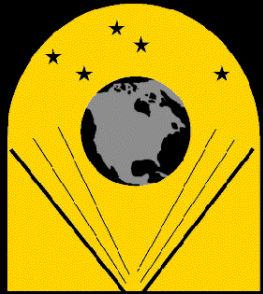


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Cultural Production as Reproduction in the Appropriation of Mediational Means in School and in Out-of-School Contexts

Christopher Worthman, DePaul University

Abstract

This article presents instances of two children, ages 6 and 10, using representational speech, or the language of formal instruction, in school and in out-of-school contexts. I contend that the children purposely chose to use this language in different contexts and made the distinction between it and other mediational means, such as the more familiar language of home, for reasons tied to the authoritative and hegemonic nature of representational speech. Language use is a complex and dynamic process that arises from not only the context but also from the sociocultural backgrounds and interests of the participants as well the mediational means available to them. As such, teachers need to support their students in their contesting of culture in all situations, being aware of the interaction that takes place in the classroom and where ultimately that interaction leads. Helping students recognize mediational means and why they are used in particular situations may lead to real and positive change that allows for multiple perspectives and voices in the classroom and society.

I open this article with an anecdote from my first year of teaching fifth- and sixth-grade language arts. I taught at a private inner city school that served African American males. Most of the students found their way to the school through a process of elimination. They had no success in the public school system, and many had been labeled as having behavioral or learning problems. Friends, relatives, and neighbors recommended the school as possibly a last chance before they stopped going to school all together.

After two months, I settled in and established a routine centered on process writing and literature-based instruction. Students often worked collaboratively on self-selected and teacher-initiated projects. Classes began with students writing in journals. After a 10-minute mini-lesson, the rest of class time was given over to project work, literature groups, and individual and group conferences with me. This class format, although often chaotic, appeared to interest and challenge students—particularly after they realized there were deadlines to meet and revisions to make on their work—that is, except for Eric, who questioned much of what went on in class. One day I asked what he thought I should do to make school interesting and challenging for him. He shrugged and said he did not know. I asked what he would do if he were the teacher. He looked at me, smiled, and said he would “do better” than I was doing. I asked if he would use different materials or treat the students differently. He said, “I’ll show you what I would do.” His smile suggested that he may have been joking, but I said, “Okay, half of tomorrow’s class is yours to teach.” Eric nodded and said, “All right.”

I had not expected Eric to come to school prepared to teach, so when he walked to the front of the class the next morning I was surprised. He told me to take a seat and said, “Remember what you said.” I nodded and sat in his chair. He told the class that he was the teacher for the day and that if anyone gave him a problem he would deal with them. Everyone looked at me, and I only shrugged. “He’s the teacher today,” I said. The others’ amusement quickly evaporated, however, as Eric proceeded first to lecture about the reading assignment and then to quiz them on it. He stood in front of the class and worked from the textbook, asking questions and, if there was no immediate response or if the response was “incorrect,” reading off the correct answer. When a student complained about being curtly told he was wrong, Eric said, “You’re wrong, no ifs, buts, or ands about it.” He held up the book, a finger pointing to the section he was reading, to show where, in part, his authority resided.

While sitting at Eric’s seat and being ignored by him, I was reminded of the childhood game of playing school, that make-believe activity that even the most adamant haters of school play and that invariably takes the form of a question-and-answer dialogue, with the teacher giving the directives and chosen students responding. Eric was serious in his role as teacher and indicated in his interaction with the class what he thought constituted knowledge and how that knowledge is shared. Playing school is no different. Authority resides in the child-made-teacher, and all the other children agree to the form and function of the game and their roles as “students,” waiting anxiously, first, for their

turn to be called on and, second, for their turn to be teacher. They mimic the words and actions of their teachers with dramatic emphasis on the authority of the teacher-talk and the transmission of knowledge. Such emphasis on authority and the transmission of knowledge suggests what students believe about the structures of school, society, and knowledge even as many of them struggle within these structures.

Much of the tension between Eric and me, I now believe, was rooted in the image or persona I conveyed as a teacher and how it contrasted with what he expected of school and of me. Eric’s background was etched by contact with social service agencies and government-sponsored programs, including state child service agencies, public schools, and community organizations, both private and public. He understood what he needed to do to succeed within the existing social order even as he found the task daunting, and he had come to expect school to be a certain way, with what is said conforming to a certain language style, which he exemplified in his teacher impersonation. This is not to say that Eric, or other students, did not take advantage of or adapt to the new classroom pedagogy or that the pedagogy met all the other students’ needs or expectations. The anecdote merely points out that even as Eric struggled within previous, more traditional school structures, he still believed such structures were what school was about, and anything less, was a slight to him.

For Eric and children who play school, performance is serious business, and even if they do not excel in or value formal instruction within a school context, they believe their representation to be what school is about and that there is power and significance in the knowledge sanctioned by schools. Over the past couple of years, I have experienced this phenomenon anew in the words and actions of my son, Ryne. As a six-year-old, Ryne began appropriating, or what I call “trying-out,” a language of formal instruction in out-of-school contexts or situations that were familiar to him but in which he never used this language before. In his interactions with his mother and me, he would present information as if it were borne of him and as if nothing in our experiences related to the information. In other words, knowledge moved from him to us in objectified fashion, with no consideration of the context or our prior experience. Before this, Ryne had played school with neighbor kids and cousins on many occasions, but the trying out of a language of formal instruction that caught my interest was more subtle and purposeful and done in familial interactions, which I present later in this article. He nor I would classify these interactions as play.

In defining what constitutes the language of formal instruction used by Ryne and Eric, I borrow from Minick’s (1993) research and analysis of repre-

sentational speech. She writes that representational speech concerns itself with “bracketing off” human interests and concerns from what is said, making meaning dependent on the words spoken and, thus, the speaker. Such speech is often a product of the classroom, where it is used as a means of classroom management and control and for imparting specific information to students, hence my referring to it as a language of formal instruction. Representational speech is often a textbook-based speech, where what is learned is the terminology or language of the content area with little consideration of the activities or contexts of which this language is a natural part. It is an objectified knowledge. For example, to learn the parts of the body without focusing on one’s own body or others’ bodies and how these parts function in people’s lives or the significance of these parts in the work of biologists and medical professionals is to decontextualize and objectify what is learned. It is to disengage the language from the object it represents as if the language stands alone as knowledge.

Representational speech neglects lived experience and what the learner brings to and takes away from the learning event that is relevant to her life. Indeed, representational speech disembodies knowledge from human interests and concerns and the situation in which it is presented, often for hegemonic effect, or for the maintenance of existing power relations and a top-down flow of knowledge. It is important to realize, however, that as a mediational means, representational speech is neither exclusive to the domain of schools nor the only language style used in schools. One needs only to read a contractual agreement drawn up by lawyers to realize this. Representational speech is one way of interacting, and as a language of formal instruction, it can be understood as a way of asserting authority (Minick, 1993), even, I think, for those whose position within a particular situation is not normally imbued with authority. The validity and usefulness of the information are ingrained in the authority of the speaker, an authority representing the position one inhabits and not the person.

During the situations with Ryne and, in retrospect, with Eric where representational speech was used, I found myself asking the Bakhtinian question, “Who is doing the talking?” (Bakhtin, 1986). Obviously, they were the people speaking, but in their talk what cultural, historical, and institutional voices were being privileged and why? Privileging in these situations refers to which mediational means, or language practices or styles (Hymes, 1974), Ryne and Eric viewed “as being more appropriate or efficacious than others in a particular sociocultural setting” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 124). Eric, in acting like the teacher, chose to speak and act as he believed a teacher would, using a media-

tional means he thought appropriate for the situation even as he had difficulty functioning as a student in similar situations. Indeed, from past experiences in similar situations, Eric had learned the language of formal instruction and what constituted knowledge and the sharing of knowledge.

Ryne, too, although in less explicit and authoritarian ways, appropriated representational speech in talk with his mother and me, demonstrating his assumptions about this language’s use and the contexts in which it is used. Yet, at the time Ryne began trying out the language, he was in a school that strove to contextualize teaching and learning by drawing on students’ lives and making instruction relevant. Being a white, male student in a family of educators, Ryne’s use of this language style probably would have gone unnoticed or would not have seemed unusual had I not been interested in mediational means appropriation. I had made conscious efforts not to use representational speech in contexts in which Ryne was a part and had chosen his school believing he would not be in such contexts, at least not to the degree as in other schools. Rather than disdain the appropriation, however, I decided to examine Ryne’s use of this speech.

In this article, I present Ryne’s use of representational speech during conversations with his mother and me for what Willis (1981) calls the dynamic processes of production and reproduction in creative practice in determined sites and how these processes help reproduce culture. Specifically, I show how Ryne reproduced the speech in familial contexts and to what ends. I contend that Ryne, like Eric, purposely chose to use this language and made the distinction between it and other mediational means, such as the more familiar language of home, for reasons tied to the nature of representational speech. He also distinguished between situations in which different mediational means might be appropriated, making explicit what mediational means to use in a particular situation. In conclusion, I maintain that educators need to be conscious of the mediational means they use while helping their students become aware of different mediational means and opening up the classroom to multiple perspectives and voices. Before looking at the familial interactions of Ryne, his mother, and me, or the sites of inquiry, however, I want to outline the theoretical underpinnings of my observations, most notably the dynamic nature of human interaction in self-creation and cultural production.

Human Agency Within Existing Structures

In *Ways with Words*, Heath (1983) demonstrated how mediational means learned outside of school in children’s home environments affect their in-

school performance. At one point, however, when discussing the literate traditions in the Trackton community, she referred to Aunt Bertha's son who had "peculiar boyhood habits of wanting to go off and read alone" (p. 191). Although she used this anecdote to point out the social attitudes of the community toward someone who chose to read over socializing with neighbors, Heath did not comment on where the young man might have picked up these habits. From her descriptions of Trackton life and literacy acquisition, I assume that, although he entered school having a history of literacy rooted in functional reading practices with environmental print, it was in school that Bertha's son first encountered any prolonged use of books and the practice of reading that was labeled anti-social by his neighbors. Bertha's son may have loved reading so much that its use in situations where it was not expected or appreciated was worth family and neighbor criticism. However, in most cases, people use language to try to effect a positive image of themselves, particularly from others with whom they are most closely associated or with whom they most closely want to associate. Habermas (1984) terms this self-presentation as "impression management." A person presents himself to the world with the intention of evoking a certain public image.

In any situation, however, a person's self-presentation is mediated by the response of others. If the response does not validate the presentation, then not only does the person usually redefine how she presents herself but also her image of herself is transformed to some degree. As Benjamin (1993) writes,

... in the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it. At the very moment we come to understand the meaning of I, myself, we are forced to see the limitations of that self. (p. 134)

The dynamic interaction of self and others implicit in any self-representation and in others' responses is an ongoing process, where human beings create themselves in interaction with others within existing structures. In other words, the interaction of individuals, or what Wertsch (1991) terms the intermental plane of existence, affects and transforms how a person understands and presents herself to the world through her speech and actions, the intramental plane of existence. Wexler (1992) suggests that this interaction and subsequent self-understanding may be more dynamic and confrontational for youth who are trying "to create ... visible, differentiated and reputable sel[ves]" (p. 155). Yet, even in such confrontational interactions, or interactions where authority is either assumed or subsumed by the other, the self still looks for and depends on others' responses. At the same time, the self enters

specific situations with certain expectations that are rooted in prior experience and sociocultural backgrounds.

Wertsch (1991) writes that "the power of mediational means in organizing action is often not recognized by those who use them, which contributes to the belief that cultural tools are the products of natural or necessary factors rather than concrete sociocultural forces" (p. 37). For example, the anecdote about Eric suggests the influence of being in situations where representational speech was privileged. Eric's beliefs, and consequently his utterances and actions, about education and school grew out of his experience, even as that experience had not been positive. Eric, like children who play school, believed that how he was teaching was, by definition, how school should be. Yet, Heath's anecdote about Bertha's son demonstrates the dynamic nature of human action and, thus, cultural production. Individuals choose the mediational means they think appropriate even if the situation is antithetical to the means chosen. The selection of mediational means is neither random nor determined. It involves both how one interacts within the situation and the mediational means available to the person (Gilligan, 1982; Kearins, 1981, 1986).

Bourdieu's (1977) and Bernstein's (1975) theories of cultural reproduction assumed that sociocultural background was so much a determinate of human development that people could not help but act a certain way in a particular situation and, thus, reproduce existing cultures. The dominant culture is reproduced because of its "system of objective relations which impart their relational properties to individuals whom they [the objective relations] pre-exist and survive" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 487). The relations that allow the dominant culture to be reproduced are as insipid and preponderant as the air around us, Bourdieu implies. In effect, what happens is that cultural structures, such as educational systems, economic structures, and home environments, reproduce themselves by producing agents who are predisposed to act in ways that contribute to the reproduction of the systems, structures, and environments. Preliminary reflection on both Eric's and Ryne's appropriation of mediational means suggests this to be true. Both mimic what they had already heard. This conclusion, however, ignores the confrontational nature of self-creation, a nature exemplified by the anecdote about Bertha's son, which is possible only if we allow for human creativity within established structures.

Over the past 15 years, a critical ethnography has developed that has transformed Bourdieu's and Bernstein's theories of reproduction to allow for creativity. Lois Weiss (1996) refers to this development as a growing interest among educational anthropologists in the "relational component [of structure

and agency to] the construction of identity” (p. x). Culture does not so much reproduce itself as it produces itself anew in response to human agents acting and speaking within particular situations (Willis, 1991). Indeed, because of activity and creativity, cultures cannot be reproduced; they can only be produced, transformed in degrees so minute that, as Wertsch notes, they appear natural or necessary. Ryne’s trying out of representational speech, much like Bertha’s son’s reading, is a creative act that affects the situation and produces—and invariably reproduces—culture and transforms his consciousness. Eric’s use of representational speech was creative and affected the situation in the ways he had intended. Not only did he demonstrate what he thought school should be like but he also got me to think about how I was teaching.

Willis suggests that to understand how cultures produce themselves we need to look beyond school at the dominant influence in human development: the home and community into which a person is born and spends his or her formative years. Thus, in the analysis that follows, the point of inquiry is the spaces in which we all live, those spaces between the structures—such as school, home, and other institutions—that help shape our existence and world view and our ability to act in the world, using the “tools,” particularly language, that are available to us within these structures and across structures. As such, the excerpt and description that follow can be looked at as models for the way complex uses of mediational means might exist in other situations, suggesting the complexity of language use and cultural production that speaks to the necessity of always asking and understanding the question, “Who is doing the talking?”

Cultural Production and the Development of a Speaking Voice

Language Appropriation Within a Familiar Context

The following excerpt was recorded nearly five years ago while my son Ryne and I were doing yardwork. I was pulling weeds along a fence in our backyard, and Ryne was following along, mainly watching and recording with his tape recorder, something he had begun to do shortly before that time. He liked to record events throughout the day, including the times he was alone in his room, so seeing him with his tape recorder was neither surprising nor unusual, although it proved serendipitous. Hearing this conversation later piqued my interest in mediational means appropriation.

Ryne, six years old at the time the excerpt was recorded, was interested in nature and things scientific and knew a lot about plant, animal, and insect life. His class was part of a nature project called Mighty Acorns. They helped clear forest preserve land to make way for a prairie wildflower sanctuary. Most of Ryne’s knowledge about nature and wildlife came from school activities and reading informational books on science and nature. At the same time, however, he continually asked me for information and stories about my youth in a rural area and along a river, where I had fished and trapped since I was his age.

The excerpt begins with Ryne seeing a spider on the fence. Not realizing I had seen it too, he ignored the particular spider and began a conversation about spiders in general. (/// indicates a break in the recorded interaction; italicized words indicate stressed or strongly intoned words.)

(1) Ryne: **You know**, if there wasn’t spiders in the world, **insects** would take over the earth.

(2) Chris: (continuing to work) I didn’t know that.

(3) Ryne: Yeah. (He paused.) **Spiders** eat more insects than anything else in the world.

(4) Chris: That’s interesting.

///

(I continued working, moving a couple of feet along the fence row, and Ryne stayed near the spider. A few minutes later, I uncovered an earthworm as I pulled a clump of weeds up by the roots.)

(5) Chris: (Pointing) There’s an earthworm.

(6) Ryne: Where? (He walked over and knelt beside me.)

(7) Chris: There. (I put my finger by the worm.)

(8) Ryne: Oh. (He bent down to get a closer look and then sat up.)

Just like when you were a kid and you hunted worms.

Remember? Remember the story about getting earthworms?

(9) Chris: Yeah. But that was at night after it rained, and the worms came out of the ground then.

(10) Ryne: I know. You’d pick them up before they went in the ground. (Without repeating the story, Ryne summarized what he remembered and pressed for more, but I continued working, saying that he already knew the story. We both were quiet for about 30 seconds.)

///

(11) Ryne: Can I pick him (the worm) up?

- (12) Chris: No. Just leave him there, so he can go back in the ground. He doesn't like being in the sun.
- (13) Ryne: **I know**. The sun will dry him up. They don't like the sunlight. **That's why** they live under the ground.
- (14) Chris: **I'll** put him in the grass over here. (I picked the worm up.)
- (15) Ryne: Don't squish him. (He looked closely at the worm.) He looks dead.
- (16) Chris: He's not.
- (17) Ryne: I know.
- (18) Chris: There.
- (19) Ryne: I bet he goes under the ground now.

The factual statements, or comments about spiders and worms (lines 1, 3, and 13), were what Ryne learned either during Mighty Acorn activities or from reading and were embedded within particular situations that involved either his actual or vicarious participation. He had, however, taken this information and introduced it to a situation different from Mighty Acorn or reading contexts and attempted to decontextualize it as a way of appropriating it for his own purposes. It was decontextualized in that, as statements of fact, their meanings stand on their own and would be the same in any context. However, this is not enough to classify the statements as representational speech. Significant for being classified as this type of speech is that each statement was spoken to guide the conversation in ways Ryne wanted it to go. He did this by taking a stance as the sole bearer and sharer of this knowledge. In lines 1, 3, and 13, he stressed or strongly intonated words or phrases that conveyed his authority and the knowledge he held and shared. In line 1, he stressed **You know** and **insects**. In line 3, **Spiders** and **anything else**. In line 13, he stressed **I know** and **That's why**. Phrases such as **You know**, **I know**, and **That's why** are emphatic claims of authority that position the speaker to tell what he or she knows and that demand the listener's attention. The other words or phrases—**Spiders**, **anything else**, and **insects**—are the information to be conveyed, information that had been decontextualized by the speaker and that when stressed connoted a universality that minimized the significance of the context and the listener's experiences and maximized the speaker's authority as information knower and sharer.

Ryne made the first statement (line 1) after he saw the spider and believed I had not seen it. As such, although for him there was a context for making the statement (There was a spider on the fence, thus reason to talk about it.), the statement to me was decontextualized and not said to draw my

attention to the spider but to start a conversation in which Ryne assumed authority over and controlled knowledge transmission. My response of ignorance (line 2) validated Ryne's authoritative position as knowledge bearer and sharer. He followed my comment with another statement of fact (line 3), and again did not point out the spider to me. I again validated his statement with my response (line 4). At this point, I had moved a few feet beyond the place where the conversation had begun, while Ryne stayed near the spider. The distance between us facilitated the ending of the conversation.

Ryne and I often talked about past experiences when we were together doing yardwork or other things. Stories from my childhood or my memories of when Ryne was younger were often part of the conversations. Ryne returned to this more familiar mediational means (line 8) after I unearthed the worm because it triggered his memory of a story I had recently told him. However, my unwillingness to repeat the story or to allow him to pick up the worm led Ryne to clarify or trump my statement in line 12. In line 13, he pointed out that not only does he already know that worms do not like the sun, but he also knows why and what they do to avoid the sun. His cause and effect statement reasserted his authority about nature.

In the excerpt, Ryne demonstrated an ability to move between mediational means, both by initiating them and responding to my utterances in ways that directed or guided the conversation. He transformed the situation by introducing a way of talking and thinking that had been absent from similar situations before then. He used representational speech effectively. He demonstrated in his use of such speech that he understood its decontextualized nature and the authority it presupposes by easily appropriating and demonstrating these aspects of the language.

Distinctions Between In-School and Out-of-School Structures

The following descriptions are of Ryne's music experiences over the three years following the excerpt in the previous subsection. Ryne began taking flute lessons at the beginning of fourth grade, which was less than a month after he turned nine. After his first lesson, he came home and practiced and then, later that evening, explained the design and function of the flute to his mother and me. After we were seated, he sat in front of us and proceeded to explain the parts of the flute and to show how they fit together. He held up each piece, said its name, and then asked us to repeat the name, nodding his approval when we were correct and repeating what he had said when we were wrong. He then showed us how the notes are produced, taking care to point out a

number of times that the pressing of different pads produces different notes. He then played for us the few notes he had learned, showing us after each one what the note looked like in his music book. After that, he quizzed us, asking questions and telling us to raise our hand if we knew the answer. I assumed that this structured and one-sided presentation was similar to the one he had gotten earlier in school.

Although this was his first experience with the flute, it was not Ryne's first experience with music. His interest in music went back three years to when he was introduced to the xylophone in school. There were no lessons involved or even efforts to teach students notes, but once a week they would sit in a circle and learn simple songs by ear and sight as the music teacher demonstrated. During free time, Ryne often played the xylophone on his own.

After much discussion, I bought Ryne a used xylophone when he was six, and he began playing it at home and writing his own music. Since he had not learned the script, or written notes, for music, he wrote the letters of the corresponding notes across a piece of paper. He also wrote the letters of the notes on the keys of the xylophone. His songs, in effect, were strings of letters from A to G written across lined notebook paper.

A year later when he was given a recorder and his first music book in school, he began to learn the note symbols, but continued to write his own music in alphabetic script, going so far as to write four songs in script that he performed at his school's recorder recital at the end of third grade. One day, I looked in Ryne's recorder music book and noticed he had written the letter for each note above its symbol, suggesting to me that he had yet to appropriate fully the language of music into his repertoire of mediational means, although he had been learning it for nine months.

Beginning with his flute lessons and band practice in fourth grade, Ryne started using the note symbols in school contexts. He began having private lessons at school and having band rehearsal twice a week, including solo performances and written homework and practice. For example, as part of his formal instruction, he had two exercises early on that required him to demonstrate his proficiency in writing notes. In the first, he completed the last one or two stanzas of a known song based on the earlier stanzas, and in the second, he wrote his own music incorporating the notes he was learning that week with the notes he already knew. These exercises were short-lived but, even with that, Ryne was immersed in the language of music and no longer used alphabetic script in his reading or playing of music.

Four months after he started playing the flute, however, I saw Ryne writing on the inside cover of his music book and asked what he was doing. He

said he was writing a song. When I looked at it, I noticed that it was a grouping of alphabetic letters across the page. I asked him why he was doing it that way when he knew the note symbols. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, this isn't for school. I'm just doing this for fun."

Ryne made a distinction here that is significant: He compared how things were done in school with how they were done in other contexts. Like in the garden excerpt, he knew when and how to appropriate mediational means for specific purposes, and he did so in this second example consciously, noting that one way is for school and the other is not. More significant, however, was the dynamic nature in which Ryne appropriated mediational means depending on the situation. When interacting with his mother and me after his first flute lesson, he used representational speech, which included the note symbols, knowing we were unfamiliar with the information and that the language use provided him authority over the information. Although the information was new to him, he presented it as sole arbitrator or knower, as if the information were borne of him. Whenever we discussed his flute lessons or talked about a song he was learning, he enjoyed pointing out the patterns of notes and what they meant. During practice time, he played songs and asked if we knew the titles, often showing us the song and then replaying it. Again, Ryne was creatively shaping the situation with the mediational means he appropriated, taking an active part in the production of culture while appropriating the authority that was implicit in the language of representational speech even as his knowledge of what he said was new to him.

Getting a Grip on Mediational Means

With a question such as "Who is doing the talking?" the answer is both the speaker and the sociocultural influences on the speaker. Wertsch (1991) provides excerpts demonstrating the Vygotskian theory of internalization, wherein what formerly occurs on the intermental plane, in the interaction of individuals, moves to the intramental, or conscious, plane. Wertsch's excerpts show that what was once a conversation between a mother and child on how to put a puzzle together was transformed in later situations to the child doing the same task, appropriating the voice of his mother in asking himself the same type of questions she had asked during previous activities. It is not surprising then, that within settings such as school, students often learn representational speech and make it part of their repertoire and, to varying degrees, appropriate it in other situations.

Although the information they tried to convey may have been new to them, Ryne and Eric learned and used representational speech well. They also learned how to present knowledge through the use of this speech even as that knowledge was still rudimentary and suspect to them. Saljo and Wyndhamn (1993) suggest that students recognize the importance of context in decision-making and act accordingly, using different strategies to solve the same problem presented in different contexts. Both Ryne and Eric knew that mediational means are dynamic language styles that can be applied to different situations. Ryne did this when he distinguished between in- and out-of-school contexts and the form his music writing took. Even if we grant that the processes by which he read and wrote music were part of the larger process of learning the language of music, the nature in which he appropriated the different processes suggests his effort at “assessment management,” or securing his place within a particular situation. Eric, like many students, knew representational speech’s function in society as a language style that embodies authority and distinction, separating the knowing from the unknowing (Levinson, 1996). I suggest that he appropriated this language for its affect in certain situations, seeing it as important in contexts such as school but possibly irrelevant or even detrimental in other situations (Fox, 1990).

Both Ryne and Eric contested the situations in which they found themselves, actively and creatively working on them to transform the contexts and their places in them. Ryne’s use of representational speech accelerated the reproduction of dominant culture. By this, I mean that, although he creatively appropriated this speech, his reasoning for doing so was based on an assumption he had about the language: He believed it purported a certain authority, making him the arbitrator of the information he shared. Eric’s pointing to the text to note from where his answers came suggests the same assumption. With Ryne, such an assumption may never cause confusion or doubt. His position in mainstream society is not as precarious as Eric’s may be because he is already, for the most part, of the mainstream. Eric, however, in many ways is not and must weigh the benefits and disadvantages of mainstream society against a background that has not been well served or honored by mainstream institutions such as school. My concern, in this case, is not with Ryne’s future but with his role in society. He, like all students, was learning to be a member of a society, and how and why he appropriated language styles was part of that learning.

The contradiction evident in saying that Eric and Ryne both contested—thus produced—and reproduced culture (Levinson & Holland, 1996) is a result of the dynamic interaction of structures and agents, and of how struc-

tures define and are defined by agents. Understanding this contradiction, and examining it in particular situations, is paramount to beginning a worthwhile and meaningful discussion of agency, opportunity, and equity for all students.

Levinson and Holland (1996) claim that “people creatively occupy the space of education and schooling” (p. 14), going on to say that “this creative practice generates understandings and strategies which may in fact move beyond the school, transforming aspirations, household relations, local knowledges, and structures of power” (p. 14). Ryne took what he learned in school and appropriated it outside of school in ways that challenge existing structure relationships. He creatively asserted himself in household situations in ways he had not done so before. He also challenged existing knowledge in that he introduced a competing mediational means as a way of presenting new information in already established structures. Ryne, in effect, used existing structures to develop creatively and assert his own agency. He created a public image, or as Rival (1996) writes, reformed “ordinary practices, particularly those centered around the body and the domestic space,” to reorganize social practices and reshape his social identity (p. 160). Yet, the social identity he created fit easily within the existing social structure, reproducing existing social hierarchies and all the inherent inequalities borne of negating the experiences of others in favor of the objectified, narrowly defined knowledge that is representational speech. Unless Ryne understands representational speech as only one of many mediational means and why and when he uses it, his appropriation is problematic in that it has the potential to marginalize others’ ways of knowing and understanding. As Ryne’s father, I consider the possibility of this outcome to be the miseducation of Ryne, and I wonder how many other students, particularly students in well funded, middle and upper class public and private schools, are being miseducated in the same ways.

For Eric, the assumption that representational speech inherently affords him or others authority is just as problematic. Although he may succeed in a society that makes representational speech indicative of knowledge and culture (He has gone on to one of the better private high schools in the city), the price of consciously or unconsciously “buying into” the beliefs and practices of such a society may come at a high cost, one that low socioeconomic status students may neither be able to afford nor willing to pay (Fox, 1990).

To argue against teaching students to appropriate and use representational speech because of the authority it implies is absurd, however. I agree with Eric that there is something wrong with a teacher who withholds language skills and styles that can help students, particularly students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, enter and challenge mainstream society. How these styles are

taught is my concern because both Eric's presentation in my class and Ryne's appropriation of representational speech outside of school were chilling for their Orwellian hue. Ryne and Eric need to know about representational speech, but they need to know that it is only one mediational means among many. In other words, we, as teachers, need to be explicit about not only the information we teach but also the mediational means we use and why we use them. We also need to open our classrooms to other mediational means. Many teachers and researchers already are doing this (Gallis et al., 1996; Heath, 1983; Moll, 1990, 1992). We would be remiss, however, as Delpit (1992) notes, in going too far and thinking that representational speech cannot serve these students. We as teachers need to teach the language as only a tool, and not as the essence of formal education, making explicit why it is valued and showing its limitations and its ability to exclude the knowledge and experience of others. Classrooms, whether they are in wealthy, middle class, or poor school districts, should be places where different language styles and ways of knowing are valued and investigated, where language itself is explored and different ways of expressing or sharing information are promoted.

Teachers can begin the process of exploring mediational means by making the classroom a place where student experience is valued and used as an entry point into classroom content. This means beginning with student stories and moving outward to bring in the curriculum content. It means finding ways that students can use this content in their lives. For example, to teach about plants and botany, teachers could begin with not only what students already know but also with probing questions that get them to talk about plant life and their relationships to that life without any "objective" or content information being presented. These conversations make students receptive to new information, even information that challenges what they already know. Indeed, the content becomes part of the conversation, appropriated by students in their talk about their lives and the lives of others. As such, students can figuratively, as one of my undergraduates recently said, "wrap their minds around an idea," (M. Luellen, personal communication, October 19, 1999) which I took to mean that a student can make it her own within a plethora of knowledge and experience that is uniquely hers.

Exploring mediational means would also include making the classroom texts that often foster representational speech, such as textbooks and lecture formats, problematic. Teachers could do this by noting that these texts are perspectival and often represent only one way of looking at things, and by asking students to respond to what is presented in these texts, again drawing on their own experiences. It might mean pointing out where information in the text

has changed. For example, students immersed in whole language classrooms are quick to respond when told that students in other classrooms are often taught differently. My students were always somewhat incredulous when I would describe the formulaic Dick and Jane texts with which I learned to read, although with discussion they easily understood the principle behind controlled vocabulary and repetitive texts. Supplemental texts, such as fiction and student-generated texts, can also offer other perspectives. As students become more mature, conversations around mediational means, like why some texts are written or sound differently than others or why we talk differently to our parents than to our friends, to a stranger than to a sibling, can begin the process of analyzing and naming mediational means and can practice using them in different contexts for different audiences.

Conclusions

In this article, I demonstrated how Ryne appropriated the language of formal instruction and considered why he did so and to what ends. Juxtaposed with this analysis, I introduced Eric and his use of representational speech. By looking at specific situations and the mediational means used, I show language use to be a part of a complex and dynamic interaction that arises based not only on the situation but also on the sociocultural backgrounds, interests, and mediational means available to the participants. Awareness of these three factors and their degrees of influence in particular situations is key to understanding who is doing the talking and why what is said comes out the way it does. This awareness may be the teachers'—and at this point I would say parents', neighbors', co-workers', employers', and everyone else's—responsibility: listen and respond knowing that any utterance is not indifferent to the utterances that came before it but is a response full of intentionality and precedence. We should support students in their contesting of culture in all situations, but we need to be aware of the nature of the interaction and where ultimately that interaction may lead. Helping students recognize mediational means and why they are used in particular situations may lead to real and positive change, change that allows room for multiple perspectives and voices, in the structures of school and society.

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Biography

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