SCHOOL AS A SITE FOR THE PRODUCTION OF PERSONS

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Analysis of classroom discourse shows that the classroom must be seen as a site of cultural production; children are transformed as they are introduced to a new subject position—that of “student.” Children are not passive objects of this work; they actively adopt this new position and on occasion they, equally actively, breach the classroom order. We argue that a splitting is produced—a division between child as member-of-family and child as student-in-classroom. As the year goes by, breaches of the order become less frequent, as new cultural mediators (reading, writing, arithmetic) crystallize this division in the person of each child.

Consciousness converges with the child as a landing tern touches the outspread feet of its shadow on the sand: precisely, toe hits toe. The tern folds its wings to sit; its shadow dips and spreads over the sand to meet and cup its breast.

Like any child, I slid into myself perfectly fitted, as a diver meets her reflection in a pool. Her fingertips enter the fingertips on the water, her wrists slide up her arms. The diver wraps herself in her reflection wholly, sealing it at the toes, and wears it as she climbs rising from the pool, and ever after. (Dillard, 1987, p. 11)

The I, that expresses itself, is apprehended as an ego; it is a kind of infection in virtue of which it establishes at once a unity with those who are aware of it, a spark that kindles a universal consciousness of self. That it is apprehended as a fact by others means e/o ipso that its existence is itself dying away; thus its otherness is taken back into itself; and its existence lies just in this, that, qua self-conscious. Now, as it exists, it has no subsistence and that it subsists just through its disappearance. This disappearance is, therefore, itself ipso facto its continuance; it is its own cognition of itself, and its knowing itself as something that has passed into another self that has been apprehended and is universal. (Hegel, 1807/1961, pp. 530–531)

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The commonsense view of schools is that they are places where knowledge and skills are taught. This epistemological analysis has recently taken a constructivist turn (cf. Phillips, 1995), with the acknowledgment that the child is actively constructing knowledge, both individually (Piaget, 1937/1955) and with others (e.g., Cobb & Yackel, 1996), rather than passively receiving knowledge transmitted by the teacher (cf. Reddy, 1979), but even in these accounts the child still remains an epistemic subject, with no acknowledgment that schooling changes the kind of person a child becomes. Sociological accounts of schooling (e.g., Dreeben, 1963) might seem likely to address this lack, but here too the influence of school is seen as a process of socialization in which norms and attitudes are internalized by a subject unchanging in character.

Critical pedagogy, in contrast, has attended to the fact that children’s identity changes at school, but this cultural production is generally viewed as occurring only outside the classroom. For Willis (1977/1981; 1981) the classroom is a site only of exchange (of knowledge for respect), whereas the small informal group of “the lads” is the site of creativity, of cultural work. McLaren (1993) too viewed students as active only when they are engaged in resistance to the school’s “hegemonic ideology.”

It was a rather grim paradox that when students were not working, they became active participants in resistance, and when they were at the mercy of the bleak self-effacement of instruction, they remained, for the most part, passionless observers and passive recipients of over-packaged (and over-cooked) information. (p. 156)

Giroux (1983) pointed out that in both “reproduction” and “resistance” theories of schooling, “schools are often viewed as factories or prisons, teachers and students alike act merely as pawns and role bearers constrained by the logic and social practices of the capitalist system” (p. 259). Such “theorists,” he wrote “have failed to provide any major insights into how teachers, students, and other human agents come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence” (p. 259). Recent examination of “the cultural production of the educated person” has paid more attention to “how people creatively occupy the space of education and schooling” (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 14), but the details remain far from spelled out. A greater understanding is important because current calls for school reform amount to a demand that schools change the kinds of person their students become (cf. Packer, in press).

Finally, there is general agreement that elementary school provides children with a transition between the family and the larger institutions of work and public life and that it introduces the important cultural mediators of text and number, though again these changes are generally viewed in terms of skills, knowledge, norms, and values that are internalized or constructed. But the world of the classroom is a “disciplinary matrix” (Foucault, 1973), a “symbolic order” (Lacan, 1956/1968), involvement in which doesn’t just generate knowledge and skill, it leads to in which we call ontological work: transformation of the human person. In this article we undertake a detailed and careful analysis of classroom discourse in order to begin to characterize the way schools change children—cultural production in the classroom.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND ONTOLOGICAL WORK

Understanding this ontological work requires an appropriate type of analysis: one that attends to the pragmatics of discourse. Linguists have been working on accounts of language, of speech, as producing an effect; as constitutive. Language makes a mark, it leaves a trace—understanding how it can do this requires an understanding of the human relationships in which speech is used. To see how words can touch people, can make them open up, can hurt them, can destroy them—to understand this power of language requires attention to the ontology of human being. When one pays attention to “what is done” in “what is said” in the school classroom, an economics of emotion becomes apparent in the pragmatics of discursive movement, and the dialectic of meaning and desire in the transformation of the human person is evident.

Much of psychology adopts the peculiar combination of an examined ontological dualism (attributable to Descartes) and at the same time the repudiation of ontological talk as metaphysical, untestable and meaningless (attributable to the logical positivists). We need to start instead with a nondualistic ontology: something like Hegel’s efforts to formulate an alternative to both Descartes’ dualism of mental and material and the unbridgeable ontological gulf left by Kant, between things-in-themselves and things-as-they-appear, the noumenal and phenomenal (cf. Packer & Goicoechea, 1999).

The broad tropes of a nondualistic ontology are discernible in the work of Hegel, Heidegger, Hyppolite and Kojève, Lukács, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and others. Such an ontology sees the person as constructed and transformed in social contexts, formed through practical activity in relationships of desire and recognition, in such a manner that the subject becomes split, thus motivating a search for identity,
for unity. The human person is constituted in relationship, in society and in history, with the “individual” just one possible form.

To be human is to be thrown into a preexisting social world in terms of which we find ourselves interpreted and understood—"posited." To posit is to interpret a person as a particular kind of existent, a particular kind of subject—as male, female, American, student, teacher, and so on. In uttering, a speaker posits self and other, assuming or assigning subject positions to both self and other: “[T]he referential process is one in which subjects, objects, and social relations are simultaneously produced in the course of even the most mundane utterances” (Hanks, 1996, p. 237). To speak is not just to represent the world but also to occupy it; and we do many things “through” language—“we realize ourselves; effect changes in our worlds; connect with other people; experience beauty, rage, and tenderness; exercise authority; refuse; and pursue our interests” (p. 236).

Pragmatic approaches like conversation analysis (cf. Levinson, 1983; Nofsinger, 1991) look mainly at the way speakers take turns in conversation. But when someone takes a conversational turn they make a move, and we can understand these moves as changes in relationship. Hanks noted that indexical terms like this, that, I, you, we, them, and around here are inherently relational. “In uttering any of them,” Hanks (1996) wrote, “speakers put themselves in a relation of inclusion, exclusion, proximity, or distance relative to the object of reference, and relative to their current interlocutor” (p. 237, emphasis removed). Actually, the possible ways that a relationship can change as we move, in and through talk, are more complex. De Rivera (1967) distinguished three axes of relational movement, three different ways in which “the other or the self may be moved in order to increase or decrease the distance between the person and the other” (p. 76):

1. Movements of recognition, of status—in which we “push away, withdraw, extend or obtain recognition for others and, through them, ourselves” (p. 62), with emotions like admiration or contempt.

2. Movements of belonging, of intimacy—in which we forge or add a connection between ourselves and another person or object, with emotions like love or fear.

3. Movements of being, of openness—wherein “we grant, or deny, that the other is” (p. 62) and how it is, with emotions like wonder or suspicion.

With conversation analysis supplemented by a nondualistic ontology and these three kinds of moves we have the analytic apparatus to conduct a pragmatic investigation of discourse that takes us beyond turn taking to study the ontological work that is done when people talk. That work involves positing specific kinds of being—particular kinds of subject—to the persons of self and other (and other entities), and positioning these subjects along axes of belonging and recognition. Attention to the pragmatics of these movements, to the semantics of topic and reference and to the organization of turn taking, allows a description of schooling that begins to show how children are transformed.

**FIRST DAY OF FIRST GRADE**

Let us turn from these abstractions to a concrete example. It is the first day of school in first grade in an elementary school in a small, poor, working class, and ethnically mixed school community in the U.S. Rust Belt. The teacher, Joan Smith, is introducing the newly arrived children to the symbolic order of “Room 2.” In the mundane details of classroom life we can discern the active co-construction that is central to schooling. In apparently merely practical, ordinary, and transitory discourse we can see the teacher’s transcendent initiation of newcomers to the disciplinary order of the classroom’s community of practice.

Mrs. Smith’s classroom is populated by a variety of artifacts new to the children. Quickly drawn to their attention are cut-out paper bears, placed at key locations: above the poster of classroom rules, above the calendar, and in the wagons of the “Reading Train” on the posterboard that serves to indicate students’ progress through the sequence of books to be read over the year. Familiar, cuddly, friendly if occasionally inclined to growl, the bears represent the students, both individually and collectively. Each bear on the Reading Train stands for one of the students; the other bears represent the ideal student—hard-working, cheerful, well-behaved, affectionate toward their teacher.

123 J: Okay, underneath our calendar I have my friends the bears. If you look
124 round Mrs. Smith’s room you’ll find out that she likes bears a lot. Yeah, I
125 like bears a lot.
126 S: There’s bears on the train!
127 J: Yeah . . . and there’s bears up there on the colors . . .
Okay, but these bears are very special bears, because
these bears help us live together.

S: Bears.

J: Turn around, turn around and look at me, right here. These
bears help
us to learn the rules so that we can get along together in Room
2 this year.

As the bears are pointed out and posited (as "my friends"); 123), a
negotiation begins that reveals the complex and subtle interactive work
of alignment in which Mrs. Smith directs the children's attention and
solicits their active compliance. Her next utterance (123–124) has the
appearance of a conditional proposition, but its illocutionary effect is
to prompt the children to look about the classroom. The response of
the children indicates they interpret it as a directive. Mrs. Smith af-
irms this response (127); however, her command in Line 131 marks as
problematic their reaction to Lines 128–129 and initiates a correction
of their alignment to the "point" of her utterance: Joan's focus is not
the bears, but "the rules" that "they help us to learn." She introduces
each in turn. First, "We have a really special rule here in Room 2, you
have to have a smile to come in the door, and you have to have a
smile to go out of the door." Then rules one through three: Do your
work; Talk softly; Line up quietly.

J: . . . Okay let's go on to rule number four.

I don't think this bear has a chance of breaking that rule be-
cause

he's too busy eating his honey. But the rule says No Running.

Without a bear specifically to signify "No Running," Mrs. Smith
defines the rule through a bear doing his work ("rule number one"),
who is "too busy eating his honey" to run. Yet how does Joan antici-
pate the appropriation of this rule by the children? On what basis
does she anticipate they might adopt it as their own? Indeed, why
should these children listen to this woman as she tells them what they
can and cannot do, as she details the rules? What gives these rules
legitimacy? As Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) emphasized, any
disciplinary order is conventional, a "cultural arbitrary" that must be
presented in practice and pedagogy as rational and natural—an im-
position they call symbolic violence.

Within the current discourse, we can trace two related devices
that the teacher employs to legitimize these rules. First is the recip-
ciprocal desire for recognition and belonging between the children and Mrs.
Smith, evident in the negotiation of social status and intimacy—the
authority and power illustrated when she dismissed the children's par-
ents this morning, after they had brought the children to school; her
emphasis on her connection with the children's home life (speaking of
having taught their older siblings, for example). Second is the intro-
duction of new forms of subject with attendant positions. Joan utilizes
the affective dynamics of being, belonging, and recognition to draw
the children into the symbolic order of the classroom, to posit and
position them as a new kind of subject, and invite them to adopt this
new positing and positioning as their own (Butler, 1997). Status and
intimacy are achievable for the children, but only in the terms of the
classroom's symbolic order.

. . . . But Mrs. Smith really
feels strongly about this one, and I want you to know that I
mean no
running. Now is that because I'm a meany?

Ss: No! [immediately and sincerely!]

Joan refers to herself here in both the third and first person: as
"Mrs. Smith" as well as "I." She shifts between proper name and
indexical throughout the conversation (e.g., 123–125, 193–195, 358–361),
as and she does so we glimpse how the symbolic order of the class-
room contains the new (for the child) subject positions of teacher and
student, with new expectations, obligations, sanctions, and relationships.
The reference shifts from position to person: "Mrs. Smith" is a posi-
tion defined by and in the order of the classroom, whereas "I" is (gen-
erally) the human being always both more (in its possibilities) and less
(in its concreteness) than that subject position.

The parallel distinction between the person of the child and the
subject position of "student" becomes apparent too. For example, the

1We use the term subject position to refer to the person as both posited as subject
and positioned (in moves of intimacy and status) in relation to other subjects.
call for a chorused response (195) is a rhetorical device Joan uses frequently to bring the children together, to have them speak as a group which she can address with the anonymous indexical “you” (e.g., 194, 197, 199). This subject position is defined as “boys and girls” who must raise their hands to be recognized as speaker who must follow the rules, pay attention, put their thinking caps on. It is as occupants of this subject position that the children can obtain recognition and intimacy. How is this subject position established and how do children come to occupy it? We will see that they are neither passively positioned nor can they immediately adopt this position.

The call for a chorused response is also the first part of a question-answer adjacency pair that offers the children the chance to align with a preferred understanding. Two children self-select and offer two related replies: because Mrs. Smith does not want them to be hurt and because someone could be hurt by running in the classroom. Joan ratifies the latter explicitly (“That’s right” immediately follows the second response), and the former implicitly through a narrative construction (omitted here).

197  J: Why do you suppose—
198  S: Cause you don’t want us to get hurt.
199  S: Cause you could run into somebody.
200  J: Raise your hands, and tell me. Raise your hand honey. Raise your hand.
201  Yes.
202  S: (somebody could get hurt)
203  J: That’s right . . . [J proceeds to tell them a story of a child who ran down
204  the hall and into a door that she opened, cutting his head]

After the interruption of a first-day-of-school visit from the building principal and the district superintendent this discussion continues:

358  J: “No Running” is very important to Mrs. Smith. This is one
359  that I might get kind of mean with, because
360  I don’t want to see blood running down your faces.

She invites (195) and receives (196) acknowledgment of the authority (status) and concern (intimacy) of “Mrs. Smith”; the children align with her utterance. Her moves toward this alignment are three-fold: positing her existence in terms of being (“meany” vs. “not meany”), her standing in terms of recognition (an authority invested in the well-being of the children), and her desirability as someone who cares about their well-being (acting “mean” but actually not) in terms of intimacy. She posits Mrs. Smith as a subject whose interests the children should appropriate, identify with, or “move closer to” (cf. de Rivera, 1977, pp. 43–44). She is building on prior knowledge (cf. above, 198) and on the developing connection between the children and herself to define the positions of Mrs. Smith and her students.

The subsequent question (360–361) projects a new trajectory for the elaboration of the signifier “running”; the conditional relevance (Levinson, 1983, p. 306) of the question restricts the scope of subsequent talk. Now the student possibility “running” will be differentiated in terms of the spatiotemporal organization of school life: the application of the rule to the subject position of student clarified in terms of setting—specifically, contrasted with other settings where other rules obtain. What Joan doesn’t anticipate is that some of these other settings occasion other subject positions.

360  J: There is a place where
361  you can run; does anybody know where that is?
362  Ss: Outside! [All chorusing together with enthusiasm]
363  J: Outside, you bet. Once you are outside the door, you can run, because that’s
364  a safe place to run. You may also run on Thursdays in gym.
365  S: In gym. We only . .
366  J: In the gym. David, just wait a minute okay? If you have something to say
367  you need to raise your hand. Okay. You know what? The other place that
368  you can run is at home. But you may not run in [the school’s] halls, ever, ever,
369  ever, ever, ever.
The rule “No Running” is elaborated into a web of preferred understandings. “Outside the door” indexes a spatiotemporal boundary beyond which the rule does not apply. The additional contrasting “safe” space/times serve to further clarify the scope of application of the rule, as it applies to a child who properly occupies the subject position of student. Three are indexed: the playground/during recess, “the gym”/“on Thursdays,” and “at home”/after school. But, as we will see, by indexing these contexts to elaborate and define through contrast the symbolic order of “Room 2,” Joan inadvertently destabilizes the trajectory of talk about the rules—the children unexpectedly use her mention of “at home,” “in gym,” and “outside” as an occasion to talk about their personal experience, and so cause a breach in the classroom order.

Structurally considered, this segment illustrates an elemental assumption of the classroom turn-taking system: unless explicitly stated otherwise, Mrs. Smith will supply both the periodic places where speaker change can conveniently occur, the transition relevance place (Levinson, 1983, p. 297), and the appropriate presequence required for the children to obtain a speaking turn (e.g., raising the hand). As a turn construction unit, Joan’s question (361) selects the relevant “who”—she ratifies (363) the children’s interpretation that the appropriate voice is the collectivity of “you,” another chorused response. By contrast, she marks as problematic (366–367) David’s use of self-selection to speak for the “we” (365) in their experience of “gym.” The point of her correction is ambiguous because David both disobeys a rule for self-selection (“you need to raise your hand”) and bids to shift the topic of conversation. Joan’s responses (336–369) effectively both since she marks his behavior and reasserts the pertinent direction of their talk—legitimation of the rules. Joan’s use (364) of the prepositional phrase “in gym” was not to be interpreted as occasioning further talk about the children’s personal experience of that action context.

Immediately following her correction, Joan indexes “home” as another action context where “running” is appropriate; she does not question the children further about their experience of the gym. Yet her indexing of “home” occasions another child to voice the “I” of personal experience as member of a family, speaking from outside the subject position of student:

370  S:  I can’t run (at home)

371  J:  And I don’t want you running around the desks. I mean at home outside.

372  S:  ( )

373  J:  It’s not safe, boys and girls. We have a lot of desks in here; it’s just not safe to run here. Can you all promise me that you won’t run? Say, “I promise not to run.”

375  Ss:  I promise not to run. [chorusing together]

376  J:  In the wrong places. Cause outside I want you to run, I want you to run long and hard and fast, okay?

377  Ss:  ‘Kay!

Line 370 is the first of what will become an escalation of assertives offered by the children indexing their home life, a series which disrupts the talk about the rules. But before this occurs, Joan invites the children to align again as she reiterates her concern for their welfare as a basis for the prohibition of running except for “safe,” “outside” places. Joan reaffirms her intimacy with the children by connecting her desires with theirs. However, as the conversation continues, it becomes evident that the interest of the children here is not primarily their physical well-being, but their status in the eyes of their teacher.

Notice Joan’s response to Line 370. Her first assertion (“And I don’t want you running around the desks”) continues the marking of illegal space—times for the sanctioned “running”: a counterpoint to “in gym” and “at home” initiated in Line 366. The second marks a self-repair, qualifying her use of “at home” in the same extended turn that began in Line 368—apparently she interprets Line 370 as confused and offering a correction of her Line 367, thus as misinterpreting her. The child, however, is not correcting; she is sharing something, as becomes clear at Line 385, after the same child properly follows the rule for turn allocation and raises her hand:

383  J:  . . . . That’s a good time to run. ‘Cause it gets all that energy out. Emily? Do

384  you have a question?

385  S:  Yeah. I can’t run out in my yard because my dog runs after me sometimes.

386  J:  Oh, well then it might not be a good idea.
The child’s use of the first person here indexes the context of the family, rather than that of the classroom: the child posits herself as a family member, as child-in-family, rather than student-in-classroom. That is the “I” that can be said to possess a dog, who can speak of “my dog.” Where Joan has been speaking of the appropriate places to run in school, the child speaks of the possible places to run in her particular household. She’s sharing something noteworthy about home and running—note-worthy because it’s an exception to the teacher’s assertion about home.

Joan’s response to this event is interesting. This breach takes the discourse out of the classroom in terms of context, in terms of topic, and in terms of turn taking (no longer initiation-reply—evaluation [IRE] format; cf. Mehan, 1979). Although topical relevance has been breached, Joan at first aligns her evaluative statement to the child’s topic (386), drawing the implied assessment, speaking as an “I” who cares, giving her personal attention. “It might not be a good idea” to run in the backyard if your dog is going to chase you. Rather than attempting repair she participates in the breach.

389 Sₐ: My dog—when I run—

390 Sₐ: My dog always runs after me. [boy]

391 Sₐ: He’s my dog, and he runs real fast.

392 Sₐ: I have a dog too.

393 Sₐ: I have three pets!

394 J: Cause Daniel, you also have a new brother

Another child self-selects and makes a similar conversational move (389). And still another pipes up, perhaps contrasting his running when chased with the first child’s inhibition. Two others chime in, in what has taken a competitive edge, boasting, bragging, making bids for attention, recognition, and admiration—moves of status vis-à-vis one another, moves of intimacy vis-à-vis their teacher. Joan self-selects, adding to one of the children’s assertions, establishing her familiarity with his family context. (She still has not yet made a move to re-establish the discourse on rules that preceded the breach; she continues to be aligned to the children’s moves.) Several other children continue this display of their family experiences:

400 Sₐ: We have three dogs, three dogs.

401 Sₐ: Four. Five.

402 Sₐ: When I go ( ) my dogs come after me and bite me.

Although these moves are bids to share with the teacher, notice how self-referential they are—the tone is one of “me, me, me!” These moves show the children’s desire for recognition, both from each other and the teacher. They are conversational bids for the floor; they are claims to be special, to have something that differentiates themselves from one other and from the “you” posited earlier. Each child asserts their being (as person with characteristics that are particular) and their status (with characteristics that are special), in bids for intimacy. Joan recognizes them in their desire and they continue to display themselves with pride (cf. de Rivera, 1977, pp. 56, 61). These utterances show us that the children have not fully embraced the subject position of student. They breach the symbolic order that the teacher is keen to present and preserve on the first day of school, but they do so not to resist the authority of their teacher but in moves that evince a desire for her recognition and connection.

403 J: Oh boy. Okay, just let me ask Regina what she wants and then—David, you need
to listen sweetie. Regina? [sshs the other children]

404 S: [very softly] I have a dog at my house

Now Joan begins to move the discourse back to its initial trajectory; she posits Regina as student, to be recognized for raising her hand. Joan does not abruptly shut down the talk of pets, she gently leads the children back to what is, from her position, the appropriate discourse. At first she responds topically (394); soon (404) she is ssheing them, telling them they “need to listen”; then (406) she begins to reframe their talk and incorporate it into the original topic:

406 J: You know what, when I hear all these I’ve-got-dog stories I bet you’re really
going to be excited to learn some of the things we’re going to do this
year, to learn about animals. We’re going to learn all about animals, so we’ll
be able to talk about our pets later on.

S: Teacher? [but Mrs. Smith moves on]

Joan’s turns (403–404, 406–409) show changes in topic, context, turn-allocation device—from student self-selection to a resumption of teacher-selection—and, importantly, the subtending interest of the children. Topic shifts from “my dog,” to “animals,” to “our pets”—what is posited is no longer the dog, but discourse about the dog; first “stories,” then “talk.” Joan also reasserts the impersonal “you,” indexing the students as a class instead of individual children. The discourse has shifted from the family to the way “first graders” talk about family in the classroom. What’s now being talked about is not the family dog, but academic subject matter—actually, talk about academic subject matter. The children find themselves posited and positioned—understood and interpreted—again as what is, for them, a new kind of entity and in a new mode of relationship: they are students who are “really going to be excited to learn.”

Joan’s interpretation is directed to alter a subtending desire, the interest of the children. When Joan aligned herself with the interest of the children, she maintained intimacy by joining them as they spoke from the familial context. Here she initiates a shift in that interest from “excitement” about “stories” to future learning. Whereas the “I” of the family is interested in “my dog” of personal experiences, the “you” of the student, in the classroom, is interested in dogs as “animals” or “pets”. The student learns about dogs; she is not chased by them. Joan posits “learn[ing] about animals” as an imaginary future activity that the children can anticipate moving toward as students. Such a movement toward an activity, accommodating one’s self to its order, is a movement along the axis of “belonging” or intimacy (de Rivera, 1977, pp. 43–44).

And how do the children respond to this ontological work? It is important to recognize that the children are not reduced to passivity by these movements. They are still actively involved, making sense, responding with enthusiasm, and trying to accommodate themselves—not just posited, but positing. One little boy self-selects:

S: Teacher? [Joan ignores him. or does not hear. She moves on]

J: Let’s go back now to the other two rules that we had—
and in doing so, always going beyond their precipitated subject—both breaching the order and aligning with it. Their breach, and its repair, show that, on this first day of school at least, they actively and willingly seek to comply with the order’s dictates. Seeking the teacher’s recognition of their status, their specialness, they take on the being of the new subject position of the classroom. If we are to understand schooling adequately, we must comprehend the active character of compliance and its consequences. Resistance is not the only route to identity.

To adopt a subject position of student is to be subject to its impersonal prohibitions. With this comes a new repression, new definitions of what cannot be said, what cannot be done, new places and times in which kinds of doing and saying are appropriate or inappropriate. This new subject is subject to new demands about what must remain unsaid and undone. That impulses should not be acted on immediately, but must be delayed and deferred is a constant imperative in this first-grade classroom, as in many. Desire must be postponed—the students need to listen, not talk, and they need to wait, not act. The body is disciplined, as the child becomes member of a community quite different from the family, becomes one among equals.

And in school the child is no longer simply child-in-family, but now becomes also student-in-classroom. The new subject position does not replace or supplant the former—after all, the children return to their families at the end of each school day. But nor does it simply supplement it. As the child becomes able to adopt the new subject position and manage the appropriate transitions between the two, a split is introduced: the child as person assumes different positions of subjectivity in the two incommensurate contexts.

The family is lived as natural necessity (Sartre, 1971/1981). Now, in school, the child begins to adopt a new position from which events and situations, including the family, can be viewed at a distance. The new subject position changes the way the child lives the old—he or she can never go home again in quite the same way.

The person of the teacher is crucial in this. The teacher is the authority, the representative and presenter of the symbolic order of classroom life. It is in relationship to her that the child becomes student. Her task is to draw children into the classroom order and their new way of being, appealing to, but not simply meeting their needs. In school the children’s needs and desires must be transformed. Schools regulate not just to organize and maintain order among children in the classroom, but in order to transform them. The disciplinary order of classroom life is a repressive one, but it is repressive, in part at least, in service of transformation. The relationship between Joan and the children is not just cognitive: Joan steps between them and their parents as a new object of desire, as authority figure, mediating the relationship between child and parent. According to Felman (1987), “teaching is not a purely cognitive, informative experience, it is also an emotional, erotic experience . . . [and] cognition is always both motivated and obscured by love; theory, both guided and misguided by an implicit transferential structure” (p. 86).

And the child, now student, encounters the new symbolic media of reading, writing, and arithmetic—forms of representation that open up new vistas and transform participation in the world. These symbolic systems are cultural mediators that permit an indirect, cognitive, and symbolic relation to what has previously been natural and immediate. These are new techniques of objectification, and they can be applied to new material, to the family—turning preractive participation into inspection of an object—and to self.

For example, Joan introduces the calendar on Day 1. Much later in the year, she is still locating the “here and now” of the classroom on the calendar—“So today is Monday . . .”—but she now takes this as a starting point to introduce the children to the calendar as a device with which they can calculate the date a week in the past, a week in the future. Time becomes abstract, quantized, organized, and regimented. Once the children can locate themselves in the representational system (the box that is “today”), simple operations are introduced that generate “last week,” “next week.” And these can be iterated—“We could do it again”—to generate 2 weeks ago, 2 weeks in the future, and so on.

The child, transformed in discourse, becomes able to use discourse in new ways; the new form of subject becomes able to turn and inspect its other, older form—consolidating and crystallizing the split in the person that adopting the new subject position invokes. Of course some children are better prepared than others for this new kind of stance; those from middle-class families, in particular, are more likely to be familiar with an attitude of distance, reflection, and self-consciousness (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990, p. 116). Our ontological analysis of the character of schooling promises an improved understanding of the link between societal class division and classroom success and failure.

Our analysis has shown the child not as an unchanging epistemic subject, but as an active and changing participant in the praxis of social interaction in which the epistemic subject—the cogito, the reflective, rational, scheming self—is one possible outcome. Such an outcome is not stamped on the child. It is a product of the disciplinary order of the classroom, but it is also a production of the child's in-
volved engagement with the person of the teacher, the desire for whom supplements that for the parent. As school takes over from the family, the social and historical production of the person the child will become continues.

REFERENCES


