather than seeking to impose the right answer upon them.

Analysis of teachers' comments during small group work reveals that the teachers' interaction patterns during small group work was similar to the ways in which the teachers interacted with students during large group instruction. Mrs. Anderson sought to understand what students were thinking but she was more likely to assume an authoritative role. Ms. Brazaitys was frequently authoritative but balanced that authority with sustained efforts to talk seriously about students' issues with them.

As Figure 3 illustrates, Mrs. Anderson's greater reliance on authority in the classroom and Ms. Brazaitys' balance between authority and inquiry during classroom talk held across the study. Recall as well that during reporting sessions, Mrs. Anderson always initiated a smaller percentage of classroom talk than did Ms. Brazaitys (Figure 1). These findings support a conclusion that Mrs. Anderson was only occasionally *engaged* in classroom discussion, in that she talked less frequently and when she did, she was less likely to allow what students said to shape her thinking. Ms. Brazaitys, on the other hand, was quite engaged in classroom discussions. She not only interacted more with students

but when she interacted she did so by using what students said as a thinking device—she seemed more likely to listen.

Likewise, the students in the respective classrooms behaved in a manner similar to their teachers. While the Elk Lake students talked a great deal, they were less likely to respond with extended discussion about what a speaker had said. Like Mrs. Anderson, her students seemed more likely to be satisfied with a single, right answer. At Olympus, both teacher and students demonstrated a willingness to listen, understand, and challenge the speaker. There were other similarities between teachers and students that support the hypothesis that students based their adaptation of the roles upon how the teachers defined their own roles in the classroom.

Some Discussion

How do these observations relate to notions of discussion and teaching as cultural activities? Two points are especially salient here. First, these observations support Stiegler and Hiebert's assertions regarding the power of cultural understandings in classrooms. It could be argued that while the patterns of student and teacher behavior changed significantly during this intervention, those changes were generally "at the margins" (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000 p. 6). That is, the activity of the classroom changed but, the teachers' assumptions about what it is to teach civics and the substance of their talk appear to have been in place at the beginning of the study. The intervention appeared to *magnify* those assumptions rather than to create or change them. For Mrs. Anderson and her students, the intervention often served as a vehicle to move responsibility for maintaining fairly repressive discursive patterns from teacher control to student control. The role the students assumed was modeled after their authoritative

teacher, not based in notions of inquiring student. In Ms. Brazaitys' classroom however, the intervention was a vehicle that facilitated robust discussion, perhaps because the intervention was culturally consistent with Ms. Brazaitys' assumptions about how students learn and what they should be doing. In Ms. Brazaitys' case, "at the margins" change was powerful change. The intervention gave Ms. Brazaitys and her students a tool that facilitated a fuller realization of the cultural assumptions and beliefs that supported Ms. Brazaitys' practice. This raises the question: should the primary concern of reform-minded individuals be the changing of culture or the alignment of powerful pedagogy with existing cultural beliefs? I suspect that a careful consideration of this question may cause us to give different answers in different classrooms and perhaps, in different disciplines.

Second, the students' ability to discover and adapt to the patterns of the teachers speaks both to the students' status as cultural players in a classroom and to the power of the teacher to set and maintain classroom cultures. Students in this study, appeared to attend and adapt to the cultural assumptions of the intervention as interpreted by each teacher. This suggests that while any cultural change in classrooms must include the socialization of the students, students may readily adopt a consistent, well-articulated conception of teaching and learning. Changing practice based in particular cultural assumptions is not necessarily subverted by unacculturated students. Given time and models, students are quite able to adopt cultural ways of thinking that are initially foreign. But what holds these assumptions and practices together? The answer to this question is found in my second plausible hypothesis regarding the metaphors adopted by the teachers.

Metaphors of Audience Roles

The audience roles as I conceived of them were roles designed to foster deliberation; coming together to decide what "we" should do (Dillon, 1994a). The teachers in this study, however, brought their own assumptions and conceptions to the project. Teachers' speech patterns hold clues to the underlying cultural basis of these teachers' perspectives. The analysis of the teachers' meta-communicative comments and the social dramas of the classroom indicate that they held metaphors that organized their conceptions of the audience roles. These metaphors differed from each other's and from my own. The term "metaphor" is not used here in the literary sense. Rather, the term is borrowed from the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and others (e.g. Sweetser, 1992). From this theoretical framework, metaphor is a system of organizing conceptions that influence how people view reality and act in the world. Metaphors enable and constrain how we think and act and typically are embedded in our language and our culture. The metaphors utilized by the teachers appeared to inform the teachers' decision making and their actions. And by extension, the teachers' metaphors informed the actions of their students as well. I discuss each teacher's metaphor in turn.

Elk Lake's Metaphor

For Mrs. Anderson the audience roles were provided to students to encourage their thinking. She regularly admonished students to think.

> Mrs. A: You guys did a really nice job of questioning one another. You did a nice job making each other think. And next time you go into your small groups, I want you to think about things you are going to have to answer (EL5).

Mrs. Anderson emphasized thinking in three areas. She wanted students to think about the questions they asked.

> Mrs. A: So really spend some time thinking about how you could ask that question (EL9).

She wanted students to think about the small group presentations.

> Mrs. A: I want you to continue to really listen and think hard about what these people are presenting (EL5).

Perhaps most often however, Mrs. Anderson stressed the purpose behind asking questions of the small group reporters—to make the reporters think.

> Mrs. A: Yesterday Carl asked a fabulous question right at the end that really caused the group to think. . . . You're asking questions to hear the answer and to make this group up here think about the decision that they've made (EL9).

At one point Elk Lake students were asking one procedural question after another. Mrs. Anderson asked the students to consider "what questions don't accomplish much and why." Lindsey provided an answer.

> Lindsey: And they weren't even really questions that would make anybody think at all. They were just like, yes, no, yes, no.

> Mrs. A: Okay. So we need to work on making questions that really make you think (EL10).

For Mrs. Anderson, the audience roles were tools of thinking. Audience roles held students in the audience accountable for holding the reporters accountable for thinking. This was a thinking skills curriculum.

Conceptualizing audience roles as tools to make people think helps explain why students at Elk Lake used the audience roles as they did in two ways.

First, if the audience roles were designed to make people think, the deliberative and decision-making functions become hidden. When students were asked to decide how to spend money they had earned, the group followed the process of the previous sessions. They dutifully asked one another questions about what each group proposed without any apparent attempt to examine how what was being proposed by the smaller group affected the larger class. What follows are two typical questions.

Andrea: Do you have more than one problem (EL11/8)?

Sadie: How does this decision solve your problem (EL11/9)?

Notice that the focus continued to be on the small group. ("Do *you* have more than one problem?" "How does this decision solve *your* problem?") Students seemed intent on making the reporters think (or on checking to see if they had thought), without an understanding that the problem and the decision did not belong to the small group alone—it belonged to the entire class. The roles were transformed into thinking roles and their deliberative function was lost.

Second, while Elk Lake students engaged at high levels and they challenged one another, reporting sessions often included questions that did not seem to build off of what was being proposed. They sometimes seemed content to ask questions off the chart, regardless of their relationship to what the group was proposing. Elk Lake students might have been less engaged because they saw their role primarily as one of prompting thinking in the small group by posing thoughtful questions. The questioners' roles ended when they created a

question that made the reporter think. There was therefore little need to follow up on questions or to challenge solutions.

Olympus' Metaphor

Ms. Brazaitys seemed to value thinking as well. However, her primary metaphor for audience roles might be categorized as "reasoned argument." When Ms. Brazaitys spoke about communicative behavior she used labels such as "disagree," "argue," even "fight." Audience roles allowed and encouraged students to voice their opinions.

Ms. B: . . . We're going to respect (each) other and . . . if you want to agree or disagree with them, you'll get your chance (O2SD1).

However, disagreement had to be tempered with reasons.

Ms. B: As long as you can back up what you are saying, it makes sense, you can argue (O8SD2).

As the above excerpts indicate, Ms. Brazaitys focused on both argument and providing reasons. She encouraged students to agree or disagree, to argue, as long as they had reasons.

Ms. Brazaitys' conception of the audience roles more closely matched what I had in mind—as a means of deciding what we should do, particularly as students engaged in deciding how to spend their money.

Ms. B: Ask good questions because at the end, we have to make decisions on . . . the [choices] . . . you . . . present. We're going to choose. And if people give good reasons while they're presenting that's gonna go a lot faster (O11SD3).

Here Ms. Brazaitys incorporated the choosing aspect of audience roles with her metaphor of reasoned argument. Giving good reasons makes the session go

more quickly because the class will spend less time attempting to clarify and understand the reasoning of the reporters.

Conceptualizing audience roles as reasoned argument had implications for the behavior of students at Olympus. For the purposes of this discussion, I focus on one way in which such a metaphor facilitated engagement and one way in which it detracted from deliberation.

Seeing audience roles as tools for reasoned argument may explain the high degree of engagement at Olympus where students attempted to understand and challenge one another. Reasoned argument as Ms. Brazaitys communicated it involved the dual process of listening and responding. Seeking to understand is the essence of listening. You cannot reason with people unless you understand their reasoning. Further, students at Olympus challenged one another much more frequently than did students at Elk Lake. The focus on presenting arguments and reasons encourages such challenges. Students may be freer to state their disagreements when the object of the challenge is the reasoning, not the students themselves.

While reasoned argument seems a productive metaphor for encouraging student engagement, it also got in the way of deliberative behavior. The metaphor of argument holds anti-deliberative connotations. An argument typically has winners and losers while in a deliberation we identify our common interests. Those in arguments and fights are adversaries. Those who deliberate are members of a community. Students at Olympus became enamored with the excitement of the adversarial experience. In an interview Lyle and Laurie talked about arguing.

Lyle: I like to get in fights with everybody.

I: What do you mean by fights?

Laurie: Like arguing, right?

Lyle: Yeah.

I: Why is that enjoyable?

Lyle: Cause it's better than sitting around and talking (OI3/2).

While Ms. Brazaitys reminded students that a purpose of audience roles was to make the best decision possible, the argument metaphor exerted its power on the group. It is hardly surprising that the teacher and students were drawn to argument—it is a prominent metaphor in our society (see Sweetser, 1992). However, the strength of the metaphor threatened to overwhelm attempts to build an understanding of deliberation, a primary goal of this intervention.

Further Discussion

Early in this paper I posed two questions. Do claims about teaching based in comparisons of math teachers also apply to teachers in disciplines with less "well-defined" problems, like civics? What is lost and what is gained when the cultural aspect of teaching becomes the focus? In addition to points made earlier (teacher as cultural leader, and the possibility that "at the margins" change is powerful when it matches cultural assumptions and cultural adaptability of students) here I suggest additional non-sequential answers to both questions.

Stigler and Hiebert's reported basis for stating that teaching is a cultural activity centers around international comparisons of math teaching. They state that teachers are more alike than different within a culture (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; 1998; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Yet this study presents two teachers with considerably different cultural assumptions about the purpose of civics instruction and discussion within the same culture. While the size of the study

precludes our understanding the prevalence of these different assumptions, the study raises two relevant possibilities. First, it illustrates a difficulty with viewing teaching discussion as a cultural activity. That is, an emphasis upon a general culture influencing classroom practice risks making culture a monolith. While the idea helps us to properly see the pervasiveness and invisibility of culture and the need to address cultural issues, it skirts past the fact that cultural understandings, in the words of "Leont'ev, . . . [have a] 'double life,' . . . as represented in the contradictory relation between those that arise out of individuals' personal experiences (personalized meanings) and those that are socially-historically produced (communalized meanings)" (Huspek & Kendall, 1991, p. 4). The cultural systems represented by these teachers are based both in the meanings "socially validated" by the surrounding community and upon the unique meanings they use "to make sense of the inner life and its relation to the external world" (Huspek & Kendall, 1991, p. 4). To speak of culture as a determinate monolith is to miss the complexity of cultural systems and of the individual teacher's place within it. While it may be true, as Stigler and Hiebert claim, that differences are greater between cultures than between individuals, such an observation may cause us to miss the considerable differences between individuals and between the ways in which individuals understand and interpret culture.

Second, this study points to the possibility that our cultural understandings of math education may be more established and consistent than our cultural understandings of civics education. These cases illustrate elementary teachers with very little background in civics, drawing upon different pedagogical knowledge and cultural assumptions. Both teachers were provided

with information about the assumptions behind the design of the intervention. Yet they interpreted the intervention through very different, personalized cultural assumptions. While Mrs. Anderson cast the intervention as one concerned with thinking skills, she seemed to teach the civics lessons more like a U.S. math lesson, with discussion as a set of procedures that must be taught and followed (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Ms Brazaitys, on the other hand, used popular political notions of debate and argument to frame the intervention, while seeming to draw on the language of literature pedagogy (e.g. "What's the central idea?"). The considerable differences between these two teachers could be explained by evoking the personalized meanings I reference above. But, the differences may go deeper. There appears to be very little common ground between the teachers' conceptions of civics instruction. They appear to borrow cultural understandings from other subjects to teach civics. The cultural script to which Stiger, Hiebert and others refer (i.e. Anders, 1995) may be less well developed in elementary civics teaching because civics is frequently at the margins itself as an elementary school subject. That is to say, teaching may not be a cultural activity to the same extent in every subject. This point merits further investigation. To help teachers change, we must also know in greater detail about both the personalized meanings teachers bring and any cultural assumptions that seem fundamental to most U.S. teachers' attempts to lead civics discussions.

Rather than detracting from the work of Stigler and Hiebert, the cautions discussed above underline the power of viewing civics discussion (and teaching in general) as a cultural activity. While Stigler and Hiebert have articulated these advantages well (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; 1998; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), I reiterate

one important gain here that this study highlights. Seeing discussion as part of a cultural system, helps us understand why patterns of classroom discourse are so resistant to change, as well as providing insights into how changes might be introduced. As Stigler and Hiebert point out (1998; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), cultural change requires common understandings and goals. These elementary civics educators seemed worlds apart in their understanding of civic goals.

Implications

Understanding that teaching is a cultural activity may radically alter our often unsuccessful approaches to fostering school reform and the professional development of teachers. This study seeks to contribute to such an effort. Pointing to speech code theory may assist us in locating and understanding culture in the classroom. Noting the power of the teacher to communicate cultural understandings effectively suggest that the locus of cultural change may indeed be the teacher. Addressing disciplinary differences reminds us that some cultural scripts may be more powerful than others.

There are other implications as well. In our enthusiasm to understand the role of culture in teaching, we risk racing past the individual's personalized cultural understandings in favor of communal meanings. Such a move ignores the need to assist individuals with recognizing their personalized meanings and may render our attempts at cultural change ineffective. As the teachers in this study demonstrate, cultural understandings are both based in the wider culture and wholly personal. Teachers may indeed need to work together, voicing their personalized meanings, to achieve a communal meaning. Such work however, will never erase the personal nature of cultural understandings.

For civics education it is worth noting that addressing the powerful cultural metaphors to which elementary civics teachers default may require extended time with alternative conceptions of citizenship and discussion (e.g. Barber, 1984; Brann, 1994; Dillon, 1994b; Parker, 1996a; Parker, 1996b; Parker & Zumeta, 1999). A new metaphor must be created. A quick fix will not do. Absent extended, national and local discussions about discussion, little is likely to change.

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