

Learning08: Methodologies and Practices for Approaching Learning as a Social Phenomenon Inside and Outside of School

Tom Koole, Utrecht University

Displays of epistemic access

This paper presents an analysis of classroom encounters in a first grade of secondary education in the Netherlands (students aged 12 or 13) in which a teacher explains a mathematics problem to an individual pupil. The lessons are concerned with graphs and are divided into a plenary part in which the teacher discusses new subject matter or homework, and a part in which students work individually on maths assignments during which the teacher helps individual students with problems. These latter interactions, recorded with a wireless microphone on the teacher, are the data discussed in this paper.

The focus of my analysis is on the ways in which pupils show to what extent the explanation was successful. I will show that design features of teachers' explanations establish different interactional contexts for different types of pupil responses. I use the term 'epistemic access' to include displays of two different epistemic modalities, 'knowing' and 'understanding'. I will show that some types of explanation make relevant an interactional display of 'understanding', while others require a pupil's display of 'knowing'. And I use the term 'display' to include both 'claims' and 'demonstrations' (Sacks 1992), and I will show that some explanation types prefer a 'claim', while other types prefer a pupil's 'demonstration' of epistemic access.

I will use conversation analytical methodology which treats a display of epistemic access as an interactional object occasioned by the prior interaction rather than as a window into the pupil's mind. The distinctions between 'claiming' and 'demonstrating', and between 'understanding' and 'knowing' are distinctions between interactional objects (speech actions), not between cognitive states.