Gold Mine: California’s linguistic diversity as a resource for second language instruction

Eva Oxelson

University of California, Santa Barbara
eoxelson@education.ucsb.edu

Abstract

California’s educators have the distinction of working with one of the most linguistically diverse student populations in the nation, if not the world, with over 50 languages represented in our student body (CELDT, 2003). While often this is presented as a problem for educators to overcome, this paper examines a classroom event that turns this diversity into a resource. Video analysis of a lesson in a second grade English Language Development class shows how the unpredictable nature of a group project turns a range of interests and abilities into assets instead of obstacles. The classroom interaction shifts from the Integrative Response Evaluation (IRE) sequences others have shown to be prevalent in school (Mehan, 1979; Macbeth, 2003) to the teacher positing questions to which the can assert no epistemic authority. Analysis explores the consequences of such a shift in authority can have for participation.

Question

What was it about this event that allowed so many students to be engaged without differences in fluency being made relevant or visible? Something was different about this event. What was it?

Orienting Theories

- Diversity as an educational fact
- Language learning related to quality of exposure to second language, not quantity
- Activities, roles and responsibilities (participation structures) built into interaction
- People acting reasonably
- As participants make visible to each other their understandings and expectations, actions available for analysis

Methodology and Data Collection

- Interactional analysis
- Video data
- Collected as part of 3 year ethnographic study
- Dual immersion elementary school

Data

Excerpt from English Language Development class.
Project: Creating a book describing activities of students’ choice.

“Dress up!”

1 D: dress up as an elephant
2 T: (to Dolores) that would be a good idea. W- we’ll do that one next.
3 B: (gets up and goes towards costume) dress up as an elephant
* 4 T: wait sh ah you wanna dress up right now? Alright?
* 5 Ah: I want to see (as gets up from chair and walks towards costume)
* 6 Sc: and a puppy
* 7 T: (making hands through hair) so we’re gonna have to change this
8 from sharing to something else if you guys are gonna wear costumes, huh?
9 (x)
10 T: laughs
11 Ch: dress up! (to 7)
*12 T: (notes to look at Ch) what are they doing now? (to Students seated)
13 Ch: dress up!
*14 E: they are playing dress up
*15 T: (notes to look at Ch) dress up
*16 T: What do you think?

Analysis

Ls 4- T teacher follows student’s (Dolores’) lead. Illustration in “Wait, ah, ah,” followed by question, “You wanna dress up right now?” makes visible divergence from teacher’s plan.

Ls 5-6: Students react teacher’s “Alright” as a place for their involvement. Alifestyle gets up and follows Dolores, and another student suggests, “and a puppy?”

Ls 7- Teacher turns student actions to suggestion into something usable for the project, with, “So, we’re gonna have to change this…” (image 4 below), but does not say in what way, constructing Dolores’ actions as something for students to comment on.

Ls 12: Teacher turns student actions into material for book, and poses question for students to answer with, “What are they doing now?”

Ls 14-15: Student, Esperanza, turns other student, Chilly’s, response into answer to teacher’s question.

Ls 16: Teacher does not assert answer, but requests Esperanza’s utterance as a question, continuing to require student participation with, “What do you think?”

Findings

- Shift in epistemic authority from teacher to students
  - Teacher poses questions to whose answers he can claim no epistemic rights
  - Teacher still guides the lesson, but follows the students to do so
  - Student participation essential for lesson, not just in direction, but in completion

- Students use each other’s utterances and actions as resource for participation

Implications

- Subject matter as emergent
- Relationships between people (students, teacher) consequential for, and constituted in, participation
- Teaching visible as improvisational and precarious.

Image A: “So, we’re gonna have to change this…”