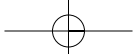
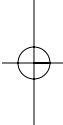
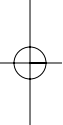


## **Part 2**

# **New Ways of Understanding Identity/Identities in Professional Settings**



# 10

## Shifting Identities in the Classroom

*Stanton Wortham*

### 10.1 Introduction

Teacher: no. you're wrong. because you're guessing without looking.  
and that is  
Student: [no way.  
Teacher: [exactly what you do as a bad [student.  
Student: [no I wasn't  
T/S: halt.

How does this exchange between a teacher and a 14-year-old student contribute to the student's social identity? Knowing that the student is a working-class African-American girl, and that the teacher is a middle-class European-American man, we might construe this as a powerful teacher silencing a disempowered student. Widely circulating categories of identity, like 'working class' and 'African American' are in fact crucial resources that people use, and that operate through people, as they identify themselves and others. This fragment could, of course, be uncharacteristic for the teacher and the student, and there could be mitigating circumstances. If this sort of event recurred, however, we could plausibly argue that the student is being identified as 'bad' because this fits with a widely circulating model of identity that includes 'resistant,' 'disruptive' students who are disproportionately African American and working class.

As important as widely circulating categories of identity are, however, many have warned that we cannot assume events like this simply represent instances of such categories (Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1976; Rampton, 1999; Schegloff, 1988). Identification happens only in practice, and it is always constructed for particular purposes and in particular events. Thus signs of identity can be interpreted only with respect to particular contexts of use. The case above could in fact be teasing or irony, and the student might understand perfectly well that the teacher does not mean to label her as resistant and disruptive. In order to tell what sort of identification is

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in fact being accomplished, both participants and analysts must attend to the details of the event and its relevant context.

In order to interpret what signs of identity come to mean in actual events, however, participants and analysts must presuppose more widely circulating models that specify types of people and the types of events that they characteristically engage in.

Identification cannot occur unless people presuppose socially circulating models, but these models only exist in particular events in which they are recontextualized in specific ways. Both 'macro' and 'micro' are essential to social identification.

Instead of drawing the typical conclusion – that we need a 'dialectic' account that moves between 'macro' and 'micro' – in this chapter I argue that we need a more adequate formulation of the issue. Processes like social identification do not occur only at two levels, 'macro' and 'micro'. In fact, many different timescales are potentially relevant to understanding the identity adopted by, or imposed on, an individual. Instead of choosing between or vaguely combining the 'macro' and the 'micro', we need to look more closely at other timescales that can be relevant to social identification. I make this argument by describing the emergence of one student's social identity over several months in a classroom. The analysis demonstrates that locally circulating categories of identity – in addition to 'macro' categories and 'micro' events – can be essential to social identification in practice.

### 10.2 Local timescales and resources

The most common account of social identification and related processes involves a 'dialectic' between 'macro' processes – say, institutionalized practices and publicly circulating categories of identity – and particular events of identification. 'Dialectic' here is not used in the more complex Hegelian sense, but simply means moving back and forth between two poles. On such an account, widely circulating categories of identity constrain acts of identification, but particular acts either reproduce or help to transform the circulating categories. This position is often credited to Giddens (1976), who called it 'structuration', but many others in sociology, anthropology, education and related fields have adopted a similar position (e.g., Levinson and Holland, 1996; Linger, 2001). This 'macro-micro dialectic' account of social identification captures some essential aspects of the process. Both publicly circulating, often institutionalized categories of identity and particular events of identification play essential roles, and neither can be reduced to the other.

Despite these strengths, however, many have recently criticized the macro-micro dialectic model (e.g., Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Eckert, 2000; Holland and Lave, 2000; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and von Savigny, 2001;

Urban, 2001). At its worst the model assumes widely circulating categories of identity and institutionalized practices, without explaining how these are created and maintained – except with the vague claim that they are constituted in actual events. This claim simply means that the ‘macro’ categories and practices repeatedly appear in actual events. But a deterministic ‘macro’ account would agree with this claim too. Properties of groups or institutions must appear in events for them to be empirically available, but the fact of their appearance does not change the ‘macro’ emphasis of such an account.

‘Practice theory’ claims to go beyond a simple ‘dialectic’ account. Proponents of practice theory describe the ‘articulation between’ (Bucholtz, Liang and Sutton, 1999; Eckert, 2000), or the ‘co-development of’ the widely circulating and the local (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain, 1998). But such terms by themselves do not describe more precisely how publicly circulating categories and institutional processes interrelate with contingent events to constitute social identification. I do not mean to denigrate the important point made by claims about practice – that we do not know what publicly circulating categories mean in the abstract, but that we must instead examine how they are contextualized in practice to understand their role in social identification. I am simply pointing out that ‘practice’ must be explicated further in order to explain how processes like social identification work. If ‘practice’ is to where ‘macro’, ‘micro’ and perhaps other resources help accomplish social identification, we must know more specifically what it looks like.

Lemke’s (2000) concept of ‘timescales’ is useful here. A timescale is the spatio-temporal envelope within which a process happens. Processes relevant to understanding social identification take place across characteristic intervals. The emergence of capitalism, a process which in some respects has taken millennia, and in other respects centuries (Marx, 1867; Postone, 1993), occurs at a relatively long timescale. In contrast, individuals develop their capacities and live their lives at an ontogenetic timescale, across decades. Particular groups develop relationships and local habits, like those that emerge within a classroom over a year, at what I will call a ‘local’ timescale. And particular events take place at shorter timescales, taking minutes or hours. ‘Macro’, ‘micro’ and ‘practice’, as categories for analysing processes like social identification, abstract away from a continuum of timescales.

Social scientists characteristically envision these as different ‘levels of explanation.’ Parsons’s (1951) strategy for dealing with multiple levels of explanation was to divide human phenomena into fiefdoms, each of which was owned by a discipline – sociology owned longer timescale institutional change, anthropology owned culture, psychology owned individual development, and so on. In more contentious times social scientists try to reduce or subsume other levels into their own favoured level. Lemke

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presents an alternative approach, arguing that any human phenomenon likely depends on processes at several timescales. We need to explore 'cross-timescale relations' – the set of linked processes across several timescales that collectively explain how any phenomenon occurs. As I argue below, for instance, it will not suffice to argue that the student in the excerpt above was an African-American girl identified using the longer-timescale stereotype of being a resistant, disruptive 'loud black girl'. Longer-timescale processes that included her race were relevant to how this girl was identified over time in the classroom, but these were mediated through processes at shorter timescales. Neither can we understand this student's emerging social identity only with reference to short-timescale events in which her identity was 'constructed', however. Instead of trying to explain the phenomenon with recourse to only one or two timescales, we must explore how processes from various timescales were linked such that they collectively yielded the phenomenon. For different phenomena, the relevant timescales and cross-timescale linkages would likely be different.

My phenomenon in this chapter is the social identification that happened to one student in an urban ninth grade American classroom over an academic year. I will show that, in order to understand this phenomenon, we must attend to a months-long timescale across which habitual patterns of social identification developed in the classroom. Teachers and students developed *local* models of identity and habitually applied these to students like the girl from the excerpt above. These local models were constrained by longer-timescale processes, but they could not have been fully predicted from those longer-timescale processes. The local models were also constituted by shorter-timescale processes, like the use of certain categories to identify students in actual classroom discussions. The local models thus emerged from, but cannot be reduced to, event-level processes.

The social identity of the focal student in this case shifted twice over the academic year. We cannot explain these shifts solely with recourse to widely circulating social models – because this would not explain why two or three from among the many potentially relevant models of identity were applied to her, nor why her identity shifted as and when it did. We cannot explain the shifts in identity solely with reference to particular events of identification either. These events themselves only became intelligible with reference to more widely circulating models. The shifts in identity also emerged over a trajectory of several mutually presupposing events, instead of through discrete events of transformation. By examining a local timescale, across months in the classroom, we can see more clearly how the shifts occurred.

For a full account of this student's social identity development see Wortham (2005). This chapter focuses on the local timescale, and on one local resource that played an important role. In this classroom, concepts and themes from the academic curriculum became an important resource

for some students' identity development. The 'Paideia' (Adler, 1982) or 'Great Books' (Great Books Foundation, 1991) curriculum centred on several questions of enduring human concern. In the middle of the year, for instance, they discussed whether individuals should sacrifice their desires for the good of the group, or whether a society should be organized so as to allow maximal individual freedom. The teachers deliberately assigned texts that took different positions on this issue – for example, Plutarch's 'Life of Lycurgus', which describes the collectivist ancient Spartan system, as opposed to Ayn Rand's *Anthem*, which advocates extreme individualism. These texts about collectivism and individualism identify characteristic types of people. From some collectivist perspectives, for instance, those who contribute to the collective good are admirable comrades while those who refuse to sacrifice for the group are parasites or outcasts. The analysis below shows how such models of identity were mobilized to identify students themselves. The curriculum became a resource for social identification, as curricular categories like 'social outcast' were used to identify the focal student.

### 10.3 Research site and focal student

Colleoni High School was a large three-story brick building that occupied an entire city block in an ethnically mixed working-class neighbourhood of a large American city. When this research was conducted, more than a decade ago, the neighbourhood had become predominantly African American, together with growing populations of Latino and South Asian immigrants. The student body was ethnically mixed and mostly working class – approximately 50 per cent black, 25 per cent Latino, 15 per cent white, and 10 per cent Asian.

Like many other schools in the city, Colleoni participated voluntarily in desegregation by offering a special educational programme to students throughout the district. At Colleoni the programme was based on guidelines from *The Paideia Proposal* (Adler, 1982) and *An Introduction to Shared Inquiry* (Great Books Foundation, 1991). Adler and the Great Books Foundation recommend that students discuss 'genuine questions'. That is, 'seminar' discussions should involve students presenting and defending positions on complex questions, not simply parroting back the teacher's preferred answers. The two ninth grade teachers I spent most time with, Mrs Bailey and Mr Smith, ran joint history/English classes twice a week, when they had 80-minute seminar discussions with their 19 students. The other three days, each teacher ran more conventional didactic lessons for 40 minutes each. Increasingly over the year, they engaged students in rich seminar discussions of complex texts – discussions in which students came to recognize issues of enduring human concern and to formulate their own arguments about these issues.

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The focal student for this analysis, whom I will call Tyisha, was a 14-year-old African-American girl. Because this was her first year in high school the teachers had limited information about her. Her scores on the city-wide exam for eighth grade students placed her in the third quartile among students taking the test – about average for this ninth grade class, though slightly below average for all students in the great books programme at Colleoni High. Anyone observing Mrs Bailey and Mr Smith's class for the first time would notice Tyisha. She drew attention to herself both verbally and non-verbally. On most days she participated early and often in class discussion, answering teachers' questions and offering opinions of her own. One or two other students spoke as often as she did, but she called attention to herself by speaking more loudly and colourfully and by referring often to her own opinions and experiences. Tyisha also moved around in her seat more than most students, both when she was raising her hand and at other times. About once a week she created a commotion by dropping something on the floor during class – often her pile of xeroxed readings, handouts and notes, which were not fastened into her folder and cascaded across the floor. Despite drawing attention to herself in these ways, Tyisha was not officially classified as a problem student. She was not diagnosed with any disorder, nor was she identified as having special needs. She finished the year in this class, received a passing grade, and expected to return for her sophomore year. Based on the 50 hours I spent observing this classroom over the year, together with my experience in other settings, I would say that she was at least as intelligent as the average ninth grader.

### 10.4 Summary of Tyisha's classroom identity development

Tyisha's behaviour remained stable over the year in several important respects. She spoke often, she did not hesitate to disagree with the teachers, and her comments focused on her own opinions and her own experiences. In September and October the teachers identified her as a cooperative student. Their pedagogical philosophy called for students to present their own positions on curricular themes and to defend those positions with reference to their own experience and the text under discussion. While most other students were still trying to figure out what the teachers wanted to hear, Tyisha was articulating and defending her own opinions. In December, however, teachers and students began to identify Tyisha as disruptive. By then many other students were offering their own arguments, as the teachers wanted, and the teachers labelled Tyisha's strident disagreements and focus on her own opinions as a refusal to conform to classroom norms.

Tyisha's emerging identity as a disruptive student was atypical in this classroom, against the background of Mrs Bailey's gendered expectations for students. Mrs Bailey both explicitly and implicitly communicated that ninth grade girls were easier to teach than boys, because they conformed to



school expectations. Girls, she claimed, were more likely to succeed in school and in adulthood. Boys were more difficult to teach because they resisted school expectations. As a result, they were less likely to succeed both in school and in later life. This gendered difference in expectations and outcomes is increasingly common in American schools (Lopez, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Wortham, 2001). Whether because the stereotype is true, or because of self-fulfilling expectations, most students did come to enact these gender stereotypes throughout the year. Whenever possible the boys sat together in the back of the room, and all but one boy generally refused to participate, while many girls participated actively and dominated classroom discussions. Tyisha's identity development over the year took her from being typical for her gender to being atypical. Several girls in the class were quiet, and spoke only when called on. But Tyisha was the only girl who was identified as difficult.

Teachers and students identified Tyisha as an atypical girl, in part, using categories from the curriculum. The development of Tyisha's identity as a classroom 'outcast' occurred as teachers and students discussed one theme from the curriculum, a theme about the appropriate relation between individuals and society. Over about two months, the class read and discussed literature (like the Plutarch and Rand mentioned above) that advocated different positions on the question of whether society should be individualist or collectivist. When the class explored how all societies must ask individuals to sacrifice something for the good of the whole, and how people who refuse to conform cause problems, they developed local cognitive models of the curriculum that included categories for appropriate behaviour in a group. People who pursue their own desires without regard for the group's needs, for example, might be identified as disruptive outcasts. Over time, teacher and students identified Tyisha using this category at the same time as the class discussed this curricular theme.

While discussing their curricular theme, teachers and students developed an analogy between some aspects of the theme and their own classroom relationships: if students were to pursue their own ideas and desires in class without following any norms, the class would face the serious problems foreseen by critics of individualism; but if students did not express any ideas of their own, at least in this sort of 'great books' class, the discussion would grind to a halt. They used this analogy to understand the curriculum – exploring Lycurgus's collectivism, for instance, by discussing how their classroom discussions required individuals to sacrifice their desires for the good of the group. Teachers and students developed the analogy between the class and 'society' in part through a series of examples, including what I have called 'participant examples' – in which a participant in the conversation him or herself becomes a character in the example (Wortham, 1994). In several of these examples, Tyisha played the role of an individualist, disrupting or cast out from the group. Her transition from 'good student' to

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‘disruptive outcast’ solidified as teachers and students used the category of a disruptive outcast who refuses to conform to social expectations, both in their cognitive models of the curricular theme and as a category they used to identify Tyisha.

Tyisha’s identity development proceeded through four phases over the school year. First, from September into November she was just another promising female student. Second, from November to January teachers and students objected to her strenuous and opinionated statements. Third, from January into February, as described in the last paragraph, they drew systematically on the individualism/collectivism curricular theme to identify Tyisha as a disruptive outcast from the classroom ‘society’. Fourth, from late February into May, they drew from another curricular theme – one that explored the tension between loyalty to and resistance against authority – to identify Tyisha. During the spring, Tyisha’s identity as an outcast who resisted the teachers’ authority was sometimes construed as admirable resistance. She remained an outcast, but on occasion teachers and students identified her as an outcast legitimately resisting authority. These shifts in identity only become visible if we attend to the local timescale, as classroom-specific models of identity developed across the months of the academic year. And they can only be explained (in part) by tracing how categories from the curriculum contributed to Tyisha’s various identities over time.

### 10.5 From typical girl to disruptive outcast

From near the beginning of the year in Mrs Bailey and Mr Smith’s class, teachers and most students acted as if girls and boys have different social identities with respect to school. As Mrs Bailey said explicitly one day, girls are easier for teachers to deal with because they conform to school expectations, and they are more likely to succeed in school and in adulthood. Boys are more difficult to deal with, because they resist school expectations, and they are less likely to succeed both in school and in later life. I call this the stereotype of ‘promising girls and unpromising boys’. This stereotype draws on widely circulating socio-historical patterns, like those that identify black male students as particularly concerned with respect and more likely to resist participation in school (Anderson, 1999; Ferguson, 2000) and those that identify adolescent boys as disdainful of school success (Newkirk, 2002). But the gender difference was especially salient in this classroom, for two reasons. First, Mrs Bailey believed what she said – she both explicitly and implicitly stated it throughout the year, and the girls often reminded the boys about these alleged gender differences. Second, the boys tried to sit together in the back of the room, and all but one of them generally refused to participate in class discussion, while many girls participated actively and dominated classroom discussions. For more evidence of this local gender difference, see Wortham (2005).

### Extract 1

- 

### Extract 2

- 290 T/B: bees do what?  
TYI: kill.  
[laughter]  
MRC: some bee pollen, they raise[pollen  
T/B: [they fertilize  
FST: flowers.  
T/B: what do spiders do? they fertilize plants. bees are  
295 people who, are insects who ahh, Cassandra?

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At line 290 several students treat Tyisha's comment as a joke, by laughing. It was a small joke, but apparently successful. Note that the teachers do not discipline Tyisha for this. Mrs Bailey simply ignores Tyisha's comment and continues with the discussion. Tyisha then re-enters the conversation more constructively.

**Extract 3**

- T/B: how long do insects live?  
 CAN: maybe ten days, about [a week  
 MRC: [a week.  
 T/B: a day, a couple of months, alright.  
 320 TYI: some of them a day because you know, if they bite  
 you, they die.  
 T/B: okay some of them as soon- as soon as they, they, they  
 put their stinger in it, they're dead. okay, now put that  
 back to Pampu. why might the Chinese believe or feel  
 that man  
 325 comes from the earth as an insect. that man is similar to  
 an insect?

At lines 322–3, Mrs Bailey ratifies Tyisha's comment as a useful contribution, one which allows the teacher to articulate her analogy between the mortality of bees and the idea of humans as insects (at lines 323–6).

At the beginning of the year, then, the teachers positioned Tyisha as a normal or a good student. They appreciated her opinions, and they did not discipline her when she made jokes. As the fall went on, however, several other students learned to offer arguments and give evidence in the way that Paideia or great books teachers want. At this point the teachers increasingly distinguished between Tyisha's comments – which they began to characterize as 'opinions' offered without supporting evidence – and more successful students who gave better arguments. Tyisha's behaviour had not changed much. But relative to the teachers' expectations and to other students' increasingly successful participation, it looked as if Tyisha was acting differently. In December and January, her social identity began to shift from that of a good student to one who inappropriately pushes her own opinion, who gives incorrect answers and who disrupts class by leading discussion off-topic. Both teachers and other students began to treat her this way, drawing on a more traditional model of appropriate classroom behaviour in which students should not disrupt the teacher's agenda.

Some evidence for this shift comes from the teachers' increasingly blunt evaluations of Tyisha. Right before the following segment (from 18 January), Mrs Bailey has just interpreted a passage of a text from Aristotle that they had read. Aristotle is not saying that women are slaves to men,

only that the relationship between a man and woman is partly analogous to the relationship between a master and a slave.

#### Extract 4

- TYI: okay, when- um Sylvia was talking about the slave  
and the master, the master, okay, the slave, he uses  
430 his hands and stuff but- they won't give him a chance to use  
his- to teach him to read and stuff and the master know  
how, so he using his mind. why does he [ 4 unintelligible  
syllables]
- T/B: [okay, didn't you  
435 just missed the connection, the con- the thing is that-  
do not look at this as saying that slaves are manual  
workers, slaves- women are slaves. look at these as four  
distinct relationships.

Tyisha's reasoning wanders a bit from lines 428-33, but she is apparently struggling with academic issues relevant to the discussion. Nonetheless, Mrs Bailey interrupts to tell her that 'you just missed the connection' (lines 434-5).

This incident alone might have reflected momentary impatience on the teacher's part, but the following evaluation follows immediately.

#### Extract 5

- T/B: and in Greeks- in Greece, there certainly were  
slaves that used their mind. yeah?
- 445 FST: I'm talking about going back to what Tyisha said  
about how slaves that- well- if, okay if a master didn't  
teach the slaves how to read, how did they learn how to  
read?
- how did we know how to read and talk ourselves?
- T/B: o[kay, you just missed-
- 450 TYI: [ right, thank you.  
T/B: you just missed the point.  
JAS: you missed the point. we're not compari [ng them.  
TYI: [I know,
- 455 T/B: but I'm talking about-  
okay, look at this again, mental, manual workers,  
are mental workers

At line 445 an unidentified student refers back to the earlier comment by Tyisha, building on Tyisha's comment to ask a question. Mrs Bailey and Mr Smith normally encouraged students to refer to each other's comments in this way, because it helped students listen to each other

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and develop more complex arguments across the group. At line 450 Tyisha explicitly thanks the other student for resuscitating her point and asking the question.

But Mrs Bailey immediately jumps in (at lines 449 and 451) and returns to her earlier evaluation of Tyisha's point, with similar phrasing: 'you just missed the point.' The speed of Mrs Bailey's intervention, and her blunt characterization of Tyisha's (and the second student's) point, is uncharacteristic for this class. These teachers wanted students to develop their own arguments, and they generally helped students who are struggling to articulate something. But by January they expected that Tyisha's points would not contribute to the conversation – that her comments were disruptive and not substantive. Note that another student (Jasmine) echoes Mrs Bailey's evaluation of Tyisha at line 452. This illustrates how other students also assume that Tyisha's comments will lead the class off-topic and are not worth pursuing. Jasmine uses an exclusive 'we' in line 452, probably to distinguish Tyisha from the teachers and the other students. In this instance Tyisha did have one defender, the unidentified girl who sided with her at line 445. We will see Jasmine herself side with Tyisha in the extended example below.

The split between Tyisha and students who contributed to class broadened over time. Teachers and students increasingly identified Tyisha as a student prone to give incorrect answers and lead the discussion off-topic. The teachers continued to react quickly and harshly to many of her comments, presupposing that her contributions were disruptive and intellectually unproductive. The following segment, for instance, comes from 25 January.

**Extract 6**

- T/B: okay. well I think that he's talking more not about not being with people, but that he will not have to have people bail him out at any point. he can make it on his own.
- 1055 TYI: so you gonna be the only person living there?
- T/B: no. that's not what he's saying, Tyisha.
- CAN: he's saying that he can live without people helping him.
- 1060

At lines 1052–5, Mrs Bailey is summarizing her interpretation of a point. Tyisha offers a gloss at lines 1056–7, a gloss which misstates Mrs Bailey's point, and the teacher reacts immediately by telling Tyisha she is wrong. This quick and blunt response contrasts with the teachers' typical response in such situations. If another student had said this, or if Tyisha herself had said it earlier in the year, they would most likely have explored her point or been more gentle in evaluating her response. Another student gives a more

accurate gloss at lines 1059–60, then the class continues to discuss the point and ignores Tyisha.

By February, Tyisha's identity as a disruptive outcast had solidified. Teachers and students generally acted as if she was disorganized, prone to offer comments that took the class off-topic, and concerned with her own ideas more than with helping the group develop a coherent discussion. Thus Tyisha became an exception to the local gender stereotype. She was a girl who, nonetheless, was not a good student and was not likely to succeed. In the following segment, for example, from 11 February, Mr Smith explicitly characterizes Tyisha as a bad student who does not listen.

### Extract 7

- 50 T/S: I will do a spot check, spot check your notebook.  
the notebook, and you better listen Tyisha, because you  
have a habit of never listening to me. Tyisha
- TYI: I know what you're talking about[
- T/S: [no.
- 55 TYI: you're talking about[ the notebook
- T/S: [your ears are unfortunately closed sometimes.
- ...
- T/S: number five. who made the laws?
- 65 FST: the assembly.
- T/S: okay [ what page?
- TYI: [the king
- T/S: no. you're wrong. because you're guessing without  
looking. and that is [
- 70 TYI: [no way.
- T/S: exactly what you do as a bad [student.
- TYI: [no I wasn't
- T/S: halt.

At line 52, Mr Smith says that Tyisha never listens to him. And at line 71 he calls her a bad student. Mr Smith had a temper, and he sometimes made inappropriate comments like this about other students. But Tyisha was more likely to be the target, as teachers and students increasingly assumed that she made inappropriate contributions and took the class off-topic.

My data contain at least a dozen other telling examples, from December through May, of how Tyisha was explicitly identified as disruptive by the teachers and students. They accused her of not listening, of being wrong, and of making comments that led discussion off-track. Taken together, these comments show that the teachers and students came to identify her differently than they had earlier in the year. From September through

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November she was just another student, and sometimes a good one, but by December and January she had become a disruptive student who made implausible arguments that derailed discussions. Instead of taking time to explore the reasoning behind her comments – and, it must be said, there was only sometimes defensible reasoning behind them – the teachers and other students quickly dismissed Tyisha and moved back to their own discussion. Further evidence of Tyisha's emerging identity can be found in Wortham (2003, 2004, 2005), which analyse extended segments of classroom discourse in which Tyisha gets identified as disruptive and as an outcast from the classroom community. Wortham (2003) shows how the disruptive outcast identity was not only attributed to Tyisha by others, but was also sometimes actively embraced by Tyisha herself. She did not deliberately plan to become a disruptive outcast, but she willingly challenged the teachers despite their explicit complaints about her 'disruptions.'

### 10.6 From disruptive outcast to reasonable sceptic

So Tyisha's identity shifted from that of a good student to a disruptive one, especially during December and January. But she did not get trapped in this identity. Instead of labelling her simply as disruptive for the rest of the year, in the spring the teachers sometimes evaluated Tyisha's vigorous arguments as legitimate resistance to authority. Teachers and students still identified her as a disruptive student some of the time. But Tyisha developed another identity as a student who sometimes offered reasoned dissent.

The first evidence for this new identity comes from a discussion on 22 February. In this class Tyisha argued that the students themselves have been tricked by the teachers and the assigned texts, which are probably not describing historical events as they really happened. Thus she positioned herself as a sceptic who defended other students against the teachers' misinformation.

#### Extract 8

- 890 TYI: all this stuff is probably phony.  
 T/B: all of this stuff is phony. you've been in a class now for the last seven months where you've been receiving phony information.
- 895 TYI: and nobody cannot tell me, prove it to me that this is true. so I just listen and talk, just like I believe it.  
 T/B: well, you know, I think that's a good point. I think that you should question. what would be the evidence that this might be true?  
 TYI: that it's just in Greece.



- 900 T/B: you don't think there was a Greece?  
 TYI: yeah, I do believe that. we found it on the map, but when we go there we gonna see different, totally different stuff. I don't know, I just don't believe it.
- 205 T/B: okay, you don't think there are any documents from  
 905 the period? you don't think there are any things that- that have been left around from like when Athens was in its glory?  
 TYI: some people probably went to Athens and made up the story.

At line 890 Tyisha claims that the information in the curriculum is 'probably phony'. She refuses to believe it, although she pretends that she does in order to get by in class. Given the teachers' reactions to Tyisha over the past months, we might expect that Tyisha's challenge would generate a hostile or dismissive response. But, after initially being sarcastic at lines 891-3, Mrs Bailey praises Tyisha for 'questioning' at lines 896-7. This is one of the highest values in the teachers' pedagogical philosophy. One must continually question, as Adler and the Great Books Foundation advocate. So Mrs Bailey's comment (at lines 896-7) seems to be uncharacteristic praise for Tyisha. Just this one segment by itself certainly did not change Tyisha's identity. We will need more evidence to assess the significance of Mrs Bailey's comments. But this segment raises the possibility that, instead of being a disruptive outcast, at the end of February Tyisha may have been turning into a reasonable sceptic.

Mrs Bailey followed up Tyisha's challenge on February 22 with a discussion of evidence and scepticism in interpreting history. The teachers asked students to look through another text they had just read for evidence that might contradict Pericles's description of Athens. In this way they modelled historical method for the students. They also enacted how Tyisha's position as a sceptic is integral to the practice of historical interpretation. Mrs Bailey then summarizes their discussion.

### Extract 9

- T/B: ... and, certainly, in your class, you've gone back  
five thousand years ago. where are these documents?  
how
- 1070 do we know that they're real, and they just weren't made up by somebody who wanted to lie? and those are questions that historians deal with? and you know what a cynic Mr Smith is and can you imagine an entire community full of Mr Smiths who are going around trying to make a name

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- 1075 for themselves by saying this is false. okay, people like you that go, I don't believe this. I'm going to go and find out that it was false and spend the rest of my life proving this wasn't false. and there have been millions of people, thousands of people, certainly hundreds of thousands of
- 1080 people, that have engaged in that kind of inquiry. so I, I appreciate your scepticism. I think, I think it's right. I think that you need to sometimes say, where is this information coming from? but I'd also like you to recognize that you're not the first person to have those questions and that there are
- 1085 people who have devoted their lives to authenticating, to saying this is really real or did somebody make it up? okay. is it time to go yet? you want to pull this together wherever you are at the moment. I really like this question. it's very good.

At lines 1069–71 Mrs Bailey echoes Tyisha's question, and at lines 1071–2 she makes clear that professional historians ask questions similar to Tyisha's. There is an interlude from lines 1072–8 where she paints a somewhat unflattering picture of Mr Smith – with whom she generally did not get along. But at line 1081 she 'appreciates' Tyisha's 'scepticism', and at lines 1088–9 she again praises Tyisha's question. She thus identifies Tyisha as an independent, critical, even heroic dissenter. In this discussion on 22 February, then, Tyisha may be changing from a disruptive outcast into a reasoned sceptic. At this point the new identity was provisional. But in the spring, legitimate resistance to authority became a central topic in the curriculum. Just as the curricular concept of disruptive outcast had been used earlier to facilitate Tyisha's developing identity in January and February, the new curricular concept of a citizen legitimately resisting authority became important to Tyisha's new identity as a legitimate dissenter.

Tyisha's dissent was also framed as legitimate resistance on 12 April, when teachers and students juxtaposed Tyisha's identity as a dissenter with a protagonist who analogously refused to go along with authority. The class had read a story, 'The Pearl', in which a poor Native American named Kino finds a pearl. He brings it to the Europeans who control the local town and they offer him 1000 pesos for it. Because he knows that the pearl is worth much more, and because Europeans have often cheated the Indians, Kino refuses their offer and makes a perilous journey to the capital city to get a fair price. Given the curricular theme of loyalty and resistance that the students and teachers have been discussing, students take Kino to represent people who have been exploited and the Europeans to represent unjust

rulers. The central question for the seminar is whether Kino should have sold the pearl to the Europeans. Should he have been content with his station in life, or should he have resisted the Europeans' attempt to exploit him?

Well into the discussion, Tyisha offers an example. A student has asked how Kino knows his pearl is worth more than 1000 pesos. Tyisha responds with an unclear analogy to Nike Air Jordan basketball shoes.

### Extract 10

- TYI: it's just like these Nike's that out- that's out. people want it now cause they think they Jordan.
- 1075 MRC: (hh)
- TYI: but when he got on tv, and said, they not real. they got mad, you know they not real, but you know he's like they not bad. people stop buying them.
- ...
- 1090 T/B: whoa, whoa, whoa, I, I, I lost the connection to the pearl here.
- STS: (hhh)
- T/B: perhaps you could make the connection between-
- TYI: just like people see this pearl and they think it's real
- 1095 so they willing to spend money on it.
- FST: yeah, like the gym shoes.
- JAS: [yeah, like my shoes.
- T/B: oh, so you're making the connection, your connection here is a repercussion to what Germaine said. that
- 1100 Germaine was saying, hey, he knows it's worth something because everybody else seems to think it's worth something= [
- TYI: [right
- T/B: = and you're saying people can ha:ve, all be deceived.
- 1105 is that what I'm hearing Tyisha?
- TYI: yeah sure.
- FST: (hh)
- T/B: so you're rescinding what Germaine said.
- TYI: no I'm agreeing with her.
- 1110 T/B: no. you're disagreeing with Germaine.
- TYI: what'd she say?
- FST: he opposite of what she's saying.
- TYI: oh, my fault. I'm disagreeing with her.
- STS: [3 seconds of laughter]
- 1115 T/B: you have to start relating you're points directly so we all follow your thinking.

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The analogy between Tyisha's account of fake Jordan shoes (at lines 1073–8) and Kino's pearl is not clear, as Mrs Bailey points out at lines 1090–1. Tyisha tries to clarify at lines 1094–5. But since Kino's pearl was real, the analogy does not hold.

Mrs Bailey tries to articulate Tyisha's point such that it makes some sense, at lines 1098–102. But Tyisha's response at line 1106 sounds sarcastic – as if she does not really care what she was trying to say. Tyisha acknowledges that she was not following the earlier discussion, by asking a question at line 1111. Then at line 1113 she makes a joke, indicating again that she does not really care about the substance. Mrs Bailey responds to this oppositional behaviour with a comment at lines 1115–16 that echoes many others the teachers made in preceding months. She distinguishes between Tyisha ('you') and the rest of the class ('we'). Even in April, then, Tyisha is sometimes a disruptive student who does not care enough to contribute constructively to class discussion.

As the class proceeds, however, the theme of resistance against authority opens up the identity of legitimate dissenter for Tyisha. While discussing whether Kino should have sold the pearl to the Europeans, Tyisha vigorously argues that he should not have, while several other students argue that he should have just sold it and not been greedy. Mrs Bailey makes the argument more relevant to students' own identities by giving a participant example. She imagines that the students are facing oppression like Kino, and asks whether they would resist it. The specific topic concerns education. In the story, Kino wants to get more money for the pearl in order to buy an education for his child. In the example, students must decide whether to tolerate a 'separate but equal' Jim Crow education or whether to demand a more adequate education.

**Extract 11**

- 1180 T/B: okay, I, I, excuse me, I'm a southern state. a:nd uh,  
I'll give you an education Jasmine. I'll give you an  
education in that building over there, with all these kids  
crammed in, with text books that are fifty years old. o:r  
(1.0) you can take a chance. and you can stand up to the  
power structure. and maybe even pull your kids out of  
1185 school and boycott schools for a while. and maybe not get  
any education at all for awhile because you want a real  
education and not this Jim Crow education.
- FST: right.
- T/B: what do you do?
- 1190 FST: you stand up for what you believe in.
- T/B: you take what you can get? or do you go after what  
is really what you want?
- STS: [3 seconds of chatter]

- 1195 TYI: because, if he had been poor for this long, and he had a chance to be happy with his life, why don't give it to someone you know that's not gonna be satisfied as you?
- JAS: but, but in, in the long run, wait a minute, in the long run you might not even get nothing, so you just gonna sit there.
- 1200 TYI: I'd rather go try, then just sit there and say this is about sitting down. I- I think I could have got more than that. I'm not gonna sit there no longer, I'm gonna go out and search for some money. I'm not gonna be like that.
- ...
- ...
- 1230 T/B: [reading from text] ... for it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more. and this is said in disparagement? °that means put down, kind of [5 unintelligible syllables]° whereas it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that made it superior to the animals that are satisfied with what they have. that Jasmine who's telling us should be satisfied with what you have, we've got Tyisha saying hey, go for it. now. this again we're circling around, do we? are we to be content with
- 1240 what we have or should we go after other things?

At lines 1200–3, Tyisha argues that Kino should not have been satisfied with the Europeans' offer. She imagines herself in such a situation, using 'I', and says that she would not cooperate with the Europeans' exploitation. At line 1238 Mrs Bailey summarizes Tyisha's position as 'go for it'. She then uses Tyisha's argument to restate the larger question about whether people should resist exploitation.

This participant example develops an analogy between students' identities as African Americans – who have been and in many cases continue to be denied adequate public education – and Kino's identity as a Native American exploited by Europeans. Mrs Bailey explicitly makes race relevant at line 1187 when she mentions 'Jim Crow', a term that indexes the unequal social conditions endured by African Americans before the Civil Rights Movement. This analogy between the black students and Kino participates in a broader analogy, developed over many classes, between the students as disempowered black people and the 'citizens' (of the second curricular theme) who must decide whether to remain loyal to or resist authority.

Analogies like this can mediate social identification. Teachers and students construct local cognitive models to understand the curricular topic of

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legitimate resistance. Through the analogy, they use categories of identity from their own experience – like the legitimate resistance to Jim Crow segregation that many of the students' ancestors suffered – to construct these models. Categories of identity from these cognitive models become available to amend or construct models they use to identify each other socially. When participant examples bring the analogy into the classroom itself and apply cognitive categories to individual students, the curriculum can become a resource for identifying students like Tyisha (Wortham, 2003).

The analogy between Kino and African Americans facilitates Tyisha's emerging identity as a reasoned dissenter and a defender of the disempowered. Those who worked for equal education in the Civil Rights Movement pursued a just cause. If Kino's situation is in fact like theirs, he should resist exploitation and stick up for himself. By analogy, in the classroom, Tyisha's regular dissent against the teachers could also be framed as legitimate resistance. And in fact, in the discussion on 12 April, Mrs Bailey does shift her evaluation of Tyisha. Earlier in the discussion Tyisha had been labelled as disruptive (e.g., at lines 1115–16), but by line 1238 Mrs Bailey positions Tyisha as contributing to the conversation by defending an alternative point of view.

In this segment Tyisha both articulates and enacts a position of opposition or resistance. She argues that someone marginalized, like Kino, should oppose the powerful and stand up for himself. She also defends her opinion against several others in the class. She habitually opposes the teachers and other students by defending unpopular positions. So in this discussion Tyisha enacts what she recommends that marginalized people should be doing. People like Kino who stick up for themselves are not greedy, but are justifiably defending their interests against others who take advantage of them. Mrs Bailey's favourable response to Tyisha here endorses Tyisha's position. Sticking up for oneself with reasoned arguments in classroom discussion is valued by the teachers, just as Kino's decision to stick up for himself is valued by Tyisha.

In this class on 12 April, then, Tyisha gets explicitly labelled as and enacts both emergent identities – as a disruptive outcast and as a legitimate dissenter. The first identity emerged and solidified from December through February, with respect to the individualism/collectivism curricular theme, and it remains available as teachers and students identify her throughout the rest of the school year. The second identity became available in April and thereafter. At the end of the school year, Tyisha was sometimes positioned as a legitimate dissenter, as someone who was justifiably sceptical about majority opinions and stuck up for her point of view. This identity as a legitimate dissenter was facilitated by the loyalty/resistance curricular theme, as discussions of legitimate resistance appeared in the curriculum and became available as a category of identity. The 12 April example shows how both identities sometimes appeared in the same discussions and how Tyisha shifted from one to the other within a few minutes.

## 10.7 Conclusions

Over the academic year, Tyisha went from being a normal female student, to being a disruptive outcast, to sometimes being a reasoned dissenter and sometimes being a disruptive outcast. These shifts in classroom identity happened despite the fact that her behaviour remained relatively consistent across the year. Tyisha's identity development was accomplished – by her, the teachers and other students – in part using categories made available through the curricular themes of individualism/collectivism and loyalty/resistance. The category of 'outcast' became available to frame Tyisha's identity as the class started discussing the first curricular theme. As they built local cognitive models of that theme, those models intertwined with the local models of identity they constructed to identify Tyisha. Then, when the category of 'reasoned sceptic' became available during discussions of the second theme, Tyisha's identity sometimes shifted again.

These local models of identity, which entered the classroom through discussion of curricular themes, were not the only resources used to identify Tyisha. Institutionalized expectations about appropriate student and teacher behaviour, stereotypes and expectations about how working-class African Americans relate to mainstream institutions like school, and other widely circulating models and processes were relevant to Tyisha's social identification in this classroom. But these more widely circulating models are not sufficient to account for her shifts in identity, because the shifts were mediated through more local categories. Tyisha became a particular type of girl, one who violated the local stereotype of promising girls and unpromising boys, as teachers and students borrowed categories of identity from the local curricular themes. If the curriculum has not been organized as it was in this particular classroom, Tyisha's identity would probably have developed somewhat differently. She might have been 'disruptive,' but probably not a 'disruptive outcast'. In addition to the importance of the local timescale, the contingent shapes of particular events also influenced how Tyisha was identified in context. But neither were her shifts in identity constructed entirely at the event-level.

The analyses show how local, intermediate-timescale processes, like the development of categories within a particular classroom over several months, can play an essential role in constituting the social identification of students. These processes draw on longer-timescale processes, which supply widely circulating models of identity. They also draw on shorter-timescale processes like interactional events in the classroom. But locally emerging models and resources, like the curricular models of identity and the habitual positions that other students took with respect to Tyisha, played an essential role in this case. In at least some cases, then, we must go beyond 'macro' and 'micro' and examine other relevant timescales.

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I do not claim that the configuration of widely circulating, local and event-level processes that played a role in Tyisha's social identification is always the right one for studying social identification. The relevant processes and timescales will vary depending on the focal phenomenon being analysed. Even the social identification of different individuals in the same context can draw on different configurations of timescales (Wortham, 2005). Nor do I claim to have analysed all timescales relevant to the social identification of Tyisha in this classroom – to do so would require more space and expertise than I have. But I do claim to have shown that adequate analysis of social identification in this case must examine how processes at various timescales interconnect. I emphasize local processes of emerging models and categories of identity over the course of the school year in order to show how 'micro' and 'macro,' singly or in 'dialectic,' will not suffice as levels of analysis.



## APPENDIX

### Transcription Conventions

'-'	abrupt breaks or stops (if several, stammering)
'?'	rising intonation
'.'	falling intonation
'_'	(underline) stress
(1.0)	silences, timed to the nearest second
'['	indicates simultaneous talk by two speakers, with one utterance represented on top of the other and the moment of overlap marked by left brackets
'='	interruption or next utterance following immediately, or continuous talk represented on separate lines because of need to represent overlapping comment on intervening line
'[...]'	transcriber comment
':'	elongated vowel
'°...°'	segment quieter than surrounding talk
','	pause or breath without marked intonation
'(hh)'	laughter breaking into words while speaking

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