Are communities of practice really an alternative to discourse communities?

Paper presented at the 2003 American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Conference

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One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it. A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.

Wittengenstein, 1958,1.14-15, p. 49

Introduction

Let's start out by getting a feel for the strange territory of discourse communities. John Swales has recalled that when he first heard the term discourse community (DC) in 1986 from Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, he "adopted it immediately" as it crystallized issues he had been thinking about. What makes a theoretical notion instantly adoptable upon being named? That's one of the questions I want to explore in this paper. In 1988, concerned about the fuzziness of a concept that could apply to academic discourse, academic divisions like humanities and science, a particular discipline, a particular department, or even a particular classroom,[1] Swales proposed six criteria to define discourse communities:

- common public goals,

[1] Beaufort in the late 1990s continues this trend, identifying her research site, a nonprofit organization as one discourse community, whose writers needed to interact with other discourse communities including business, the federal government, foundations, and city agencies.

- mechanisms for intercommunication,
- participatory mechanisms to provide members with feedback and information,
- discourse expectations reflected in genres,
- specialized terminology, and
- a critical mass of experts.

At the time, Swales' contrasted speech communities—which he saw as local, involving mainly face-to-face interaction and serving needs of primary socialization and solidarity—from discourse communities—spatially dispersed, formed around sociorhetorical functions, and mainly mediated by texts. By 1993, in the face of critiques of DCs as fuzzy, overly homogeneous, overly consensual utopias and in the face of the emerging situated research on academic and disciplinary writing and enculturation of undergraduate and graduate students which was finding, on the ground as it were, complex spaces shot through with multiple discourses, practices, and identities, Swales wrote what he later described as a valediction to the notion of DCs. However, in 1998, he concluded that his skepticism had been premature, and he offered a revised framework that distinguishes place discourse communities, which he focused on in his book, from focus discourse communities. Place discourse communities (with echoes of Lave and Wenger's communities of practice perhaps) are local groups involved in some mutual project that brings about such things as shared lexis, regular communicative genres, and recognized, though not necessarily consensually accepted, senses of purpose and role. Focus discourse communities are not defined by mutual engagement, but consist of individuals who co-participate in discursive practices with some purposeful focus even when they are separated by time, language, geography, and so on. Notice the way this new pair reverses the privileging of the earlier distinctions between speech and discourse communities.

Why does DC theory have such strange features: instant adoptability, resilience in the face of critique, resistance to calls for theoretical specification, the protean character of its fundamental assumptions as it migrates across theoretical and empirical traditions? As the Wittgenstein epigraph implies, I will argue that our notions of the social are informed by an underlying model. In this paper, I will describe that model first in relation to discourse communities, and then point to similar phenomena in the circulation of the notion of communities of practice (CoPs). However, beyond offering a critique, I will also lay out bases for an alternative sociohistoric conception of the social, suggest some dimensions that we might use to assess any notion of the social, and finally explore some implications of taking up a firmly sociohistoric position in relation to discourse and the formation of persons and society by looking at a case study of academic work.

What is a DC?

In the early 1980s, the notion of discourse communities was clearly an idea in the air. Between 1981 and 1983, David Bartholomae, Charles Bazerman, Patricia Bizzell, Shirley Brice Heath, and Martin Nystrand separately published texts that related interest in the social contexts of writing/literacy to some notion of community. The intellectual origins for this work were diverse: Dell Hymes' speech communities, Stanley Fish's interpretive communities, Stephen Toulmin's field-specific arguments, Michel Foucault's discourses, and Thomas Kuhn's paradigm-following knowledge communities. Yet each of these communities pointed to difference, breaking up larger entities like English, good writing, logic, autonomous texts and scientific disciplines.

In a 1982 article, Patricia Bizzell apparently coined the term "discourse community," finding

a name that stuck for the idea in the air. Without explicitly defining it, she talked about discourse communities in terms of shared discourse conventions, habits of language use, expectations, ways of understanding experience, and patterns of interaction with the world. Graphically, she represented discourse communities as partially overlapping circles, named for dominant social institutions, beginning with the native discourse community of the home and extending to those formed in school, the workplace, and other (unnamed) domains. She referred to the university as the academic discourse community. Bizzell noted discourse communities change over time and suggested they always have internal fuzzy areas for personal initiative.

To get a flavor of the diverse views that have co-existed under the big tent of DC theory, it's instructive to consider a textual exchange between Swales and Bizzell. When Swales (1988) offered the criteria for defining discourse communities cited above, he illustrated the application of these criteria by considering some hypothetical café owners and actual hobby groups. He argued that cafe owners would not form a DC because they would not have common channels of interaction or a common project. On the other hand, one of his prototypes of a DC was an international group with a special interest in HK stamps. This group, he found, had channels and forums of communication, a common project, specialized lexis, certain genres.

Responding to Swales, Bizzell indicated that she had intended to make world-view and social practices, not simply language-using conventions, central. She suggested that the hypothetical cafe owners were likely to be a DC because of social and class-based or ethnic discursive practices of the people likely to become cafe owners and because they engaged in similar discourses (ordering supplies, talking to customers and employees). In fact, Bizzell expressed skepticism about Swales' stamp collectors, wondering if this hobby would lead to a shared worldview. She concluded that perhaps really dedicated stamp collectors might, through intense

and long-term engagement in this hobby, develop "habits of mind" that would shape many areas of their lives. Or perhaps, as in the cafe owners' problem, selection issues could be relevant. What kinds of people are, after all, likely to engage in stamp collecting?

What's wrong with DCs?

Even as the idea of discourse community was gaining currency, critical views emerged. In 1989, Joseph Harris argued that discussions of discourse communities had been sweeping but vague, that the communities described were warm fuzzy "discursive utopias" marked by consensus and homogeneity. In the same year, Marilyn Cooper noted the tendency for discourse communities to be conceived as stable entities separate from and governing individuals and events. Drawing on Richard Rorty and Clifford Geertz, Cooper argued for seeing discourse communities instead as the products of continual hermeneutic work, as social phenomena where varied values and practices intersected, as ways of being in the world, not narrow intellectual commitments. Seeking to clarify the notion of discourse communities, Cooper and Harris both suggested that the concept needed to stay closer to concrete, local groupings, avoiding expansive abstractions like "the academic discourse community," and to acknowledge disagreement and conflict. Harris saw conflicts particularly as marks of commitments to multiple communities "...one is always *simultaneously* a part of several discourses, several communities, is always already committed to a number of conflicting beliefs and practices" (p. 19).

Situated research on the academic and disciplinary writing and the enculturation of undergraduate and graduate students (e.g., Casanave, 2002; Chin, 1994; Chiseri-Strater, 1991; Doheny-Farina, 1989; Herrington, 1988, 1992; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Ivanic, 1998; Prior, 1991, 1998; Prior & Shipka, 2002; Syverson, 1999) has complicated notions of discourse

communities, finding complex spaces, shot through with multiple discourses, practices, and identities.

What do DCs have in common?

In my 1998 book on writing and disciplinarity, I suggested that the theory of discourse communities had formed at the intersection of two streams. The first being structuralist practice, particularly processes of abstraction and decontextualization (categorization, spatialization, detemporalization, hierarchy), and of government (manipulation and prediction of the now abstracted object of inquiry and attention). Chomsky's conversion of concrete, temporal language into idealized tree diagrams, S goes to NP + VP, is an extreme and prototypical example of these practices. The second stream being the folk model of communication known as the conduit metaphor (or transmission model), which imagines communication as encoding, sending, and decoding a message, so that intersubjectivity must be based on codes that sender and receiver share. This metaphor entails particular views of knowledge, learning, and ultimately of persons and societies.

Discourse communities, I argued at that time (and I would now add related notions) represent only a partial break with earlier structuralist, Saussurian models of national languages. What they have typically done is:

1) to broaden the objects of study—for example from Hymes' (1971) response to Chomsky that language users need to know rules-of-use as well as rules-of-form all the way to James Gee's (1991) notion of Discourses as ways of saying-being-acting-thinking-feeling-valuing, and

2) to step down from national systems, shrinking, or Balkanizing, the jurisdiction of

discourse governments—whether it be Hymes' multi-repertoire speech communities, Gee's (1991) evocation of that very local big D Discourse of a biker-bar, or Eckert's (2001) garage band as CoP.

Research produced under this paradigm has achieved much, but continues to assume that there is some level where shared rules and knowledge govern performance, where variation can result from only three sources—error, participants' level of expertise in the community, and competing community norms (whether between or within participants).

I now think that my earlier analysis was incomplete, that part of the resilience and mobility of DC notions lies in tropes and influences I did not recognize at the time. For example, when you look at the lists of examples of DCs, or CoPs, or activity systems, they inevitably seem to be named social entities (physics, company employees, the family, city government, the military, drug dealers, bikers, garage bands, jocks). In the typifications of our languages, these communities are truly always already there. There is nothing new under the sun of this concept. DCs are as much folk sociology as folk linguistics.

More critically, however, when I used government in 1998, it was a doubled allusion, chosen with some irony, to the Chomskyan linguistic tradition (government and binding theory) and to Garfinkel's critique of social dopes, the representation of people as cognitive puppets whose strings are pulled by an anonymous Society. However, I now see government as a key term in two additional senses. First, as Mary Louise Pratt suggested in 1987, linguistic and discursive communities truly do seem to be constructed on the nationalist model that Benedict Anderson identified as imagined communities, the image of the nation state as discrete, fraternal, sovereign. This anchor is significant because nationalism is a global cult of staggering

proportions. Noting the literally millions of people who have died in the name of nation states, Anderson wrote:

> These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what make the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices. (p. 7)

A powerful force, nationalism, as we are tragically seeing once again at this moment. Should we wonder that people whose imaginations have been so saturated with the ideology of nationalism would tend to view any social entity in terms borrowed from it? Second, this notion of government has another significance. The practices I outlined (classification, division, hierarchicalization, spatialization and control) are also key representational practices. The role of such mobile inscriptions (texts, tables, maps, diagrams) in the age of mechanical reproduction is a common theme in Foucault's disciplined institutions, Latour's centres of calculation, and Anderson's imagined communities. In this second sense too then, it is not surprising that these same representational tools should appear as we attempt to make visible the discursive landscapes of our academies and societies. DC theory, in short, has deep roots in our social practice.

Do communities of practice share these features?

The CoP is another notion that quickly gained popularity following on Lave and Wenger's 1991 book *Situated Learning* (although the authors themselves noted that the concept was only thinly developed in that book). Sociolinguists adopted the notion of CoPs rapidly: William Hanks wrote the introduction for *Situated Learning*, Penelope Eckert and Sally

McConnell-Ginet favor it in a 1992 essay wherein they sought to rework dominant approaches to language and gender, Ron Scollon (1998) takes it up in his studies of multimodal communicative practice in the news,[2] and Eckert (2001) continues to use it in her studies of language variation among high school students. Lave and Wenger (1991) defined CoPs in these terms:

> In using the term community, we do not imply some primordial culture-sharing entity. We assume that members have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold varied viewpoints. In our view, participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a *community of practice*. Nor does the term community imply necessarily co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (pp. 97-98).

In his 1998 book *Communities of Practice*, Wenger identifies three key characteristics of CoPs: mutual engagement, an enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement does emphasize co-presence. Wenger sees the CoP as a mid-level category, somewhere between an interaction or series of casual interactions and larger categories like organizations, cultures, professions.

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[2] Scollon (2001), however, notes that he has turned from the community of practice to the notion of the nexus of practice, grounded strongly in cultural-historical activity theories of mediated action. He argues: "The concept of the nexus of practice is unbounded (unlike the more problematical community of practice) and takes into account that at least most practices (ordering, purchasing, handing, and receiving) can be linked variably to different practices in different sites of engagement and among different participants.

Again, it is instructive to see the theoretical slipperiness of these terms. Lave and Wenger 1991 and Wenger 1998 work from quite different theoretical bases. Fourteen of the 48 references in Lave and Wenger represented work in the tradition of cultural-historical activity theory (Vygotskyan traditions Leontev, Wertsch, Engestrom)—the reference to "participation in an activity system" should thus be taken seriously. In Wenger's 160+ references, activity theory is cited in at most 10 cases, none of which are particularly endorsed or central to the footnotes where they appear. In Wenger's work, the role of activity theory is replaced by a diverse set of anthropological and sociological references.

Vann and Bowker (2002) have noted another sharp distinction between Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). They note that whereas Lave has used CoPs to mount a critique of schooling and of psychological theories that rest on a schooled mentalite of decontextualized and mobile skills, Wenger has used the community of practice notion to analyze and promote new capitalist work policies. In a related observation, Gee (2000) suggests that the emergence of communities of practice as an organizing concept for both schools and workplaces is a symptom of, and tool for, the establishment of practices and people tuned to mobile global capitalism.

Why have people been attracted to CoPs as an alternative to discourse or speech communities? CoPs seem to foreground diversity, to emphasize the centrality of participation and practice, and especially to argue for attention to learning as a ubiquitous dimension of social life, all laudable extensions of DC thinking. On the other hand, it is worth noticing that CoPs seem to background the question of where social classifications, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, might be formed. It is a theory that can quickly conclude that claims adjusters at an insurance company are participating in an identity- and society-forming CoP, but that seems to find the formation of some identities mysterious. Isn't reasonable to pause and ask why the

practice/identity of claims processing gets a clear home, while gender, class, race, and sexual orientation must remain homeless social classifications?

Again, there are questions about what counts as a CoP. Is a marriage a community of practice, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet suggested? What would be the enterprise that stretches across perhaps decades of economic, familial, sexual, interpersonal, community, recreational, and work activity enacted “in” a marriage? Am I worrying too much about a slippage in CoPs? I don’t think so. Eckert (2001) offers a fascinating account of how social practice is reflected in group and individual linguistic and semiotic variation (some of her best stories are of clothing). However, she takes up friendship groups as **the** CoP in which language variation and identity are being co-produced. Although she studies high school students, she eliminates school as a significant force. In fact, adults are also a priori eliminated as participants in the leading CoPs for students’ sociolinguistic and semiotic identities. Oddly, Eckert’s high school students appear to live in a world not only without adults, but also without TV, films, or music, quite different from the media-saturated elementary students we see in the studies of Anne Dyson or George Kamberelis. I don’t have time here to fully analyze Eckert’s deployment of CoPs and social network analysis; however, I would suggest that it is exactly in the production of bounded spaces defined by named social categories and events, in the easy way that high schools students in late capitalist, media-saturated urban centers come to be represented as living in a primordial, face-to-face, un-mediated world of egalitarian solidarity that we see the infusion of the structuralist-nationalist model. I should add that I could say the same for particular appropriations of the notion of activity systems. The underlying model is the issue here.

Let me suggest some key coordinates along which we can locate notions of the social:

1) the extent to which discourse and practice are homgeneous or heterogeneous,

2) the extent to which the discourse spaces are homogeneous or heterogeneous,
3) the extent to which the space is discrete and bounded or dispersed,
4) the extent to which interactions are rule governed or situated but mediated accomplishments,
5) the degree of reliance on ethnosociological classifications,
6) the extent to which the community is represented as grounded in face-to-face and unmediated models of interaction and learning, and
7) the degree to which the concept seems instantly adoptable, undertheorized, and scalable

If initial community theories tended to imagine homogeneous discourses in homogeneous spaces, accounts of communities in the last decade have moved to acknowledge more heterogeneous, though still discrete discursive spaces, allowing for various conflicts, divisions of labor, and interactions with other discourses, but typically still involving homogeneous discourses (perhaps smaller and less stable than in earlier representations).

Sociohistoric bases for alternative

I'd like to briefly sketch a few basic principles and sources for an alternative, dialogic view of literate activity and social formations. First is the notion that all practice is historical and concrete, not synchronic and abstract. In a key statement, Voloshinov (1973) argued:

> Underlying the theory of abstract objectivism are presuppositions of a rationalistic and mechanistic world outlook. These presuppositions are least capable of furnishing the grounds for a proper understanding of history—and language, after all, is a purely historical phenomenon. (p.82)

A purely historical phenomenon. This is the fundamental shift. It is for this reason that Voloshinov and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) rejected the notion that language resides in some neo-platonic realm of dictionaries, grammar books, books of social etiquette (whether located in society or in the individual). Thus, language only lives in **chains of situated utterances**. A similar image of historical chains, of trajectories, is seen in Latour's (1987) notion of following human and non-human actors through heterogeneous networks in space and time, networks that critically do not respect reified ethnosociological boundaries and categories. Such chains and trajectories can also be seen in Hutchins' (1995) analyses of distributed cognition and heterochronicity in the navigational act of taking a fix, a process that Hutchins notes involves prefabricated tools with histories as diverse as the millennia-old sexagesimal number system first arising in Babylon, the centuries-old mathematics for chart projection, the decades-old development of plotting tools, the weeks-old preparation of charts, and the hours-old production of tide graphs. To say that practice and discourse are historical then is to say that they are profoundly and fundamentally heterogeneous: this is the essence of **the dialogic principle.**

A concrete historical view of practice also requires a theory of production, of the sociohistoric genesis of people, artifacts, and environments. Here I turn to work in the Vygotskyan tradition, which emphasizes mediated activity: processes of **externalization** (speech, writing, drawing, the manipulation and construction of objects and devices) and **co-action** with other people, artifacts, and elements of the social-material environment as well as **internalization**.

Because social practice is dialogic, heterogeneous and distributed in functional systems, activity should be understood as **laminated or layered** in Goffman's sense, and, following Goodwin and Duranti, as mutable, dynamic frames that are relatively foregrounded or relatively

backgrounded. Thus, there are no spaces where the social histories of people, practices, artifacts, and institutions disappear, no pure monologic activity systems, no places where identities can be figured simply in terms offered by a dominant institution's map (where a person is just an engineer, just a student, just a teacher). Lamination is not simply a notion of the multiple identities of the person, but also applies to mediational means, with heterogeneous histories embedded as affordances in the words, texts, tools, and institutions that mediate activity

A final principle that is critical is the notion of **co-genesis**. People, schools, workplaces, families, public institutions and their associated artifacts and practices have co-evolved. Shirley Brice Heath was not simply tracing a coincidental connection between school and home literacies. School and home were interpenetrated, especially among the townspeople, who were in fact a group of school teachers..

Dialogic, sociohistoric theories suggest seeing activity as the situated and distributed weaving and unweaving of personal, interpersonal, institutional, and sociocultural histories into functional systems that are open and perspectival, durable and fleeting. Heterogeneous discourses in heterogeneous non-discrete spaces that are not confined within our ethnosocial maps.

Does this kind of sociohistoric perspective leave us unable to account for commonality? What produces regularity and reach if it is not shared stuff of some kind? What is the alternative to continuing to rely on shrunken structuralist, accounts? Basic here is an understanding of centripetal forces concentrated and projected through power, externalization, and co-genesis. **Centripetal** force is not an ontological category; it is simply a force that is unifying at some level. It is about **quasi-sharedness**, not sharedness. Think of the differences in knowledge, perspective, and affect that people bring to some co-experienced event (like a young child and an

adult at a religious service, a white policeman and a black protester who "shared" the experience of a 1960s civil rights march in Alabama, a monolingual English speaker and a monolingual Chinese speaker who have co-experienced a movie in Chinese with English subtitles).

Illustration

Let me turn briefly to a partial case from one of my current research projects, to illustrate some things that dispersed laminated activity draws our attention to. In this project, Jody Shipka and I have been exploring the writing processes and literate ecologies of academic writers, undergraduate, graduate, and professorial. Specifically, we are conducting interviews where we ask the writers to draw two images related to a particular writing project, one of a space they write in and the second of the overall process. In addition, we ask them to bring some of the texts related to that project (drafts, notes, etc.). Using their drawings and texts as props, we then conduct interviews about their literate activity. With this research, we have been exploring the ways that writers engage in what we call ESSPs (environment-structuring and -selecting practices), e.g., playing certain music, having certain drinks or foods, choosing and furnishing places to writing, structuring time in and across sessions of composing, and so on (see Prior & Shipka, 2003). We are also interested in sketching the contours of literate activity, mapping out the diverse times, places, resources, and people tied together in writing projects. What I would like to do is highlight just a few things we learned about one of the writers.

Megan Neuman is an undergraduate student majoring in engineering. [3] In her interview, she discussed a short writing assignment on her core values that she had done for a class in engineering ethics and communication. The assignment asked her to identify her core values; an

associated reading had stated that core values are stable across time. Megan rejected the central premises of the assignment: that she should have stable, life-long core values, that she could articulate them (in 250 words), and that she could then treat that articulation as her "mission statement" for life. Instead, she chose an alternative genre of writing. Specifically, she decided to conduct a search for values and to present it in the form of a word jumble (see **Image 1**), so that the instructor would also have to search for the values. Her decision to alter the genre in response to this task was likely shaped by experiences in her freshman composition course, where writing in alternative genres, voices, and media was prized. She also made a list of all the words in the jumble (see **Image 2**) with a brief explanation of why they were there. Strategically she turned in the jumble early and held back the list until the last minute in the hopes that the instructor would first experience the uncertainty of the word jumble. Megan noted that she spent about 10 hours working on this assignment and felt proud of it in spite of the fact that her classmates said it would not be accepted and told her they had written out their core values in about half an hour.

In her first drawing, she represented five different scenes where her work occurred: her classroom, the engineering library, her apartment, a bus, and the food court in the student union (labeled with the names of two food chains). Central for this task was seeking out others to talk to about her ideas.

> I knew what I wanted to do and I started doing it, like, right in class and then I started, like, telling everybody about it, and they were, like, "You shouldn't do that," "You're

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[3] With the explicit written permission of participants, we are using their real names. We did offer participants the option of pseudonyms as well.

> not going to get a good grade." And so then I went back to my place and I, I worked on it, and I called a couple of people and some told me no but then my friends back home [said] to go for it and they gave me a couple of ideas…so, I wound up calling actually a lot of my friends back home and, like, just asking them, like, what values they had, they have as well as what other values other, they think other people value, and then incorporated that….

Megan sought out friends who would not only help her to generate a diverse list of values, but who would also help sustain her motivation.

Her second drawing (see **Image 3**) presents a more fluid and interior view of the process, especially highlighting her thoughts and feelings—through facial expressions of hers and of people she talked to (seen along the right edge of the drawing) in the process. The list (**Image 2**) is filled with links, sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit, to other times, places, and people, perhaps especially to the multiple conversations in person and on the phone that she initiated to construct this list of values-in-circulation. The list seems at first glance somewhat telegraphic and condensed (e.g., *Humor—always important to laugh*); however, consider other entries, such as: *Lone—another way to describe is to call single, solo, I though Albert would appreciate this one. He claimed, with it, all else follows.* When asked in the interview who Albert was, Megan replied that he was a very vocal member of the class who was "always talking about being independent and being by yourself and being able to stand, like, on your own." It is also difficult not to hear the dialogic resonances of *Gone—sometimes I know I value being gone*, even if it is not possible to settle on some definitive sense for this entry. The list is marked by variations in evaluation and personalization as well as in degrees of elaboration. Compare, for example, the

personalization and endorsement of *need—I know I value what I need* with the distance of *fury—while it shouldn't be valued, it often is*. Discussing potential misreadings by the instructor, Megan specifically indicated pointed to the riskiness of naming fury as a value: "I didn't think that she'd be able to get it necessarily, like, she'd be like, 'oh you value fury?' Like, 'okay.' So I wanted to put while, like, I said, while I shouldn't, while it shouldn't be valued, it often is. " Like Aladdin with his lamp, Megan makes three wishes: *Caring—I wish I could value it more; Style—I wish I had some;* and *Brutal—I wish this one wouldn't make the list, but in reality, I think it always will.* In writing this short list, Megan knit together a number of acts and scenes of text production on the wider landscape of affective and motivational trajectories that criss-crossed her lifeworld.

Megan also discussed the reception of her work. She was disappointed that the instructor neither got the point nor recognized her effort. Her grade was (2 out of 5), and the instructor's comments on the content were negative.

> Um, she said that it was, um, nice but what did that mean about my values? Did it—I didn't answer the question for her, um, did it mean that I was adaptable, did it mean that I was changeable, like what, what does that mean about my values?

She then turned in a re-do and got 5 out of 5. When asked why she didn't bring her final mission statement, Megan said: " I don't really, like, consider that, like, my mission statement, you know? I just, that's what I turned in because that's what I needed to do…." Describing the text, she recalled that she just put in " really generic topics like love, determination and family." Summing up, she said, "I don't remember what they were cause I don't really care." Yet the

instructor's response to the second text was very positive, Megan recalled it as "Wonderful. Good job." The instructor suggested the task had helped her find her goals, a claim that Megan assesses as "kind of bogus."

Megan's case shows that the trajectory of activity traced in this academic task is not comprehensible in terms of the course alone or her own grappling with the task. It is a trajectory that is not trivially traced through her home, over the telephone lines that connect her to other people who offer up values that might be in her jumble, back to her freshman composition class that suggested she consider relations among goals, genres, and media, and out to the many cultural practices and specific biographical experiences that are indexed in both her list and her rationales and also in the assignment and its uptake by the instructor. What we are tracing here is a rhizomatic network spread through space and time, a Latourian network that does not respect our ethnosocial maps, and activity that is distributed among people and a variety of material-semiotic artifacts. Her ways of taking up the task and her texts alike richly index this network of heterogeneous activity. I should add that in over 20 interviews with undergraduates, graduates, and faculty in a number of different disciplines we have found this kind of complex, dialogic, dispersed and laminated activity to be the norm.

Conclusions:

I want to suggest that this structuralist-folk linguistic-folk sociological-nationalist ideology forms a deep foundation for our thinking about community, identity, and discourses. DCs and CoPs, Discourses and Activity Systems all are susceptible to the gravity of this foundation. To contest it takes serious theoretical attention. As in this partial case study of Megan's texts, processes, and literate ecologies, what we find when this sociohistoric approach begins to permeate our methods, to reposition the frames though which we trace our outlines, is

the need to follow the concrete sociohistoric trajectories of actors, practices, and artifacts through heterogeneous spatial-temporal worlds, to unanchor the formation of our objects of inquiry from the typifications offered up by our languages, to attend to the multiplicity, the lamination immanent or visible in all interaction, and to see the laminated, fundamentally heterogeneous character of our discourses, our selves, and our social life. Are communities of practice really different from discourse communities? What I am arguing is that DCs, CoPs, activity systems, Discourses, contact zones, whatever terms we turn to will continue to slip toward that underlying structuralist matrix unless we very consciously wrest them away and carefully stake out alternative theoretical grounds.

Image 1: Megan Neuman's word jumble

Megan Neumann
GE 199
Mission Statement

I never went searching for my values. I am grateful however, that I never took general values, and claimed them to be mine. In reality, I am not sure what to truly value. My mission statement is just that, a mission. A mission to search if, in all the jumble, I will be able to find something to hold onto, to call my "core values."

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R O M U H G Z M P R E D A E L E F Y
N O W F U R Y K Z H E A R T L N H L
L C A R I N G L E A R N A H O O H I
O Z O N E O R E A L O N G I N G T M
V F E P N E E D G O D U E M E F O A
E R C A A L A O S A O E V I G R O F
S I A Z L O T R U T H F U L N E S S
S E P P O A F X R H I V E I V D H C
E N A U Y G T E E Z N U R T U R E O
N D C R A I L U A T O P T E W I A P
T S I I L V N A R R R U M O R V L E
I H T T T E E H A B C E P A K E X D
A I Y Y Y T S T Y L E H E A L I N G
L P C K O Y S F A I T H M O D S I W
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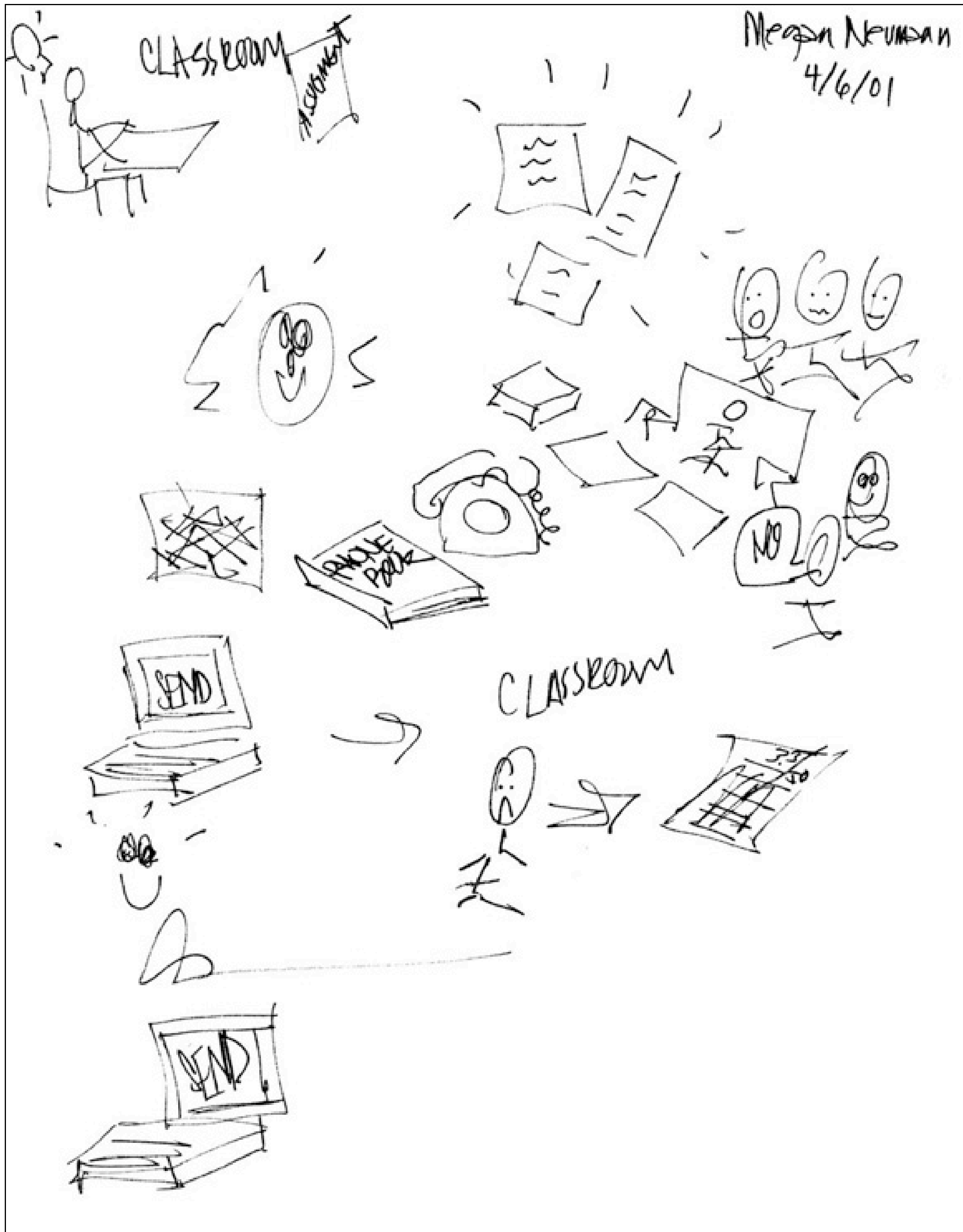
*It would be easy for me to give a list of all the words in the puzzle, where they are, why they are here, but it is just not that easy. You have to search.

Image 2 Megan's list of words hidden in the jumble with explanations

The following is a list of the words found in the crossword puzzle. They are not exactly what I value, but rather what I believe are valued, it is my mission to look through all of these to determine what I will value.

Humor-always important to laugh
Leader-many people value being a leader, with it comes power
Fury-while it shouldn't be valued, it often is
Heart-I hope one day to really have this one down
Lone-another way to describe is to call single, solo, I though Albert would appreciate this one. He claimed, with it, all else follows
Gone-sometimes I know I value being gone
Soothe-this can really be valued, after hard times, it is so very important
Family-everyone puts it on their list, but is it really valued?
Love-I know I need it
Caring-I wish I could value it more
Learn-I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for this
Rage-It is always valued
God-Some still value God, while others think it's a joke; at least he made the list
Loath-Is to be reluctant or against, we all have to take a stand sometimes
Need-I know I value what I need
Zeal-Passion is an important part of life; it keeps it interesting
Friendship-valued very highly, you choose your friends
Longing-It makes what you want even more special when you get it
Truthfulness-sometimes it is not what you want to hear, but what you have to hear that winds up getting valued
Capacity-the limit
Essential-just like need, we value what is Essential
Purity-it looks so good in the pictures
Loyalty-it's nice to have someone on your side
Give-since it makes you feel so good
Tear-a true sign of emotion
Sure-it feels good to be certain
Lite-easy going
Drive-it keeps you going
Heal-while sometimes it is hard, it is also very important
Brutal-I wish this one wouldn't make the list, but in reality, I think it always will
Scope-it is nice to know when something is a possibility, or in my scope
Nurture-We always protect the little ones
Style-I wish I had some
Star-I am not sure if this one is for me to be a star, to value stars, of just a star in the sky, maybe all of the above
Rumor-if they weren't valued, no one would spread them
Hear-I take it for granted, but sometimes, I really do value it
Healing-It is always important to heal
Faith-what would we do without it?
Wisdom-only the wise truly know what to value

Image 3 Megan's drawing of her writing process



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