“Applying Discourse Analysis”

Discourse Analysis

As seen in the chapter, there are many different ways to use discourse analysis. One way that has been especially interesting is the combination of broad structural observation and the use of very specific transcripts for analysis. Two very helpful tools that can be used are found on the website [www.elmsa.org](http://www.elmsa.org). ELMSA[[1]](#footnote-1) (English Learning through Mathematics, Science, and Action Research) is a teacher development program at the University of Illinois at Chicago under the leadership of Aria Razfar. Joe Rumenapp also works on the project in which teachers perform discourse analysis in their classrooms to study interaction.

The first tool is a coding sheet (<http://elmsa.org/teacher-resources> “Activity Plan”) that lists several different areas of interest which will be covered in this book. Other areas could also be developed. It is divided in 30-second, 1-minute, or 2-minute segments. As our teachers taught lessons, they video recorded their lessons and then went through the video, marking when they saw one of the constructs listed. Below is a simplified version of the coding sheet to see how it could be applied in a classroom.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Time | IRE | Conversation | Questions (closed) | Questions(opened) | Notes: |
| 0:00 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 0:30 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:00 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1:30 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2:00 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2:30 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3:00 |  |  |  |  |  |

Across the top are different categories. IRE (Initiate Respond Evaluate) should be marked whenever a teacher watches a video and sees a pattern in which the teacher asks a question, then a student responds, and then the teacher responds with either feedback or evaluation (e.g. Cazden, 1988). When the teacher sees a more open conversation, usually including students talking amongst each other, the teacher responding to a question, people talking over one another, the next column could be checked. The next two columns are used to indicate different types of questions. Here it is based on a simplified version of questions. Since many teachers are familiar with Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956), coding for questions could be useful. Closed questions can be those in which a teacher is looking for one specific answer, and those are “closed.” For example, if the teacher asks “Who is the main character in the story?” the teacher would mark “Questions (closed).” If the teacher was to have asked something more open, like “What do you think will happen next?” to which there is no specific answer, the teacher could mark “Questions (opened).” The final column is reserved for other things of interest.

This level of analysis gives a picture of how the classroom interaction is organized. Look at the following two charts filled out. What do you notice? What does this tell you about the classroom that was analyzed?

Classroom Video Analysis 1: Introduction to the Genetics Unit.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Time | IRE | Conversation | Questions (closed) | Questions(opened) | Notes: |
| 0:00 | 1 |  | 1 |  |  |
| 0:30 | 1 |  | 1 |  |  |
| 1:00 |  | 1 |  | 1 | Students talked about similarities of step-siblings  |
| 1:30 | 1 |  | 1 |  |  |
| 2:00 | 1 |  | 1 |  |  |
| 2:30 | 1 |  |  |  | I was talking about the assigned reading |
| 3:00 | 1 |  | 1 |  |  |

Classroom Video Analysis 2: A Week into the Genetics Lesson

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Time | IRE | Conversation | Questions (closed) | Questions(opened) | Notes: |
| 0:00 |  | 1 |  | 1 | I asked how the students felt about eugenics |
| 0:30 |  | 1 |  |  |  |
| 1:00 |  | 1 |  | 1 |  |
| 1:30 |  | 1 |  |  | Students were discussing pros and cons of eugenics |
| 2:00 |  | 1 |  | 1 | Jeff asked about genocide |
| 2:30 |  | 1 |  |  |  |
| 3:00 |  | 1 |  |  |  |

What were the differences? What does this tell you about the way the lessons were organized? Of course, these were only three-minute clips of a lesson, but you could do this over the course of an entire lesson.

Another tool used by the ELMSA program to study classroom talk was transcribing a portion of the video. There are many ways to do a transcript, which are further elaborated on at [www.elmsa.org](http://www.elmsa.org), but here is an example of a two-minute interaction in a classroom. What do you notice?

1. **Teacher**: ‘cuz it’s bad for us . right? All that fire and all that smoke.
2. How many of your parents smoke at home .. or grandparents .they
3. smoke at home
4. **Students**:((multiple responses and stories, hands raising)) yes . my
5. grandma always smokes
6. **Teacher**: Do they? (.5 sec)Do/ do/ do you think that’s good for the air?
7. Do you think that’s good for us?
8. **Students**:((Multiple responses)) no ((hands raising))
9. **Teacher**: No, it’s not good for us.so if that happens you know we need to
10. get away from that because that’s not good for our bo:dies (0.2
11. sec) we can catch diseases . we can catch CANCER that way
12. ((putting hand to chest)) so we want to stay away((pushing hand
13. out in front of her)) from the smoke . yes ((looking at a
14. student))
15. **Student** **1**: My dad smoke and it made my baby brother sick
16. **Teacher**: Yeah . it made him sick . right? Yes student 2? One day my
17. grandma used to smoke and then she got really sick and then she
18. stopped smoking because um: one day .. um:: I saw a lady.and I
19. have asthma and she was smoking right in my face and didn’t say
20. anything and then I started coughin’ and then I got super sick
21. **Teacher**: Yeah . and see.that/ that’s not good .. Especially when if you
22. do have [asthma if you couldn’t breather;)]
23. **Student** **2**:[That’s rude]
24. **Teacher**: That is rude
25. **Students**:((overlapping talk))
26. **Teacher**: [That’s very rude . isn’t it?]
27. **Student** **3**:Some people have allergies like me.my grandma smokes and she
28. KNOWS I have allergies . she .. don’t even close the DOOR
29. **Teacher**: So what can we do? What can we do to get away from this
30. [smoke?]
31. **Student 4**: go outside::
32. **Teacher**: What else?
33. **Students**:((overlapping talk 5 sec))

 Apply the concepts learned in the chapter to this transcript. Answer the following questions:

1. What is said?
2. How is it said?
3. What does it mean?
4. What values are expressed?

For the first question, notice the answer is pretty much explained by reading through the transcript. The teacher and students are having a talk about smoking. We can see that some of the students are saying that their family members smoke.

The second question is a little harder to see in a transcript, but you can see that the talk is rather open. The students, in this case, first graders, are talking at the same time. They are telling stories and the teacher is trying to pick up on specific examples. No one student has the center of attention, so we might imagine the students are grouped in a circle or on a rug, or something. Additionally, we can see that the teacher is not looking for a specific, single answer.

Reading the transcript we can also see the third question. We know that the teacher thinks smoking is bad, and many of the students agree, saying it is “rude” and bothers their allergies. The meaning, at this level, is really the “face value.” What do we know about the topic being talked about? Smoking is bad. It is unhealthy.

The final question is much more complex and we need to take a step back from the transcript to understand how that classroom interaction relates to wider cultural beliefs. For example, the value that smoking is bad is clearly seen. This connects to a larger society-wide discussion about smoking and how it is bad. Of course, the teacher knows that many of the students’ family members probably do smoke, so she asks about it. She takes a position of warning the kids about smoking, even though their families do it. So, she takes a moral and authoritative stance, even as it goes against the parents and grandparents. The students also speak up and take moral stances against their family members.

This short example tells us a lot about this classroom and the relationships built there. It was useful for this specific teacher because she saw that if she opened up the floor and asked open questions, the students took over talking and telling stories. This was something she valued and learned about through studying the videos. She could see which students were talking and how they were talking. In the moment, the teacher said she didn’t really have time to think about all of the questions and comments the students were making, but going back to watch the video showed that the students seemed very interested and many of them had a story about smoking to tell. This launched her science class into a new unit about smoking.

References

Bloom, Benjamin S., & Krathwohl, David R. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals, by a committee of college and university examiners. *Handbook 1: Cognitive domain*. New York, NY: Longmans.

Cazden, C. (1988). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

1. **ELMSA is a National Professional Development program supported by the Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition, grant number T365Z110179. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education.** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)