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EXTENDING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE REPERTOIRES

A culture of inquiry perspective
for reflexive learning

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Summary

In this chapter, we make visible how Beth (first author), a bilingual elementary grade teacher, developed a *culture of inquiry* with her linguistically, culturally, socially, and academically diverse students (10- to 11-year-olds). We share four principles of practice that guided the teacher in engaging students in being co-ethnographers with her and the external research team. We describe ways in which she supported her students in extending their communicative repertoires (spoken and written), and in deepening their understandings of inquiry processes and practices as they learned how to think and inquire as mathematicians, social scientists, artists, authors, and community members. By sharing these guiding principles, we hope to support teachers interested in “deeper learning” in developing a culture of inquiry with students.

Introduction

At the end of each year in a 5th-grade bilingual elementary classroom on the California coast, students wrote essays about what they thought it meant to be a member of their particular class community. Lizbeth, for example, wrote the following (excerpted from a longer text):

“As an ethnographer¹, I want to tell you what it means to be a member of the Tower² community. What I have done as an ethnographer to help me learn these things about my community is take notes and observe kids...

... The only thing that counts in the Tower is that you can work hard as an ethnographer, historian, anthropologist, mathematician, reader or scientist...”

Every day, teachers walk into public school classrooms where they face new challenges, such as how to navigate standards while providing students with opportunities for engaging in complex, “deeper” learning often in the context of teaching multiple disciplines. They also wonder how they and their students can make this kind of learning visible to others. Those challenges are often exacerbated by deficit-based language around what linguistically, culturally, academically, and socially diverse students, in particular, cannot do, based on things such as standardized test scores. Knowing that students like Lizbeth (a native Spanish speaker) were among these thousands of nameless children who were being labeled in public discourse (e.g., in public meetings, in newspaper articles) as “at risk” and even as “failing” because of this deficit perspective, served as a driving force for Beth, their teacher and the coauthor of this chapter. Like many teachers, Beth could see these same diverse students in her classroom reading complex texts, talking about difficult ideas, and writing to communicate those ideas. It was this clash between how students like hers were being perceived and talked about in public discourse (a “rhetoric of failure” [Yeager, 2006]) and what she could see happening in her classroom that drove her (teacher-as-ethnographer) and her external interactional ethnographic (IE) research partners, Judith and Maria Lucia, coauthors (and other team members across years), to examine over time what was happening in her classroom and find a way with students to make that visible, as well as to find a language to talk about what students *could* do, rather than what they could *not* do.

When Lizbeth and other students like her in Beth's classes wrote about their classroom community at the end of each year with some authority (i.e., as “experts” on the community), they made visible ways of being students that were part of everyday life in these classes. They identified inquiry-based processes and practices that were valued and important in their class(es), such as being an “ethnographer,” “take(ing) notes,” “observing,” and “working as” members of disciplines, all of which were part of a larger instructional design approach that Beth drew on in her efforts to address the same kinds of challenges teachers are facing today. Beth describes this approach as taking up a *stance* as inquirers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) – teachers and students together. In other words, ordinary parts of everyday life in her classroom included co-constructing a *culture of inquiry* in which students and teacher actively engaged in understanding, talking, and writing about their own class community and what was available to be learned, their own work in that context, as well as the inquiry-based processes and practices of disciplinary work, and in acting on what they learned and communicating it to others.

In this chapter, we make visible what co-constructing a *culture of inquiry* that supports students in developing disciplinary processes and practices, as well as ways of looking at and communicating about their own learning drawing on those practices, looked and sounded like in Beth's 5th- and 6th-grade classes. We share how this work supported diverse students in extending their spoken

and written *communicative repertoires* (i.e., their resources for communicating) to include ways of engaging in collaborative inquiry processes and practices with class members within and across different disciplines. We make visible how Beth developed ways of engaging her linguistically, culturally, academically, and socially diverse students in becoming social scientists, mathematicians, scientists, artists, readers, and authors, as well as in engaging in a *reflexive process* as part of the culture of inquiry (reflectively and reflexively looking at their own work in order to responsively take new action).

In the following sections, we present four guiding principles for Beth's logic of design and instruction. In the first section, we share how what we call an ethnographic perspective (Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon & Green, 2001; Green & Bloome, 1997) as a way of looking became an integral part of the theory/practice relationship and logic-of-design in Beth's classes – for her *and* for her students – and had particular kinds of consequences for what became available as opportunities for learning (Tuyay, Jennings, & Dixon, 1995) to students like Lizbeth.

Guiding Principle 1: Developing a conceptual foundation for design and decision making

In this section, we share how having a conceptual vision for students, from an inquiry stance, and a conceptual/theoretical rationale for her approach to teaching and learning were critical to Beth's design and instructional decisions, enabling her to learn to *step back* from the challenges of the teaching moment, to breathe a little, in order to take *informed action* (Freire, 2000, original 1970) in developing a culture of inquiry with her students.

Surfacing and articulating goals: Origins of a culture of inquiry approach

Like many teachers, Beth and her students took many things about everyday life in her classroom for granted, simply because they were “ordinary.” In other words, some of what may have been guiding decisions leading to whatever was “ordinary, everyday practice,” including the development of a culture of inquiry, actually became invisible. Beginning in 1991, Beth became a founding teacher member of a university/school research partnership and community, the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, a research community that was meant to be a short-term research process, but that turned into a 10-year collaborative ethnography in Beth's classes that both informed and became, over time, an integral part of the evolving culture of inquiry and an ongoing collaboration with Beth that continues today.

Although Beth had, in 1991, been teaching for 21 years and had also been a teacher researcher, this new partnership offered new eyes (through external research partners, in her classroom, like Judith and Ana in 1991, and Maria Lucia in 1996–97, with video cameras) and, particularly, new ways of looking and

conceptualizing that made sense in the context of what was actually happening in practice, in everyday life. In other words, theory and practice came together in ways that made sense in the context of Beth's goals for students-as-learners in her classes and that offered new ways of talking about those goals. Before explaining those conceptual ways of looking and theorizing that made sense to Beth, we first share her goals for developing students as inquirers in Table 5.1 below, based on what she surfaced in 1991-92 by taking time to step back and purposefully look at what was happening in her classroom (Yeager, Floriani & Green, 1998).

In this statement, Beth is making visible her approach to student learning, one that reflects her background as a teacher across different levels of schooling (pre-K through grades 5 and 6). Just like students, teachers bring a history to each new school year that informs the lens through which they see students and design instruction, which is why understanding her/his own roots and how she/he conceptualizes a vision and goals for students (beyond meeting "grade level expectations") is so critical for a teacher. In her statement, Beth also makes visible her conceptual understanding of the learning-teaching relationships that shape what she *made present* (Kelly, 2006; Yeager, 2003) to her diverse group of students.

Finally, Beth also foregrounds her goals for reflexivity (not simply reflecting "back on," but thinking reflexively in the moment as part of the learning process) and how she developed ways of engaging students in this process. This goal is visible in her description of how she engaged students in contrasting their actions

TABLE 5.1 Beth's goals for developing students as inquirers

Beth

My goal is to help students develop strategies for learning that they can use both in and out of school. From my first year as a preschool teacher (1970), I have wanted all students to be able to inquire into their thinking, to examine their procedures and processes for learning, and to be able to understand the ways in which the class community was being constructed through the ways they interacted with others.

As I have moved across grade levels, I have become concerned with helping my students acquire discipline-based knowledge. I want my students to understand how discipline knowledge is the product of actions of people and how they can "take up" the actions associated with particular disciplines. I want them to be able to "envision" themselves as anthropologists, artists, readers, historians, writers, scientists, and mathematicians.

To put my goals into practice, I create opportunities to explore how people in each discipline go about their work. We explore the ways artists work by entering their lives through their words and creations. For example, we enter the life of Faith Ringgold by reading *Tar Beach* ([book]1990) and talking about her story quilts. We use what we learn about her as an artist to explore our own writing and painting. As we work as artists, we look back on her process and see how our process is similar to and different from hers. We record our observations and ideas in our writer's notebooks (Calkins, 1990) and our learning logs.

The processes of inquiry and our ways of exploring the work of people within the disciplines for ourselves enable us to create a common language for learning. It also makes visible the processes and practices of those disciplines so that students can take up these practices and can see relationships across disciplines. I also try to communicate this approach to parents so that we, the parents and I, can build a support for student inquiry and exploration. This is especially important since some of the projects involve parents.

with those of Faith Ringgold, author and artist. In this chain of actions, she framed ways in which students were afforded the opportunity to learn through contrastive analysis, not about the content itself, but about ways of knowing and doing the work of authors and artists. In framing her goals in this way, she made transparent that her instructional processes were designed to go beyond the reproduction of disciplinary knowledge (content) and outcomes that are assessed in formal tests external to classroom opportunities for learning.

In engaging in this process of surfacing and articulating her underlying vision and goals by stepping back and asking questions about what she was seeing in the “ordinary” life of her classroom, Beth, herself, was engaging in a reflexive process. It was a process grounded in a conceptual/theoretical, inquiry-based, way of looking and thinking about everyday life that was consistent with what she knew as a teacher, like many other teachers.

Taking an ethnographic perspective as part of a conceptual foundation

Why did the Interactional Ethnographic (IE) perspective brought by her new external research partners make sense to Beth, as a teacher, for herself and later for her students? Teachers know that everyday life in their classrooms is complex. It is not something that can be seen and understood in the moment (teachers understand that especially when visitors make snap judgments about what is happening or not happening after only brief observations). However, although teachers “know” what is happening, they may not have a common language for making visible what they know (Yeager, 2003, 2006). Knowing that there was a conceptual base for what was happening in her classroom was critical to Beth in finding a language to talk about what she and her students were doing together to develop a culture of inquiry.

In the following excerpt from an essay written in 2006 (Table 5.2), Beth explained the relationship between what she and other teachers know and some key concepts underlying an ethnographic perspective (Yeager, 2006).

In her statement, Beth makes visible the dynamic nature of classroom life in which members (students, teachers, others) co-construct ways of being, knowing and doing through their actions and interactions; in other words, through what they do, say, write, and graphically create together. As teachers know, this, like learning, does not happen in one moment (or one week at the beginning of the year). For this reason, we talk about classrooms as cultures-in-the-making or, in Beth’s classes, as cultures-of-inquiry-in-the-making. She also makes visible that, as they do this, the class constructs a *language of the classroom* (Lin, 1993), or ways of talking and writing about what is happening that everyone in that group understands – what Agar (1994) would call a *languaculture*. Beth explains that the *processes* that become *practices*, or patterned ways of doing/acting, talking, writing, become part of students’ *repertoires of actions*. When we talk in this chapter about the ways Beth supported students in extending their *communicative repertoires* for

TABLE 5.2 Beth's connections between what she knew as a teacher and key concepts underlying an ethnographic perspective

A central concept for our work [as a university/school research community using an Interactional Ethnographic perspective] was a view, from an anthropological perspective, of **classrooms as cultures** or dynamic **cultures-in-the-making**, in which members (teachers, students, families, others) construct together patterned ways of being, knowing, and doing through their actions and interactions. The concept of classrooms as cultures and the situated, local nature of classroom life (Dixon, Green & Frank, 1999) made sense to me. As a teacher, like many teachers, I had often noted that "this group" of students was not like "last year's group." I also knew that, even when we planned similar activities or instructional approaches as a grade-level team, my classroom would not look or sound exactly like the teacher's classroom next door...

I also knew that not only did I bring a history and ways of doing and teaching to the classroom, but that each student brought his or her own history from multiple school, family and community experiences. And I knew that we **constructed** a new collective history each year, drawing on all that we brought and on what we did together. No year or group was ever "exactly the same." It is not only teachers who understand this. Students understand it as well...

... I also later came to understand that, in and through our interactions together, shaping and re-shaping what we all brought to the community, we constructed **repertoires of actions** (such as the practices we talked about in our own **language of the classroom** and used for writing essays and doing investigations). These repertoires became potential resources for students to draw on to make sense of what was available to them in the classroom and to produce multiple kinds of texts (e.g., oral, written, visual) (Yeager, 2003). This again made sense to me since, as a teacher, I had come to recognize that lessons weren't isolated activities. What we did in one context, I hoped, drew on [and connected to] what we'd already done and what we already brought (and drew on as resource) and was connected to what we might do in the future [or **intertextual and intercontextual links within and across actions/events over time, with consequences for future actions/events**]

(Putney, Green, Dixon, Durán, & Yeager, 2000; Dixon, Green, & Brandts, 2005).

inquiry, we mean the ways particular inquiry-based ways of talking and writing (communicating) were constructed over time. They were constructed through what the teacher proposed, and what students and teacher did, talked about, and wrote about over time by drawing on these resources (as part of their evolving culture-of-inquiry-in-the-making).

In making these connections between what she knew as a teacher and key concepts from Interactional Ethnography, Beth was then able to take up particular ways of looking at her classroom and engage her students in doing the same. If, for example, as teachers know, learning cannot necessarily be seen in the moment (Bakhtin, 1986), then it makes sense *to look over time* (a key component of taking up an ethnographic perspective).

If a culture of inquiry is co-constructed in and through the actions and interactions of people (what they do, say, and write), then it makes sense to observe/look at what students and teachers (and other members of the class) do, say, or write (looking at what happens, at students' work, at what members construct together or individually, etc.). As Lizbeth said, she spent time "observing kids" in order to understand her own classroom community.

Beth began to call her own process of *stepping back* from what was known (Green, Skukauskaite & Baker, 2012; Heath, 1982), in order to examine how she was engaging students in developing a culture of inquiry within and across disciplines, a process of *zooming in and zooming out* (Yeager, 2003); that is, being in the moment of teaching and stepping back or zooming out to ask questions of what she was seeing, then zooming in again to take action on what she was learning. This reflexive process, grounded in ethnographic theory, also led to what she developed with students to support their own reflexive actions for exploring their own community, for exploring *self-as-learner* across time and disciplines, as well as what supported them in exploring inquiry processes within and across disciplines.

Guiding principle 2: Developing inquiry processes and practices with intention from day one

First days count. In order to develop a culture of inquiry that defined ordinary, everyday life in her classes, Beth was guided by this notion. First days of school are when teachers begin to frame, with students, intentionally or unintentionally, what kind of class culture will develop. Because she had explicit goals for students-as-learners and inquirers, an explicit view of teaching-learning relationships, and a conceptual foundation that grounded her logic-of-design, Beth wanted to *intentionally* and *purposefully* co-construct with students a particular kind of class culture. For this reason, she began developing cultural and reflexive processes that would potentially support a culture-of-inquiry-in-the-making from the first day of school.

We begin by sharing, briefly, one cycle of activity that Beth introduced on the first day of the school year(s), the Watermelon Problem, in which students recorded their thinking and shared it (in Spanish and/or English) with others in their linguistically diverse class(es) (across multiple years) (Castanheira, 2000; Yeager 2003). [Figure 5.1](#) presents a graphic (re)presentation of the investigation as it happened on the first day of school in 1996, in which students tackled a common task (determine a final estimate of the cost of the individual watermelons given to their particular table group).

For this investigation, students were afforded opportunities to work in different configurations (as the whole class, within small table groups, as individuals, and as table groups reporting to the whole class) in and through which Beth introduced them to ways of thinking, acting, and communicating as mathematicians. These ways of working in different configurations shifted across the investigation, offering students opportunities to engage in reflexive processes of estimating, reporting, questioning, revising, and (re)reporting, while documenting their individual processes for arriving at their personal and group estimates. Her use of the watermelon, as a basis for the exploration of mathematical problem solving, created a process that made the walls of the classroom *permeable* (“insider” term), to support students in seeing mathematics as a resource beyond

FIGURE 5.1 Watermelon problem across multiple individual/group configurations (1996).

the walls of the classroom. This process was one she used to design tasks across the school year across disciplines.

As part of this process, Beth used a kind of explicit *metadiscourse*³, or talk *about* practice, throughout the investigation in order, for example, to provide a “big picture” rationale for engaging in particular processes or to support students in envisioning their work *as* mathematicians. At the conclusion of this first day’s investigation, she used this metadiscourse to shift students’ angle of vision from the actions they did as the actions of “students” to the actions of “mathematicians,” saying, here shown in English (excerpt):

*There are all kinds of ways that mathematicians get information...
so you did a fantastic job for your very first day of school
and your very first investigation as mathematicians... (Yeager, 2003)*

First days count, but in order for a culture of inquiry to develop, processes that are introduced once do not necessarily become ongoing practices unless they are repeated over time or are reformulated. The same practice is reformulated when it is used for a different purpose and/or in a different context (e.g., observing watermelons and later observing the actions of people as ethnographers or observing in order to paint self-portraits as artists). When the process is repeated over time, it becomes a *pattern of practice* and reflects the culture-of-inquiry-in-the-making that is being developed by the teacher *with* students. In Beth’s class, the Watermelon Problem continued as a cycle of activity for 5 more days (including, among other pieces, graphing results), during which, evidence shows, processes were repeated over time, demonstrating a pattern of practice (Green, Castanheira, & Yeager, 2011). Those practices, as shown in [Table 5.3](#), became part of what counted as the culture of inquiry in Beth’s classes within and across multiple disciplines.

Equally important, these practices make visible how oral, written, and graphic texts were interrelated in this developing culture and, therefore, how they served as potential resources on which students could draw as part of their communicative repertoires, *if* they were aware of them – if what resources were available to be drawn on, when, where, under what conditions, and so on were made *present* for them as they used what we call their *ethnographic eyes* (Frank, 1999).

Guiding principle 3: Making inquiry practices, communicative resources *present*

Sometimes we assume that when students have been introduced to an action or practice, they will automatically know that this is the time and place to draw on a particular practice (inquiry or communicative) *as a resource*. Many teachers know that this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes students don’t make the

TABLE 5.3 Watermelon cycle of activity: Reformulating practices across days

<i>Practice by day</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
Structuring practices						
Working in different interactional spaces	X	X	X	X	X	X
Using different languages	X	X	X	X	X	X
Literate practices						
Labeling, dating log and data entries	X	X	X	X	X	
Recording notes	X	X		X		
Talking to share information and ideas, reach consensus	X	X	X	X	X	X
Drawing on others as resource (e.g., peers)	X	X		X	X	X
Writing to learn (e.g., explaining a process)			X			
Reading data (e.g., reading a graph)	X			X	X	X
Reporting data in public space	X		X	X		X
Inquiry practices						
Observing for different purposes	X	X				
Gathering information from multiple sources	X	X				
Recording data	X	X	X			
Supporting with evidence	X	X		X		X
Determining a problem/question	X					
Investigating a problem	X		X	X	X	X
Estimating/predicting	X					
Interpreting data	X	X	X	X	X	X
Re-presenting data in different ways for different purposes (e.g., graphing, charting)		X	X	X	X	
Understanding different points of view	X	X	X	X	X	X

connection independently that something they learned in one context is now available to be used in this new context.

A third and critical principle guiding Beth in developing a culture of inquiry with her students is the notion of *making something present* (Kelly, 2006; Yeager, 2003) for students; bringing it forward, supporting students in making the connections between one context and another (*intercontextual* links [Floriani, 1993]). For Beth, this is another way in which *metadiscourse* about practice is critical in supporting students in becoming aware of when a resource is a resource, for what purposes, under what conditions, in what ways. Using metadiscourse to *make present* what resources are potentially needed and/or available at a particular time or in a particular context is essential in extending students' capacity for engaging in discipline-based processes and practices and their communicative repertoires for sharing understandings. It is sometimes as simple as saying, for example, "Remember when we did *x*? Well, now we're going to use that practice again, but in order to do *y*."

The following short transcript excerpt is from a cycle of activity (e.g., project, linked activities; Green & Meyer, 1991) as historians that built on practices initiated during the earlier Watermelon Investigation. Beth wanted to introduce named roles (leader, reporter, etc.) for a particular brainstorming activity. Students had taken up practices associated with these roles in other contexts, but

they were now being *reformulated*, or framed to be used in new ways, in this new context, through the teacher's metadiscourse:

TEACHER

(Speaking Spanish)

Desde el principio del año uds. han
tomados unas acciones cuando
estén trabajando en grupos.
Yo he visto personas escribiendo,
personas platicando, personas
reportando, personas que son
líderes o otras que no son líderes.

(English translation)

Since the beginning of the year you have
taken some actions when
you're working in groups.
I've seen people writing,
people talking, people
reporting, people who are
leaders or others who aren't leaders.

(Teacher switches to English)

... today we're going to take up those
actions ahead of time and know what
everybody's going to do

As shown, students were accustomed to engaging in different kinds of actions (practices) as members of a group. While teacher and students discussed these various actions as practices (e.g., talking with each other, listening, reporting, working to include everyone), they were not, to this point, formally named and assigned in advance of group work – with everyone knowing “ahead of time” what “everybody's going to do.” In this excerpt, the teacher makes present (makes visible and connects) many of these practices as they have been used in previous contexts. She then explicitly lets students know that “today” will be different and that students will take up those same practices in new ways. Making links in order to *make present* resources available to be drawn on (for talking, doing, writing) was integral to the ways in which Beth supported students in making connections over time and in drawing on their repertoires of action and communication.

Guiding principle 4: Constructing reflexive processes – Engaging students as ethnographers of their own community and of themselves-as-learners

With each of these guiding principles for constructing a culture of inquiry, Beth herself engaged in a reflexive process as she examined her teaching in the context of learning and then taught from that learning. At multiple points, she stepped back to purposefully interrogate her practice in the context of her conceptual understandings and of what she saw happening with students (orally, in writing, graphically, in action) and then reflexively and responsively made intentional decisions for action. At the same time, she supported students in developing these same reflexive processes and practices to examine their own community

in the context of learning (to understand what was *available* to be learned – what counted, what was everyday practice, etc.) and then to examine self-as-learner in the context of what was available to be learned (not what was prescribed from outside, but what was actually available).

Beth's reflexive process is unfolded in Figure 5.2 and makes visible the interrelationships among the inquiry and reflexive processes and practices introduced on the first day and the reflexive process as it developed across the year both for individual students (self-as-learner) and for the community as a whole.

As previously discussed, the inter-relationships among oral, written, and graphic texts were also integral to the reflexive process as they were to understanding and taking up the work of different disciplines, and the developing culture of inquiry as a whole. It is also important to point out that family members were also part of this reflexive process across the year (e.g., student-led student/family/teacher conferences).

Process

As further indicated in Figure 5.2, as part of this reflexive process, students were given opportunities across the school year to actively examine their own class community and what was available to be learned (e.g., mapping the classroom spaces). They also had the opportunity to *inscribe*⁴ their perspectives on themselves as learners to their parents as well as their teacher during conferences and/or presentations—completing strengths and stretches (described in column 2 of Figure 5.2) and individual and community reflexive essays (columns 4 and 5, Figure 5.2).

We share two essays from two different school years in which students, Arturo and Erica, inscribe themselves (Ivanic, 1994) and their communities in particular ways (Table 5.4) in their end-of-the-year Community Essays, making visible that this was an ongoing practice that Beth used to engage students. Each essay inscribes their particular set of community processes, making visible that the practice was situated within a particular developing languaculture in each year.

As inscribed in each essay, students drew on what they had learned as both a group (discussion) and as individuals in writing their end-of-year essays. While the essay content differed, each had a common goal, to identify what a new member might need to know on entering their particular class community (culture of inquiry) in their particular year. This essay further confirms the practices framed by Lizbeth in her essay that was selected for the introduction to this chapter. As indicated in Figure 5.2, this process involved Beth in discussing with students, before writing began, what they had previously uncovered about the community, as part of her process of creating a basis for making present available intertextual and intercontextual resources in each year. The students then made choices about what they wrote as individuals, including what language they would write in (English or Spanish). As indicated in Lizbeth's, as well as Arturo's, and Erica's essays shown in Table 5.4 below, what was inscribed reflected the different languacultural processes and practices constructed across years.

FIGURE 5.2 Students as ethnographers of their class community and self-as-learner: Reflective process.

TABLE 5.4 Students-as-ethnographers inscribing what counts as being a community member

<i>Arturo (1994–1995)</i>	<i>Enica (1996–1997)</i>
<p>In our Tower community, we have our own language as well as the languages we bring from outside (like Spanish and English) which helped us make our own language. So, for example, someone that is not from our classroom community would not understand what insider, outsider, think twice, notetaking/notemaking, literature log and learning log mean. If Ms. Yeager says we are going to “make a sandwich,” the people from another class or room would think that we were going to make a sandwich to eat. Of course, we aren’t, but that is part of our common language.</p> <p>To be an insider, which means a person from the class, you also need to know our Bill of Rights and Responsibilities which was made by the members of the Tower community. And if Ms. Yeager said, “Leave your H.R.L. on your desk,” people would not understand unless someone from the Tower community told him/her and even if we told him/her that H.R.L. stands for “Home Reading Log,” they still would not understand what it is and what you write in it. If we told a new student, “It’s time for SSL and ESL,” he would not understand.</p> <p>These words are all part of the common Tower community language and if someone new were to come in, we would have to explain how we got them and what they mean. We also would tell them that we got this language by reports, information, investigations, and what we do and learn in our Tower community.</p>	<p>I’m an ethnographer in the Tower. An ethnographer means that you have a folder where it says Notetaking/Notemaking. In notetaking, you write what the class is doing and how we are behaving. Then on the right side, the notemaking side, you write what you think your notes mean. That is how you are an ethnographer in the Tower. You might be an ethnographer to know how everybody’s doing their work. Ethnography helps me to know about the class. That is how I know how the class works.</p> <p>What I think about the Tower is that we are all ethnographers, because each week different groups meet with Ms. Yeager and she explains to us how we have to do it. We all work in groups. I think it’s good to have table groups as ethnographers, because that’s how we know and remember that day. It’s really fun to be an ethnographer, because you sometimes get to use a camera. You get a folder for one week. We divided the pictures evenly so that we all could take the same amount of pictures. I took pictures of just for fun things, like when we were doing math with pattern blocks. We also take notes on what we are doing in the class. I think it’s so fun to be an ethnographer. You get to do all the fun things.</p> <p>In the Tower we work in groups and we have to have evidence for whatever we write, because people would ask you, “What is your evidence?” We also work sometimes in pairs, like on the Island History Project. Sometimes we work with different people or alone. This year I learned that ethnographers have evidence for what they say, for their point of view.</p> <p>If there were a new student in the Tower, he/she would have to know that we are ethnographers. We try, we all do our jobs. That’s what we all have to do, what we are supposed to do, be students. When we are big, we could come to Ms. Yeager and ask her if she still has the ethnographer book and we can still remember what happened. Our children or grandchildren could be ethnographers like we were in the 5th grade.</p> <p>So that’s what I have to tell you about how we are ethnographers in the Tower. Believe me, we have fun. Sometimes we do not have fun, because we talk a lot, but most of the time it is fun. We do many different things in the class.</p> <p>That’s what an ethnographer is and how our Class of 1997 is. I will use all I have learned this year in the Tower. To be in the Tower community means that you participate in everything, put effort into what you do, and have fun by learning in the Tower.</p>

Furthermore, as Arturo and Erica show, the metadiscourse constructed by the teacher with students reflected a common set of practices, ones that focused them on understanding, as well as communicating to others, ways of being a student in this *culture of inquiry*. In addition, Erica inscribed herself in a particular way, taking up, like Lizbeth, an academic identity as an ethnographer. Both Arturo and Erica share what outsiders need to know, understand, and do to participate as students in the class. Both also frame the concept of community that was a central part of their communicative repertoires constructed over time in the class.

Evidence of learning: The Dear Reader Letter

As shown in the Reflexive Process (Figure 5.2), the Community Essay examining the community and what was available to be taken up by the group, was one of three reflexive texts that students wrote at the end of the year. The other two were a *Myself as a Learner* piece, asking students to think about themselves holistically as a learner. The third was the Dear Reader Letter that would accompany a Showcase Portfolio of work selected by students. This letter makes visible how Beth engaged students in articulating and communicating with readers where they would find evidence of particular forms of learning. In their Dear Reader Letter, students were required to provide a rationale for their selection of a particular activity, process or text that they identified as evidence of learning. The questions that they addressed, as indicated in Figure 5.2 (column 4), were co-generated by students with Beth, prior to their reflexively revisiting their *Working Portfolios* and *Learning Logs* to make selections that responded to the questions.

The process leading to the generation of nine questions was based on an *if... then...* logic. This logic engaged students in the following way of thinking about their essays: *if*, based on the community essays you wrote, a member needs to know, understand and do x, y, and/or z to be a member of our community, *then* what can you personally, as a 5th-grader, know as you leave the 5th grade? This process led students to seek, and then present, sources of evidence in their Dear Reader letters, of what they were able to do as they were leaving the 5th grade. As students completed their selection process and began to draft their letters, they conferenced individually with Beth to discuss their selections and their rationales for choosing them as evidence for their responses to the nine questions, to support them in writing the letters, given that readers would include family members and others. Thus, in this end-of-year process, they had other opportunities to talk with the teacher and colleagues during the writing process as well in order to articulate their thoughts both orally and in writing in a recursive fashion to different audiences.

Table 5.5 provides an example of how Erica took up this process, in her Dear Reader Letter. We selected her introduction and her responses to three of the nine questions from her letter to provide illustrative evidence of how Erica inscribed sources of evidence about where she demonstrated her developing capacity to engage in inquiry and communicative processes and practices across disciplines in this class.

TABLE 5.5 Erica's end-of-year Dear Reader Letter for Showcase Portfolio
(excerpt – 3/9 responses)

Dear Reader,

My name is Erica U. I'm going to tell you about my Showcase Portfolio. Our class in the Tower did nine questions about what we should be able to do in fifth grade. We had to look for good work and explain why we chose that and why it is our evidence. Where we had to look was in our portfolio where we have part of our work that we have done this year in the Tower community and in our logs. The most work we have in our portfolios are mostly projects like the colony, Spaghetti dinner and other projects that we have done. When we do our projects, we sometimes work in groups of 2 or 5 or sometimes alone, but we work more in groups of 4 or 5, with our table groups. So now I'm going to talk with you about my Showcase Portfolio.

Can I conduct an investigation?

Yes, I can. I chose the Spaghetti Dinner Investigation, because I did not know how to do a budget before, but now I do know how to do them. In this investigation, some girls and boys went to stores to see how much things cost. With my group, I found out which store had the cheapest spaghetti, salad, garlic, and other things. I had to find out the income, the prices, the profit and other things. We worked in table groups. We had to find out how many people were coming and how much food we should get. Now I know how to make a budget and how to work to get everything ready. That is why I chose my Spaghetti Dinner for an investigation.

Can I analyze a process and understand my own thinking and way of learning?

Yes, I can. I chose my problem of the week called "Four Times as Big," because I had to figure out from a little group of four squares how to make it four times bigger than it was, like $4 \times 4 = 16$. In that I had to use tables and drawings to figure it out. Then on Friday, after recess, we shared our ways of doing the problem and we all got different answers and different ways of doing it and we all had to analyze all of the class' work. I also had to write and explain how I solved this problem. That is what I chose for analyzing a process.

Can I write clearly, effectively and thoughtfully to communicate an idea?

I chose my Tolerance essay, because I explained my ideas and wrote what I thought about my ideas clearly. I really thought about it. We read them to a partner. When we went to the Museum of Tolerance, we had to listen carefully. I had ideas of how it looked, how they (the children in a camp, information added) felt back then in that time. I made my ideas and thought about how I was going to write them in order. That is what I chose for writing clearly.

Although this excerpt does not reflect all nine questions, these three excerpts and the introduction to her Dear Reader letter, make visible that Erica had developed a deep understanding of how to communicate what she learned, when, how and in what ways with whom. Thus, in these three questions, Erica demonstrates her capacity for constructing a detailed rationale for choosing a particular project (cycle of activity) to support her response to a particular question. Although not the full scope of her Dear Reader letter, these excerpts make visible her capacity to identify processes/practices associated with particular disciplinary actions and to communicate, clearly and in depth, what she learned through being a member of this 5th-grade class. These excerpts from Erica's letter further confirm her awareness of the processes and practices that she articulated in her Community Essay.

Evidence of learning: Beyond Erica, Lizbeth, and Arturo

Erica was not alone in responding to the Dear Reader questions constructed by students and teacher each year in the ways she did (and in selecting pieces of evidence to support her responses) or in the ways in which she, like Arturo and Lizbeth, wrote her Community Essay. Each year, Beth examined students' written work both formally (e.g., Yeager, 1999; Yeager, 2001; Yeager, 2003) and informally. Between 1994–95 and 1999–2000, for example, Beth found that, while specific content and choices in Dear Reader letters differed, most students made nine selections of appropriate work samples, and explained their selections (provided a rationale), supporting their responses with evidence (in Spanish or English). While the level of sophistication of language and capacity for conceptualizing their rationales varied across a continuum, all students, whether school-defined (systemically defined) as “learning challenged,” as “at risk,” or with other systemic characterizations, or those characterized as “achieving” by systemic measures, engaged in the reflexive process and took up the same practices as Erica did in constructing their Dear Reader letters. The same is true of Community Essays written across multiple years.

Members of our research community have written both nationally and internationally from a strength-based perspective about (and documented success for) students in Beth's classes drawing on Community essays, Dear Reader letters, and Beth's approach to constructing a culture-of-inquiry. They have also written about this approach in relation to school-defined “special needs” students and inclusive practices (e.g., Castanheira, Green, & Yeager, 2009) and linguistically diverse students (e.g., Yeager & Green, 2008), as well as in relation to disciplinary work and academic identities (e.g., Brilliant-Mills, 1993; Castanheira, Green, Dixon & Yeager, 2007; Floriani, 1993; Heras, 1993; Hill-Bonnet, Green, Yeager, & Reid, 2012), students as ethnographers (Yeager et al., 1998), and teaching for social justice (e.g., Yeager, Pattenau, Fránquiz, & Jennings, 1999).

From our perspective, it is not that Beth's approach – for example, taking up an ethnographic perspective with students as resource, co-constructing a practice-based culture-of-inquiry over time, supporting students in engaging in a responsive/reflexive process – is particularly focused on diverse students. It is that this approach enabled Beth, students, and external researchers to ask “who can say or do what, where, when, how, for what purposes, under what conditions, with what potential consequences and outcomes” (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992), a set of questions that make visible issues of equity of access to deeper learning opportunities for diverse students. What we have found is that students in Beth's classes across school-defined academic “achievement” and linguistic levels took up particular kinds of academic identities as ethnographers, historians, anthropologists, and students, from particular angles of vision (e.g., Yeager, 2003). They wrote and talked in complex ways about complex issues (e.g., supporting with evidence, defending evidence, using the language of historical and anthropological inquiry) *as* members of academic

disciplines and experts on their data or topic. This suggests that what students were accomplishing challenged the competence/incompetence model for assessing and talking about what it means to be a “successful” student in the context of the work that is accomplished in the complexity of everyday classroom life.

An interesting postscript to what has been discussed in this chapter is that Beth and colleagues (e.g., Córdova, 2008; Córdova & Balcerzak, 2015; Hirsch-Dubin & Puglisi, 2011; Yeager & Córdova, 2009; Yeager, Córdova, Puglisi, & Hirsch-Dubin, 2018) currently use principles guiding the construction of a culture of inquiry and an ethnographic perspective in work with administrators and classroom teachers exploring their instructional design and practices with their own linguistically, academically, culturally, and socially diverse students. One 2nd-grade teacher in a dual language program has reported, “I have gained more confidence in leading students through their own educational inquiries and this has helped me take on more of a role of a facilitator. This has allowed my students to obtain a bigger sense of ownership and become more active participants in their own learning...Through our partnership, my students have developed interdisciplinary actions which have allowed them to make connections and develop their identities not only as learners, but as authors, artists, creators, mathematicians, scientists, and investigators.”⁵

A closing and an opening

In this chapter, we shared four principles that guided Beth, the teacher-ethnographer of 5th- and 6th-grade bilingual classes, in developing a culture of inquiry with her linguistically, culturally, socially and academically diverse students:

- Developing a conceptual foundation for design and decision making;
- Developing inquiry processes and practices from day one;
- Making inquiry processes and practices and communicative resources *present*;
- Constructing reflexive processes – engaging students as ethnographers of their own community and of themselves-as-learners.

As part of these principles, we made visible the ways in which teachers can use a metadiscourse *about* practice, about everyday classroom life and a developing culture-of-inquiry-in-the-making. In sharing what these four principles looked and sounded like in action, we made visible what was made present to students through opportunities for learning processes/practices within and across disciplines in this culture of inquiry model constructed by Beth.

We made visible, in particular, the potential for teachers in Pre-K-12 facing a variety of challenges, including working within and across multiple disciplines, of finding a lens for both themselves and their students through which they can intentionally engage in reflexive practices from within a culture of inquiry. In doing this themselves, along with administrators, and supporting their students in doing the same, they can develop a common language (Edwards & Mercer, 1987)

for talking from evidence about what students, particularly diverse students, *can* do. In presenting classroom life from participants' points of view and by unfolding guiding principles of practice, we sought to lay a foundation for readers to explore ways of understanding classroom life, from within a culture of inquiry, as well as ways of providing evidence of what counts as learning, and what learnings count in such communities (Heap, 1991,1995).

Notes

- 1 "Ethnographer" as it's used here is based on a particular way of looking taken up in these classes, to be further explained in subsequent sections of this chapter.
- 2 "Tower" was the name given to a large second floor classroom space, without a room number, beneath a bell tower in this school.
- 3 Metadiscourse is language used to talk *about* practice (i.e., talk about actions and language use). This idea supports a view of teacher *discourse* (ways of talking), rather than instances of teacher "talk", as central to making historical connections, linking texts, making available what it is students need to bring and use to make sense of the evolving text of classroom life. Teachers make discursive choices *with* students, to contextualize practices, while making the connections necessary for students to make sense of disciplinary work and reflexive processes (Yeager & Córdova, 2009).
- 4 Inscribe as it's used here draws on Ivanic (1994) and on our own work to mean the ways in which writers *write themselves, their lived experience, identities, and worlds into their texts*. We argue that students inscribe worlds, *their* worlds, based on their lived and/or observed experiences and understandings (they inscribe based on what's been available to them to be understood and learned). Therefore, written texts, as products, become potential sources of evidence about what students have experienced or what was made available to them over time.
- 5 This excerpt was taken from a teacher's letter to Beth Yeager, received in April 2016.

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