

Classroom Routines and Participation Structures

Summary D

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From a longitudinal study of the effects of classroom practices on students' opportunity to learn language, Kelleen Toohey interrogated classroom activity structures from a critical, sociocultural perspective. Her study shows how routines and participation structures impact students' opportunities for interaction and language development. Students' experiences were different in each grade level. We will only represent examples from first and second grade.

Observations from First and Second Grade Classrooms

Classroom Routine: Sitting in Your Own Seat

The more help a student is perceived to need, the closer they sit to the teacher. Students are not free to move from their seats.

Consequences of Routine:

Student's competence has a physical reality and is positioned. All but two second language learners sat in front of the classroom. Access for one-on-one help and more frequent language interaction was least accessible for those who needed it most.

Classroom Routine: Using Your Own Things

No central pool of resources for all to use. Students provide and care for their own resources and do not share.

Consequences of Routine:

There is no opportunity to negotiate meaning in interaction for a purpose. Borrowing, lending, and offering to share is more underground and provides a record of power relations: a student offered to share but no one wanted to borrow. Another student always borrowed but was never asked to lend. Those with the most attractive stuff sat in the back (the most competent students). They had additional power to decide whether to share or not.

Classroom Routine: Use Your Own Ideas

Students were not allowed to repeat answers or copy the work of others.

Consequences of Routine:

In this classroom, children owned words in the same way they owned things. Example (p. 88):

Linda: Ms. Reynolds, Surjeet was helping Tiffany.

Ms. Reynolds: Thank you, Linda. Surjeet do your own work. (pause 10 seconds)

Natalie: Ms. Reynolds, Terry and Amy are looking at our work.

Ms. Reynolds: Maybe you could move.

Classroom Routine: Initiate-Response-Feedback (IRF) Pattern

The teacher controlled and structured interaction in limited ways.

Consequences of Routine:

Students had few opportunities to engage in extended responses, thus limiting language practice. When students were given freedom over talk, they used richer language, but these opportunities were infrequent. Students struggled to gain voice in the class.

References:

Toohy, K. (2000). *Learning English at school: Identity, social relations, and classroom practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Adapted with permission from:

Teemant, A. & Pinnegar, S. (2007). *Understanding Language Acquisition Instructional Guide*. Brigham Young University-Public School Partnership.



Principles of Language Acquisition

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