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Signs Of Success In Italian Schooling

Andrea Renee Leone-Pizzighella

University of Pennsylvania, andrea.leone.pizzighella@gmail.com

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Signs Of Success In Italian Schooling

Abstract
Italy’s secondary schools—the product of the class-based division of the education system around the time of Italy’s unification in 1861—are divided into three branches: the vocational school, the technical institute, and the lyceum. These three types of schools, their students, and their academic rigor are continuously discursively constructed as qualitatively distinct from one another. In accordance with these distinctions made between them on both a national and local level, students are differently attracted to and socialized to participate in the types of schooling associated with each. This dissertation draws on everyday sociolinguistic practices and emergent language ideologies across the three schools in order to explore the intersection of language, class, education, and persona in the construction of the “good” or “successful” student.

This dissertation draws on a nine-month linguistic ethnography of language-in-education in the central region of Umbria, Italy. Through participant observation, audiovisual recording, classroom discourse analysis, and analysis of narrative, I analyze how students perform academically and how they orient to various public and private performances of academic prowess across the three school types. Specifically, this dissertation aims to identify how the "successful student" comes to be realized through interaction, rather than treating it as a static trait. Further, by framing sociolinguistic metadiscourse as instances of de facto language policy, I demonstrate how everyday interactions in schools can have an impact on the ways that students learn to participate in academic endeavors and/or how they are excluded from them.

This dissertation concludes that students are likely channeled into particular school models not according to what their interests are, but according to whether they conform to or flout a particular set of qualities associated with the “good” or “successful” student. In this sense, students’ language backgrounds, previous school experiences, and family education background all play an important role in the education trajectory that they will pursue in secondary school and beyond. It is then within each of the three schools that students are socialized into specific academic discourses which continue to funnel them into specialized forms of knowledge and ways of being throughout their school careers.

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SIGNS OF SUCCESS IN ITALIAN SCHOOLING
Andrea Leone-Pizzighella
A DISSERTATION
in
Education
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Supervisor of Dissertation:
________________________________________
Betsy Rymes, Professor of Education

Graduate Group Chairperson:
________________________________________
J. Matthew Hartley, Professor of Education

Dissertation Committee:
Nancy H. Hornberger, Professor of Education
Robert Moore, Senior Lecturer in Education
Sabina Perrino, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics, Binghamton
University (SUNY)
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ABSTRACT

SIGNS OF SUCCESS IN ITALIAN SCHOOLING

Andrea Leone-Pizzighella

Betsy Rymes

Italy’s secondary schools—the product of the class-based division of the education system around the time of Italy’s unification in 1861—are divided into three branches: the vocational school, the technical institute, and the lyceum. These three types of schools, their students, and their academic rigor are continuously discursively constructed as qualitatively distinct from one another. In accordance with these distinctions made between them on both a national and local level, students are differently attracted to and socialized to participate in the types of schooling associated with each. This dissertation draws on everyday sociolinguistic practices and emergent language ideologies across the three schools in order to explore the intersection of language, class, education, and persona in the construction of the “good” or “successful” student.

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PREFACE

Years before first setting foot in Italian secondary schools, I had begun to piece together an image of them in my mind. Italian class in my American middle school and high school had taught me that the word for ‘high school’ in Italian was *liceo*. It wasn’t until I went to study in Italy much later that I realized how significant that term was: in chatting with some of my Italian classmates after our university lecture, I mentioned something that *avevo imparato al liceo negli Stati Uniti* (‘I had learned in high school [*liceo*] in the United States’). Surprised expressions popped up on everyone’s faces: *Ma, ci sono i licei in America?!* (‘But, there are high schools [*licei*] in America?!’). Of course, I replied. One of these classmates, who had much more intercultural awareness than the rest of us, sought to clarify by asking: *Per ‘liceo’ intendi ‘high school’, no?* (‘By ‘*liceo*’ you mean ‘high school,’ right?’). It was only at that point that I realized the weight of the word ‘*liceo*’ and what it meant for someone to identify with it. As a person who had not attended a lyceum, specifically, but a non-specialized public high school in the United States, I learned that a lyceum—according to these former students—was not just any secondary school\(^1\). Those who had attended lyceums (especially the classical specialization) shared a collective sense of having suffered for their diploma, after spending hours each night hunched over a Greek dictionary trying to finish a translation, and, later that day between classes, frantically reciting a monologue about the life of Charlemagne that they crafted from the facts in their textbook, just in case they were called for an oral pop quiz (known as an *interrogazione*) in front of all of their peers. As

someone whose high school experience consisted of a mixture of classes in several different subjects at different so-called ability levels, whose school carried elective courses like Weather Systems, Ceramics, Photography, Wood Shop, and Home Economics, and whose experience of high school had been primarily oriented toward being gently encouraged to figure out what I wanted to major in at college, the Italian secondary school system to me seemed at once incredibly restrictive and also admirable in its apparent depth and rigor. I took a philosophy class for the first time during the year I studied at the University of Verona and was surprised at how much of a foundation the majority of the class (most of whom had attended licei) already had (having studied it for years). The same was true for my peers’ familiarity with Greek and Latin expressions and with ancient history: these were subjects that my American public high school certainly had not covered.

I realized at a certain point that my friend group in Verona was comprised almost exclusively of former liceali (lyceum students), mainly from the liceo classico (the classical specialization), who had gone on to study philosophy, literature, education, languages, law, medicine, and diplomacy after their secondary school graduation. They came from various neighborhoods and family backgrounds, but most were from families of some means (ranging from property-owning bourgeois families to families who ran successful small businesses). I developed a better understanding of lyceums during the 2012/2013 school year when I was a teaching assistant in Rome, spending two days per week at a prestigious classical lyceum in the exclusive central neighborhood of Parioli, and two days per week at a technical institute for tourism in a modest peripheral neighborhood called La Rustica. Until that point, I had known very little about the world
of Italian technical schools (and the people who attended them and taught in them). A technical institute for tourism, the student body at this particular school was predominantly female, and many of the students had a head start on exposure to foreign languages due to their family connections to Tunisia, Romania, Poland, Egypt, and other countries in Eastern Europe and Northern Africa.

The difference in teacher-student rapport was immediately noticeable between the two schools: the lyceum students rarely spoke to their teachers if not spoken to, they listened to lectures without interrupting or asking questions, and the majority of their interactions with teachers took the form of seemingly rehearsed responses to known-answer questions. The technical school students, on the other hand, had nicknames for their teachers, they hugged them, they cried in front of them, they got into arguments with them, and they asked insistent questions during lectures. There seemed to be less fear about being called on for an oral pop quiz (because they were much less common), and less focus on getting perfect grades. I also heard stories from teachers at the technical school that I never heard at the lyceum: about teachers calling parents to implore them to send their children back to school even though they had reached the minimum required age to drop out, about immigration status preventing students from participating in foreign exchange programs (e.g. Erasmus and Comenius), and about personal/family problems ranging from parental unemployment to rarer cases of homelessness or abuse.

Still lacking any experience in a vocational school, I asked around about them to the people that I knew in Italy: What are they like? Who goes to them? Can they go to university when they graduate? From many of my friends and acquaintances I received responses about how vocational school students barely know how to speak Italian—that
they only speak *dialetto*, or a nonstandard regional variety. Moreover, many of my acquaintances mentioned that vocational school students do not want to study, that they failed out of every other type of school, that they’re from problematic families, that they’re all boys, and that they graduate in three years (a time frame that therefore makes them ineligible for university). Later experiences chatting with (male and female) graduates of vocational schools throughout Italy, however, showed me that they run popular restaurants and wineries, that they are highly successful teachers, and that they are respected artists, to name just a few of their post-diploma trajectories. My experiences in Cittadina², where I conducted fieldwork for this dissertation, further confirmed that the rumors I had heard about vocational schools were to be taken with a grain of salt.

These initial experiences in and around Italian secondary schools, as well as with teachers and both current and former students, led me to this study of Italian secondary schooling and the subjectivities produced by it. My own experience as a teacher of English in various English language centers both in the United States and Italy had shown me that teachers tend to work in silos, but that rumors about particular students, their histories, their families, and even their intelligence and socioemotional wellbeing spread like wildfire in the teachers’ lounge and in the hallways. I also learned that schools are often in silent competition with one another, that there are unofficial rankings of schools based on teachers’ experiences circulating through them, and that certain types of people—whether teachers or students—are believed to be associated with certain schools.

Putting together my experiences as a teacher and my initial curiosities about Italian secondary schooling, I set out on a systematic study aimed at more fully developing my

² All names are pseudonyms
understanding both of how schools come to be defined by the people inside them and how people come to be defined by the schools they attend. That research is presented here.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

During the 2016/2017 academic year, I set out to ethnographically explore the intersection of social class, language, education, and persona at three schools in Cittadina, a small city in a *comune*, or county, of approximately 30,000 inhabitants in Umbria, a central region of Italy (see Figure 1). The three schools included in this research are a classical lyceum, an industrial technical institute, and a vocational school, each housed in physically separate locations and each of which offers a distinct academic pathway for students. My research aimed at better understanding the circulating discourses about the programs these three schools offer, the quality and rigor (or lack thereof) of the education they provide, the types of students who attend them, and—related but not identical to the previous point—the types of subjects who graduate from them.

My research questions therefore aim at unpacking how schools both *attract* and *create* different types of students via widely circulating discourses about education and socialization into academic discourses associated with each. The questions are also interrelated in that students tend to enroll at a particular school because they have certain expectations about the social and academic practices associated with it, which they must then also learn to navigate in such a way that they emerge as “successful” in those contexts. I have aimed to interrupt this somewhat circular problem by investigating the everyday sociolinguistic practices in the classical lyceum, the technical institute, and the vocational school as well as the prevalent ideologies about these schools and their students. My research questions, which are detailed further in Chapter 2, ask (a) *How are*
the student bodies of these three school types (co)constructed via narrative and metacommentary? (b) How do students perform knowledge for peers and teachers? and (c) What does “success” look and sound like within and across the three school types?

1.2 Research context and researcher positionality

Figure 1: Map of Italy, with circle over Cittadina. Source: Google Maps.
Cittadina, like many of the cities in the Apennine mountain chain, is relatively isolated and sparsely populated\(^3\), especially when compared to the cities of Italy’s western seaboard (the Milan-to-Naples corridor). No train station serves the city, and the nearest university is about 40 miles away in Perugia, the capital of Umbria. However, this mountainous isolation is part of what regularly attracts tourists from northern Europe and other regions of Italy who make day trips to Cittadina and other nearby cities in the Apennines to admire the medieval architecture and take part in the colorful Renaissance-style festivals. While I would sometimes hear residents (particularly adolescents and young adults) lamenting about how small the city is, how little there is to do, and how closed-minded the other residents are, my observation was that residents of Cittadina are, on average, immensely proud of their town, territory, and festivals. At the borders, one small town blends into the next, and residents of Cittadina and other nearby towns and small cities have longstanding friendly rivalries with each other, boasting about the superiority of their town’s seasonal festival(s) and other unique characteristics. However, because of the open enrollment secondary school system and different course offerings from town to town, students from neighboring towns often attend the same schools, find themselves in the same classes, and become friends.

While planning my ten-month school year in Cittadina and in the early days of my being there, I was warned by many that Umbrians were notoriously closed minded and that they were not welcoming to outsiders. Using the region’s climate, geography, and topography as justifications for this unwelcoming and skeptical attitude, people often cited the severity of Umbrian winters and the mountainous terrain as keeping the local

\(^{3}\) The population density of Umbria is approximately 168 inhabitants per square mile (Tuttitalia, 2019)
people isolated from outsiders and blamed the centralized location of the region—away from the coasts—for the lack of contact with foreigners and the resulting ignorance of the Umbrian population. While these are indeed interesting and ideologically-loaded data points, these warnings did not hold water as anything more than folklore during my fieldwork experience: I felt generally accepted as a temporary neighborhood fixture, even in the small neighborhood in the small town where I lived. The shopkeepers in my neighborhood found my accent “cute” (carino), and told me so, and I eventually got used to being carefully observed by elderly men playing cards and by elderly women going to market each time I exited my apartment into the square. In defense of small-town gossip mills, no doubt spearheaded by my elderly upstairs neighbor, I was prime fodder for gossip: a young American woman, married but living away from her husband, terrible at cleaning the stairwell in her apartment building, and sometimes out until all hours on the weekends getting picked up and dropped off by cars no one had seen around the neighborhood before.

Among the mostly senior citizen population of my neighborhood, I perceived that I was mainly a benign mystery, but for the majority of the population of teachers and students at the three schools I collaborated with, I was a colleague and a “prof.” Throughout my stay, I battled with being assigned the madrelingua inglese (‘mother tongue English-speaker’) identity, which was both a blessing and a curse: it provided me endless opportunities to earn extra income under the table (which I always politely declined) and it granted me a position of ‘expert’ with many of the teachers and students. However—had I leaned into these opportunities and positionings—it would have prevented me from engaging with my three sites and the participants in the way that I had
hoped. That is, I wanted to be positioned as an *inaexpert* user of Italian, dialect, academic discourses, and so forth, and *not* as an expert in English: I felt that the former positioning would open up more doors for me to break the ice in the classes I was observing, would give me license to ask seemingly silly questions about how school and language work, and would avoid putting me in any position of real authority either with respect to teachers or students. Once I established myself in the researcher and “guest” role that I had sought out, I eventually gave in to teaching afterschool English courses at the lyceum and technical institute for students and teachers toward the end of the school year, realizing that in all fairness, that was probably one of the selling points that my contacts had used in order to grant me access to the three fieldsites to begin with.

1.2.1 Ethnicity and language in Cittadina. Thus, in terms of my position as a foreigner in this small town, I imagine that many of the students with non-Italian, or even non-Umbrian, origins had somewhat different experiences than I did in Cittadina and surrounding towns, considering their more “marked” names, accents, skin tones, or styles of dress. For instance, while being an L1 English speaker was treated as an extremely valuable resource, the students who spoke Arabic, Albanian, Romanian, or Russian did not appear as likely to treat their linguistic knowledge as valuable⁴. The students with darker skin tones also made themselves and found themselves the butt of jokes about

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⁴ During a presentation about employment, done at the technical institute by representatives of the local youth center, students were given mock identity cards with blank spaces inside where they were prompted to write about their unique personal qualities, their strengths, their weaknesses, and their special skills. The students had some difficulty thinking about special skills they had which pertained to employment, so I suggested they write that they spoke another language. The two students I suggested this to, both speakers of Arabic, replied that they didn’t speak English very well. I clarified that I meant that Arabic was a special skill. They both laughed out loud and made a big joke out of it, shouting out to their classmates the apparently ridiculous suggestion I had just made.
tanning as we neared the beginning of the summer break. While the population of Cittadina was, at the time of my research, primarily from that area, there were people of all ages who had come from other regions of Italy and even other countries in Western Europe. A large population of German-speakers and Northern Europeans had settled in the hills around Cittadina in the 1960s, wanting to live close to the land, and other residents of a certain age had come from as far as Argentina to run businesses in the area. More recent arrivals, both older and younger, included the ubiquitous (in Italy) Eastern European (Moldovan, Russian) and Filipino women who act as nannies, home health aides, housekeepers, or a combination of all three for middle-class Italian families. Some of these women are employed seasonally, but the majority live in Italy, sometimes even staying several nights per week at the homes of their elderly charges. In Cittadina, there was a sizeable population of Eastern European women who did these types of jobs as well as others (e.g., hospitality), and there were a fair number of children in schools who had Albanian, Moldovan, and Romanian origins.

More recent still are the North African and Sub-Saharan African men, women, and families who have steadily arrived in Italy as economic or political refugees throughout the late 1990s and 2000s (Bonifazi, Heins, Strozza, Vitiello 2009; ISMU 2018; Perrino 2013, 2017, 2019). In Cittadina’s schools, the population of students with sub-Saharan African origins was fairly small, while the population of students with North African roots (Tunisia, Morocco) was slightly larger. As is explained in Chapter 2, the distribution of students with mixed or non-Italian origins was noticeably uneven across

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5 A student with Eastern European roots held up his arm to his North African classmate’s arm and commented that that he would be “worse than him” (i.e. darker than him) when he got back from summer break, which got big laughs from the North African student and from surrounding classmates.
the schools, with the highest concentration in the vocational schools, followed by the technical institutes, and with the smallest population being in the lyceums. This is consistent with national trends showing that, while the disparities are not as great as they were ten years prior, students with non-Italian citizenship make up about 23% of the student population in upper secondary schools in general, but represent 36% of the student body at vocational schools, 37% at technical institutes, and 27% at lyceums (Santagati 2018).

Also consistent with national policy, there were no pull-out language programs, newcomer programs, or special accommodations for students who were not proficient in Italian at the schools where I conducted research; those students were inserted into mainstream classes and assigned a sostegno, or a support teacher, who (while not usually trained in language or literacy development) is meant to assist the student with his/her comprehension of the course material. While this has the potential to present serious sociolinguistic issues for students who arrive in Italy during their adolescence, as recognized by a 2007 report by the Italian Ministry of Instruction, University, and Research (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione 2007) and by numerous other researchers (e.g., Favaro, n.d., Fondazione ISMU, n.d.), the majority of the students with non-Italian origins who attended the three schools that I collaborated with were either born in Italy or brought to Italy at a very young age, and they appeared extremely well integrated into their peer groups in Cittadina—even speaking the local dialect. Therefore, while the focus of this study is to a great extent on the language of schooling, the specific case of the language of so-called ‘foreign’ students in my focal classes did not emerge as a salient point of study. In Cittadina, the categories of language use which did emerge as
salient, however, included what the students (of all ethnic origins) and teachers referred to as *dialetto* (‘dialect’) and *italiano* (‘Italian’); each of which took on various nuanced characteristics from context to context. Similarly, what emerged as more salient than ethnicity, race, nationality, or citizenship status were gender, social class, and type of school attended. The following chapters present the historical foundations of these constructs in the Italian school system, how I gathered and analyzed discourse data, the analyses of these data, and finally the findings and implications of this research.

### 1.3 Overview of chapters

Chapter 2, “Background, Theoretical Framework, and Research Questions,” is broken into roughly three sections as the title suggests. The first section introduces the tripartite system of secondary schooling in Italy, a history of Italian schooling and Italian education policies from 1859 to present day, followed by an overview of the Italian sociolinguistic context and the ever-present *questione della lingua* (‘language issue’). The aim of the first section is to make the case for taking an educational linguistic perspective to the study of Italian secondary schools, specifically considering the influence of classism on these schools’ separation and on the way that Standard Italian and regional varieties have settled into place across these different forms of schooling. The next section of the chapter introduces the theoretical and conceptual frameworks informing this dissertation, including the ways that language policies and ideologies have an impact on education, how students construct schooled personae—and comment on those of others—in academic spaces, and how students are socialized to perform academic knowledge via academic discourse socialization. Finally, in the third section, I
reintroduce my research questions and situate them in the context provided by the first two sections of the chapter.

Chapter 3, “Data Collection and Analysis,” details the three phases of my fieldwork in Cittadina, beginning with exploratory research, continuing with sustained classroom observation over the span of several months, and concluding with group interviews with students. This chapter also discusses gatekeeping at each of the three schools, my entry into my fieldsites, the selection of my focal classes, and the methods used over the course of my fieldwork to collect and analyze data via discourse analysis and analysis of narrative.

Chapter 4, “Social Personae and School Choice in the Italian Education System,” analyzes excerpts from several interviews conducted with third-year students about how they came to choose the school they currently attend. Students told of chance encounters, moments of madness, institutional pressures, and social expectations, often hinting at tumultuous life histories. Since the three secondary school types in this research—lyceums, technical schools, and vocational schools—are popularly believed to attract specific types of students, interviews and everyday metacommentary (Rymes, 2014) about the schools and the people inside them hold great social importance. In this chapter, I consider how the school choice decisions of these students—as told to me in the form of short narratives occurring in interview contexts—intersect with local ideologies and figures of personhood (Agha, 2011) associated with each school. I analyze these short narratives by drawing on Bruner’s (1986) narrative mode of analysis, Ochs & Capps’ (2001) account of experiential logic, and Bamberg & Georgakopoulou’s (2008) “small stories” approach.
Chapter 5, “Public Performances of Knowledge in Italian Secondary Schools,” focuses on the ways that students in the three different schools have learned to perform schooled knowledge for their teachers (and for a grade). For the students in this research, performing schooled knowledge is part of everyday life. After introducing the research context, the three focal classes, and some background information about Italian education, I present an analysis of three types of assessments across these three schools and the performative requirements of each. Among the excerpts that will be presented is an *interrogazione* (an oral pop quiz) at the lyceum and at the technical institute, as well as a laboratory session at the vocational school. The *interrogazione* is a staple of every *liceo classico* (classical lyceum) in Italy. Characterized by its stark separation from everyday classroom talk, its rigid format, and its performative requirements, the *interrogazione* is a ritual that socializes students into a particular way of engaging with school subjects. Lab sessions at the vocational school are likewise important means of socializing students into particular forms of practice in their field. However, the way that students across the three schools participate in these performances and evaluations often differs significantly.

Chapter 6, “Peer-to-Peer Performance of Expertise,” analyzes several instances of classroom discourse at the lyceum, technical institute, and vocational school over the span of one academic year in which students performed expertise in school subjects for the benefit of their peers. I focus on the double-voiced (Bakhtin 1981) nature of these performances and on how students demonstrated their knowledge of how to “do school” while nonetheless maintaining their carefully curated social personae. In particular, I examine how students drew on their peer group’s communicative repertoire (Rymes
2010) and deployed nonstandard “dialect” features when performing expertise for the benefit of their peers.

Chapter 7, “Everyday Definitions and Evaluations of ‘the Good Student’ across the Three Schools,” aims to identify how constructs related to being a good and/or successful student are talked into being by teachers, students, and other members of the school communities. One aspect of this chapter pertains to identifying which curricular elements, interaction rituals, evaluation methods, and *de facto* or *de jure* policies exist in some form across all three types of schools. Another aspect includes an analysis of classroom interaction: the seemingly banal but socially complex everyday activities of students and teachers in each school. Finally, I discuss how the casual use of overdetermined evaluative language can potentially have a long-term impact on the academic trajectory of a student.

Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation by revisiting the three research questions in light of the data presented herein and suggesting their implications for Italian secondary schooling. This chapter also briefly discusses the cyclical issue of students being identified as “the right type” for a specific school based on widely circulating ideologies about the different school types, as well as the tracking/streaming that results from the division of schools by specialization.
CHAPTER 2:
BACKGROUND, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.1 Background on Italian secondary schools

In Italy, as is the case in many countries, adolescents must decide at about the age of thirteen how they should begin to whittle down their options for the future. In front of them they have an array of educational possibilities, including paths to university, paths into a job or career, or something in between. Despite the fact that diplomas from all types of Italian secondary schools, whether from a lyceum (liceo), a technical institute (istituto tecnico), or a vocational school (scuola professionale), now grant credentials for accessing university, the type of school that one attends can still very much influence, if not altogether determine, the career path that one will eventually pursue, which in turn impacts one’s opportunities as an adult. This is the case not because universities intentionally seek out students from one type of school rather than from others—university admission is typically done via entrance exam and not by an evaluation of a student’s grades or credentials, although some exceptions exist—but because participating in these schools entails differing types of academic socialization by teachers and peers. Thus, regardless of de jure policies regarding university admission, students from these different schools are oriented, de facto, toward or away from particular postsecondary pursuits. Inevitably, what is taught in each type of school (and how it is taught) takes into account the perceived needs and abilities of the students in each of these schools; both the content of courses and the teaching style used to engage students with it must adapt to both the curricular demands of the Ministero dell’Istruzione,
journalist Beppe Severgnini describes even the school buildings themselves as presenting challenges to teachers and students at times, stating that

many school buildings are former convents, barracks, hospitals, stately homes, or former something-elses. They weren’t built to be schools. Foreign visitors think that this shows a certain style and aplomb, but the Italians who have to work and study there aren’t so sure. The end result is inappropriate spaces, dark corners, and awkward laboratories, perhaps L-, N-, S-, or U-shaped. Refurbishing buildings for schools has produced a whole new alphabet. You might find sinks in the classrooms, narrow doors, curious passageways, vertical stairs, or soaring ceilings, which means the room is never warm in winter. Surroundings good enough for a small number of orderly nuns do not meet the needs of three hundred energetic teenagers. (Severgnini 2006, pp. 187-188)

Further, secondary schools are increasingly encouraged (or pushed) to prepare students for a global job market, which demands high-level (digital) literacy skills, deep content knowledge in their fields of expertise, and excellent communication skills, preferably in more than one language (including English). Italian secondary schools seek to balance the past and the future by teaching young adults the value of cultural patrimony and their local territory while also preparing to send them into the world—nowadays, increasingly far from home—as productive and knowledgeable citizens. Italian secondary school teachers, administrators, and students at all types of secondary schools recognize these demands but are in many ways restricted in how they act on them because of institutional constraints and a lack of resources. An additional set of challenges also arises from the fact that, in recent years, the world has come to Italy: one in twelve residents today speaks a language other than Italian at home (Istat, 2015), and this has significant social
and educational implications in a country that has historically been more a sender of migrants than a receiver, but where the movement of people and ideas across borders is far from unidirectional today. For example, in 2016, 160,000 Italians canceled their Italian residency and registered as living abroad, and in 2017, 224,000 immigrants obtained Italian citizenship (Istat 2018). Schools are therefore faced with a challenge: create equitable opportunities and an inclusive learning environment for students from different national, linguistic, and social class backgrounds that draws on and promotes students’ linguistic and cultural resources as tools for both local understanding and global citizenship.

In addition to the issues described above, Italian schools are born out of a history of social class division (described further in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2), and each type of school therefore differently prepares students for what comes afterward, whether that is a trade, a professional career, or tertiary education. While all secondary schools in Italy are open enrollment—with no academic, financial, or territorial barriers obstructing access—it is popularly believed that distinct “types” of students frequent each one, as mentioned in Chapter 1 and as discussed further in Chapter 4. This obfuscates the issue of whether schools attract different types of individuals or create different types of students. This chapter provides an overview of the three school types, describes the education policies and reforms that contributed to their formation, and discusses la questione della lingua (Italy’s so-called language issue or language question) in the context of education. I then present a theoretical framework for approaching the intersection of social class, language, education, and persona, and finally I present my research questions.
2.1.1 School types and enrollment. While rooted in Italy’s history of social class division—and there are still valences of classism surrounding these schools today—children from different socioeconomic backgrounds often attend the same schools and find themselves in the same classes. Like many public secondary school systems around the world, Italy’s is open-enrollment (i.e. there are no catchment areas) and specialized (rather than generalized). Thus, enrollment in one school as opposed to another is based, in theory, on the student’s desired specialization and its associated academic/career trajectory, and only secondarily—again, in theory—on other logistical and social factors (e.g., how far it is from home, what propensity for schoolwork a student has, where one’s friends go to school). Students must use either private transportation or city buses to reach school, with some students traveling as little as five minutes on a motorino (motor scooter) and others traveling up to an hour on the regional bus or train service. Students who live in cities and town centers typically live closer to their school of choice than their peers who live in rural areas, since secondary schools tend to be clustered in more densely populated areas. Since families are responsible for purchasing their children’s textbooks and their children’s bus or train passes each school year, the costs associated with attending a particular school can be a decisive factor in the decision-making process. Bus passes can cost up to 600 Euro per child for the school year, and textbooks cost between 100 and 400 Euro per year, per child (Ferrucci 2017). While in early October 2016, during my fieldwork, a circular was distributed at the vocational school providing information about low-income families qualifying for reduced book costs, bus passes and meals are not offered at a reduced price for low-income families. One student, Roberta, explained to me that her books the previous year had cost about 200 Euro before financial
help from the school, but that bus passes for her and her two siblings had cost about 900 Euro total (Fieldnotes 2016.10.04). Considering that the median annual income for a family of four in Italy is about 34,301 Euro (approximately $40,400), or 2,858 Euro per month ($3,368), there are many families for whom these expenses are prohibitive (Istat 2016).

Since each of the three school types is specialized, it is difficult to compare their curricula in a meaningful way. However, this section serves as a rough illustration of the differences and similarities between the various offerings at lyceums, technical schools, and vocational schools. As it stands today, the three types of secondary schools in Italy are each intended to equip students with different specialized knowledge and skills for differing academic and/or career trajectories. Importantly, within each school (and specialization), there is no formal tracking system. Instead, the division of schools increasingly serves as a means of dividing students into those who are seen as being more academically inclined and/or more supported at home and those who are seen as being less so (Interview 2016.12.09). On their first day of high school, first-year students will typically become part of a class of about twenty-five students, and (unless they opt to change their course of study) they will stay with this same group of students for all subjects, all day, for all five years of high school, until they graduate. The esame di maturità (school-leaving exam) is an important rite of passage in the lives of almost all Italians regardless of the type of school they attend. Taking place in late June every year, after a short reading period and (every four years) in the midst of the World Cup soccer championships, the exam has three standard written sections for each specialization, and an oral presentation on a topic of the student’s choice. Emotions run high during the
preparation for and execution of the maturità, immortalized in the song Notte Prima degli Esami (Night Before the Exams) by Italian music icon Antonello Venditti—the anthem of all graduating students and the inspiration for the 2006 film of the same name.

As mentioned at several points throughout this introduction, there are three categories—some might even call them tiers—of secondary school in Italy: lyceums, technical institutes, and vocational schools. Lyceums are expressly designed to prepare students for tertiary education (e.g., sciences, classical studies, philosophy, Latin), and students who intend to pursue tertiary education often attend lyceums. There are six types of lyceum, even though many Italians only consider two of them “real.” There is the sportivo (athletic), artistico (artistic), linguistico (linguistic), scienze umane (human sciences), as well as the two that are considered the most rigorous and, to some, the only true lyceums, the scientifico (scientific), and classico (classical). All of these schools share a set of core courses in Italian language and literature, a foreign language (usually English), history and geography, philosophy, mathematics, physics, natural sciences, physical education, and Catholic religion. They also, however, vary to some extent in the number of hours each strand dedicates to each subject, and most of them also include additional subjects that are specific to their field of study. The classical strand, for instance, includes Greek and Latin; the scientific strand includes more hours of math, physics, and natural sciences than the others; the human sciences strand includes courses in Latin, law and economics, and a multidisciplinary human sciences course which includes instruction in anthropology, sociology, pedagogy, and psychology; the linguistic strand includes two additional foreign languages; the athletic strand includes a course in

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6 Link to Venditti’s Notte Prima degli Esami: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwPG6HvY9PQ
sport law and economics, as well as in discipline sportive (athletic disciplines); and the artistic strand includes several additional courses (including chemistry, geometry, graphic and pictorial disciplines, sculptural disciplines, and architectural and design disciplines) and laboratories (art lab, and figuration/architecture/design lab). The artistic strand requires more weekly hours of class/lab time than the others, with 34 hours per week the first two years and 35 hours per week for the last three years. The others require 27 hours per week for the first two years and 30 hours for the last three years, with the exception of the classical strand, which requires 31 hours per week for the last three years.

Technical institutes, on the other hand, are designed to equip students with career skills (e.g., hospitality, mechanical engineering, biotechnology); they prepare students to begin working after completing secondary school, but their course offerings are such that tertiary education is equally feasible. Course offerings at technical institutes are highly varied from one specialization to another, with core courses making way after the first two years for more specialized courses in the last three years (e.g. in business law, economics, management, technical studies). There are also six hours spent in laboratory each week, and it is required that students do short internships in their field in order to graduate. Technical institutes are divided into two sectors—industrial and commercial—which together offer eleven specializations: administration, finance, and marketing; tourism; mechanics, mechatronics, and energy; transport and logistics; electronics and electrotechnics; informatics and telecommunications; graphics and communication; fashion systems; agriculture, food farming, and food industry; construction, environment, and land management; and chemistry, materials, and biotechnologies. Each of these is also further divided into sub-specializations, but no single technical school offers every
single one every year (the specializations offered in any given year often depend on student interest in them and therefore on enrollment). All technical schools, regardless of sector or specialization, require students to take the core courses of Italian language and literature, English, history, mathematics, law and economics, physical education, and Catholic religion. The industrial sector is also required to take two years of sciences. These core courses comprise approximately 15 hours per week of the students’ course load for the final three years of secondary school (20-23 hours per week in the first two years), leaving about 11 hours per week for specialized technical courses and 6 hours for laboratories.

Finally, vocational schools teach trade skills (e.g., electrical maintenance, sartorial skills). These are also subdivided into two sectors—(1) service and (2) industry & artisanship—which together include eleven specializations\(^7\): agriculture, industry and artisanship for ‘Made in Italy’; commercial services; food, wine, and hospitality; health and welfare services; healthcare assistant – dental technician; healthcare assistant – optician assistant; rural development, valorization of local products, and management of forest and mountain resources; cultural and performance services; commercial fishing and fishing production; water management and environmental health; and maintenance and technical assistance. Like the specializations at the technical institute, these specializations are also divided into various sub-specializations. The core courses that all specializations have in common are Italian language and literature, English, history, mathematics, law and economics, integrated sciences, physical education, and Catholic religion. Also like the technical institute, the vocational school’s core subjects represent

\(^7\) Raised from six specializations in the 2016-2017 school year.
about 15 of the total 32 hours of school per week; however, unlike the technical institute, laboratories make up a much larger proportion of the curricular hours: as much as 40%. Schools are given a certain degree of liberty in the personalization of these programs (drawing on the sub-specializations) but might only offer a handful of them. Students at vocational schools have the option to leave school after taking a certification exam at the end of year three (around age 16 or 17), rather than finishing the final two years and receiving a diploma (at age 19 or 20).

While graduates of all three of these secondary schools are eligible, on paper, to access tertiary education, only 11% of vocational school graduates go on to university, while 80% of lyceum graduates do so (Corlazzoli, 2015). In the 2015/2016 academic year, 76% of newly enrolled university students held a diploma from a lyceum, 20% from a technical institute, and only 4% from a vocational school (Bosi et al, 2016). While this is arguably by design (i.e., vocational schools are designed such that graduates need not seek tertiary education to practice their craft) it also hints at school-level practices and national-level policies being out of sync with one another. That is, the schools are not explicitly framed as a mechanism for streaming or tracking students by academic ability; in fact, they are framed by MIUR as equal and as differing only in their specializations, not in their rigor. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, schools with technical and vocational orientations tend to attract a student body that potentially has a greater need for linguistic and social support than do lyceums: 60% of the population of students with non-Italian origins is classified as being delayed in their academic career, either because they were held back a year in Italy or because they were assigned a year below their age level when they arrived in Italy (Santagati 2018). Perhaps as a result of this tendency for
higher-need students to attend technical and vocational schools, as pointed out by the principal of the technical and vocational schools, secondary education has undergone “licealizzazione” (“lyceumization”) in recent years, with 55.3% of incoming first-year students in the 2018-2019 academic year choosing lyceums, 30.7% choosing technical institutes, and 14% choosing vocational schools. Newspaper headlines for at least the past three academic years (2015-2018) have noted a continuing lyceum “boom,” which was also highlighted by the principal of the technical-vocational school in Cittadina during an interview, in which he said:

The differences [between the three types of school] are very strong and always more marked as the years go by in terms of who enrolls at the vocational and technical schools and who enrolls at the lyceums. From when I was a student, the percentage of enrollments has seen a really aggressive shift toward the lyceums. This has led to, if before in the schools like the technical and most of all the vocational you could find a mixed study body—maybe there were some really excellent students as well as some much less excellent, etc.—today all of the difficult situations have essentially been relegated to the vocational schools. Disadvantaged students, students with difficulties, disabled students, students with a complicated socioeconomic background. While the medium-high level students have all been clumped a little in the technical schools and most of all at the lyceums. (Interview 2016.12.19, original in Italian8)

In line with this perspective, Nello, Giovanetti, Mattioli & Salsa (2008) noted a general ‘descending mobility reorientation’ (riorientamento a mobilità discendente) in Italian secondary schools, with students who encounter difficulty at their number-one pick

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8 Le differenze sono molto forti e sempre più marcate più che gli anni passano in termini di utenza, cioè in termini di chi si iscrive ai professionali e tecnici e ai licei. Considera che da quando andavo a scuola io—non ti dico quanti anni fa ma insomma un po’ di anni fa—ad oggi, la percentuale di utenza si è spostata fortemente verso i licei. Quindi c’è stato dagli anni 90 ma anche prima uno spostamento proprio aggressivo verso una licealizzazione delle iscrizioni e questo ha comportato che, se prima scuole come tecnici e soprattutto nei professionali potevi trovare un utenza un po’ mista, magari c’è qualcuno bravo, molti meno bravi, eccetera, oggi sono stati essenzialmente relegati nei professionali tutte le situazioni difficili. Alunni svantaggiati, alunni con difficoltà, alunni disabili, alunni con un background socio-economico complicato, mentre gli alunni di livello medio-alto sono tutti ammucchiati un po’ ai tecnici e soprattutto ai licei.
eventually moving “down” from lyceums to technical institutes, and from technical institutes to vocational schools. That is, students who fail or almost fail a year of school at the classical lyceum (traditionally considered the most demanding and most prestigious specialization) are not considered likely to re-enroll in the same specialization and are instead thought to be more likely to transfer to one that is seen as less demanding, such as another strand of the lyceum or even a technical institute. It is rare (and as far as I can tell, unheard of) that a student would move “up” in the opposite direction, from vocational to technical, or from technical to lyceum. As the principal of the technical-vocational school stated:

There is a very old prejudice in Italy which is that the foundation of the Italian school system—which was designed in 1923, during Fascism—sees in the classical lyceum, let’s say, the highest educational peak possible, toward which even the parents of children who aren’t gifted in those subjects tend to orient symbolically and psychologically. This despite the fact that Italy is a country with a great leftist tradition of work, of the union—we had the biggest communist party in Europe but still in the school culture, doing [manual or technical] work is seen as [part of] a Serie B\(^9\) school. The technical and vocational schools are seen really as the destinations of whoever doesn’t want to do anything. This is a prejudice that sees Latin and Greek for example as more formative subjects than IT and Chemistry, no? I don’t really know why. (Interview 2016.12.09, original in Italian\(^{10}\))

\(^9\) i.e. second-rate, as compared to ‘Serie A’ (drawing on the well-known soccer team classification method)

\(^{10}\) Funziona ancora un pregiudizio molto antico in Italia che è quello che è alla base del sistema scolastico italiano ma anche un sistema disegnato nel 1923, quindi durante il fascismo, e che è un sistema scolastico che vede nel liceo in particolare nel liceo classico, diciamo la vetta formativa possibile, a quale tendono simbolicamente psicologicamente anche i genitori di figli che non sono portate per quelle materie e per i quali sarebbe molto più utile altro. però il liceo rimane ... questo nonostante l'Italia sia un paese con una grossa tradizione di sinistra, sul lavoro, sul sindacato, abbiamo avuto in Italia il più grosso partito comunista in Europa eppure sulla cultura scolastica il lavoro e' visto come una scuola di serie B, le scuole tecniche o professionali sono viste proprio come destinate e chi non ha voglia di fare niente con una sorta di pregiudizio che vede per esempio e latino e greco come le materie più formative invece di informatica e la chimica no. non si sa bene perché.
Picking up on some of the points mentioned by the principal, the following section aims to contextualize the contemporary realities of Italian schooling mentioned thus far within a historical framework.

2.1.2 **Italian education policy 1859-present.** As suggested by the principal, the contemporary tripartite school system described above, as well as the ways that students and teachers orient to each of these schools, has grown out of the policies and laws that contributed to these schools’ formation, as well as the role they played in nation building. After World War II and the founding of the Republic of Italy, a new Constitution of Italy was written in 1948, specifying, among other guarantees, that education would be free and compulsory for at least eight years. It was also specified that more advanced education would be accessible for all deserving students regardless of financial status, although there would be one caveat: the longstanding Casati Law [*Legge Casati*] (established in 1859 just before Italy’s unification in 1861), had reformed the entire school system, proposing a highly centralized model of schooling that dedicated more attention to advanced education than to primary education, and which separated technical and classical schooling for the working and upper classes, respectively (Minio Paluello, 1946). This act created the *liceo classico* (classical lyceum) as a means of selecting the future upper classes for university education—the *classe dirigente*, or ruling class—and therefore the caveat was that under the Casati Law, no other secondary school aside from the classical lyceum offered access to tertiary education.

The Casati Law was modified in 1923, the year after Benito Mussolini took office as Prime Minister, by the Gentile Reform [*Riforma Gentile*] (Cives, 1990). This reform raised the mandatory age of schooling and expanded the offerings of applied, technical,
and vocational secondary school options while nonetheless holding the classical lyceum up as the only school through which one could access tertiary education. This would remain the case until 1968. The Gentile Reform also expressed the importance of teaching the Catholic religion at the elementary level, because religious knowledge was considered fundamental in the education of the masses, but the teaching of religion in lyceums was initially substituted by philosophy (until 1929 when religion would become a required subject in lyceums as well). At the elementary level, military youth organizations (backed by the Fascist government) aiming to build “new Italians” gained strong influence alongside the increasing government control of textbooks and curriculum (Minio Paluello, 1946, pp. 135-140). Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, teachers and university professors were pressured and eventually required to pledge their allegiance to the Fascist Party, and special mandatory courses for teachers were run by the Party to ensure their active participation in it (Germino, 1959). In 1928, further reforms instituted the development of the scuola di avviamento professionale [school of vocational training] which directed students who held an elementary school credential toward targeted preparation for either the workforce or further vocational training. As the Fascist regime developed, the chasm between those who attended lyceums and those who did not grew ever wider.

After World War II, despite the Fascist Party’s push for literacy education, there was still an elementary school drop-out rate of nearly 50% (De Mauro, 1963), which was potentially, in part, motivated by linguistic and social class factors: behind the push for literacy—part of a nation-building project—may have been a link to the Fascist Party’s attempted eradication of all dialetti (so-called “dialects”) and minority languages, which
were spoken more widely among those who had never attended formal schooling: the only way to learn to read, write, and speak in Standard Italian was to attend school. Even today, “[Standard] Italian is still strongly associated with higher education and higher social status [while] the uncontrolled and dominant use of dialect in daily communication is regarded as a sign of lower education and unsuccessful Italianization” (Dal Negro & Vietti, 2011, pp. 73-74). Italy’s historic division of the upper and working classes into different schools and different life-paths no doubt plays a role in how language, social class, and education intersect in this case.

In the 1960s, a major education reform raised the age of compulsory schooling throughout Italy to 14 and the late Tullio De Mauro’s *Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita* (Linguistic History of United Italy) (1963) sparked debate about the national language of Italy, the disputed cultural patrimony of *dialetti*, and the education and human rights of the people who spoke them. Throughout the 1960s, an increasing focus on education and human rights came to the fore and in 1968, state-sponsored Kindergarten was established. Shortly afterward, student protests also paved the way for a liberalization of university access; the pedagogue Don Lorenzo Milani had a major influence on these student movements by problematizing the selective nature of the Italian school system and the classist society that it produced (Milani, 1967/1996). By the 1970s, social and economic access to tertiary education had become much more widespread – literacy increased, school attendance increased (Dal Negro & Vietti, 2011), and the use of *dialetti* decreased (Ruffino, 2006). Different views on the role of language in education, and in the broader political project of “Italianization,” proliferated. De Mauro (1977), for instance, noted that in 1973, four in ten students dropped out before finishing middle school; of this 40%
of students who left school prematurely, eight out of ten were children of blue collar workers and farmers, while the remaining fifth were children of white collar workers.

The 1990s and early 2000s saw additional reform, due partially to the guidance of De Mauro who served as Minister of Education from 2000-2001 and motivated in part by the problematic separation of lyceums and technical-professional instruction, as well as continued difficulty in accessing university. The Berlinguer Reform (*La Riforma Berlinguer*), named after the preceding Minister of Education, aimed to achieve “a humanly rich education for all” and “fully exercised citizenship rights,” in response to “unprecedented worldwide political, economic, and social transformations” (Bertonelli & Rodano, 2003, p. 114). It extended the obligatory age of schooling from 14 to 16, reformed the graduation exam, and it reformed the structure of the education system to resemble, in large part, the way it is today: five years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and five years of secondary school (thirteen years total, roughly from age 6 to 19) (Repubblica, 1999).

The most recent reforms at the time of writing have had less to do with major restructuring of schooling itself and more to do with administration. The Gelmini Reform (*La Riforma Gelmini*) of 2010 had as its main focus administrative transparency, aimed at solving issues of nepotism, financial corruption, hiring scams, and non-objective methods of evaluating students. This sparked protests amongst teachers and students alike due to the reform’s exacerbation of the already very bureaucratic processes surrounding public education (e.g., Corriere della Sera, 2010). Most recently, The Good School Reform (*La Buona Scuola*) of 2015 —spearheaded by former prime minister Matteo Renzi—took its toll on primary, middle, and secondary schools. This reform went the opposite direction
of Gelmini, in some ways, by giving more decision-making power to school principals in terms of managing funds and hiring procedures. However, research participants during the 2016-2017 school year in Umbria routinely blamed The Good School Reform for extremely high teacher turnover in the early months of the school year.

While, on paper, neither of these recent reforms claimed to have a direct impact on primary and secondary students’ school experiences, they both led to great unrest and anxiety amongst teacher participants in my research, which had a trickle-down effect on what occurred in those teachers’ classrooms. Further, the vocational school was disproportionately more impacted by the teacher placement debacle than was the lyceum: the highest-need students (who work with teacher aids, laboratory technicians, and classroom teachers) had teachers coming and going from September until January, often with no advanced notice. Students at the vocational school would come to class on Monday to find that the teacher they had seen on the previous Friday would no longer be working with them. This is partially due to the complex placement algorithms that assign posts to teachers based on a points system, but also to transfer requests put in by teachers that take months to come to fruition (and then create a domino effect of further teacher displacement once they do). This teacher turnover may also be due to the tendency for inexperienced teachers to be placed at vocational and technical schools, rather than at lyceums, and for newer teachers to move around more than their more experienced (and tenured) colleagues. In Cittadina in 2016-2017, this had the result of less turnover at the lyceum and more turnover at the technical and vocational schools.

While this is far from an exhaustive list of reforms and only scratches the surface of how the Italian education system has been shaped by policies since the country’s
unification, it is nevertheless clear that schooling and nation-building have gone hand in hand throughout the history of modern Italy, and that the different secondary school types have remained distinct (with distinct curricula as well as reputations) throughout the years. Despite the fact that schools do not have entrance exams or official criteria for selection, a decision made in 1859 to split the working class and the upper class into two separate educational streams still has an impact today.

2.2 La questione della lingua: conceptualizing Standard Italian and dialect

Italy has wrestled with the questione della lingua (the language issue or the language question) since the fourth century (De Mauro, 1963; Tosi, 2001; Cavanaugh 2008), and school has always played a critical role in promoting the use of a standard language register (now called Standard Italian) over any other dialect or regional language (De Mauro, 1977; Guerini, 2011; Ruffino, 2006). Early works in Italian sociolinguistics (De Mauro, 1963, 1977) operate within the paradigm that Italian is a bounded system, that the various dialects (dialetti) are also bounded systems, and that borrowing between them results in either “dialectalized Italian” or “Italianized dialect.” And over the years since then, the Istituto nazionale di statistica (the National Institute of Statistics, also known as Istat) has continued to conduct periodic surveys about the use of dialect and Italian, as though these entities were clearly defined and the practices measurable. However, at the same time, it seems that even the creators of the language survey (see Figure 2) are unable to conceptualize a population that speaks entirely Italian or entirely dialect: the survey instead asks speakers to identify as speaking “only or predominantly Italian” and “only or predominantly dialect” in the family, with friends,
and with strangers. Ultimately, what counts as “predominantly Italian” to some may seem like “both Italian and dialect” to others, rendering this data set an interesting commentary on language ideology (see also Moore et al. 2010), but less so a quantitative measure of language use in Italy.

**Figure 2:** Use of Italian and dialect in Italy, 1987-2015 (Istat 2017)
Despite the apparent translingual practices of everyday life in Italy, the differences between standard and nonstandard language have long been policed (sometimes quite literally). For instance, throughout the early years of the twentieth century, the Fascist government's Italianization initiative attempted to “purify” the Italian language by boycotting foreign and dialectal words and prescribing the usage of only the most “Italian” aspects of the language (Tosi, 2001, p. 7). De Mauro (1963) later hypothesized that, considering the emigration, urbanization, military draft, and the spread of mass media in the early-mid 20th century, language shift away from regional dialects and toward the national standard would have been inevitable, rendering “dialectal fragmentation” (p. 127) a thing of the past and producing a population that spoke Italian.

A mixture of de jure and de facto language policy has been in play in Italy for decades, with legal sanctions of dialect and foreign languages creating de jure policies about language use (e.g., during Fascism) and with social mores and expectations maintaining a certain de facto policy about how, when, and with whom particular varieties should be used (Johnson, 2013).

While the use of regional dialects had indeed decreased significantly by that time, and has continued to do so (according to Istat 2017), De Mauro was mostly off the mark in his hypothesis: the use of dialetti is alive and well in many different contexts, even if it is often used alongside Standard Italian, and even though it is clear that bilingualism (with Standard Italian and regional dialects) was never part of national language planning or pedagogy in Italy. I would argue that even under different economic conditions, dialects would have continued to be minoritized on an official level, and standardized forms of Italian would have continued to dominate institutions (especially in the highly
centralized education system)—even though dialetti and nonstandard codes continue to be used today.

In Cittadina, the concept of dialetto included everything from what residents called ‘cittadinese’ (‘the dialect of Cittadina’) to what they referred to as ‘dialetto streto’ (‘strict dialect’) to what they called simply ‘dialetto’ (which included the non-city-specific non-standard youth lingua franca, as well as the previous two categories). The young people whose classes I observed often used tokens of what might be considered ‘cittadinese,’ but most did not consider themselves speakers of ‘dialetto streto.’ These tokens used in everyday speech included high frequency words and words for informal contexts such as the following:

Table 1: Commonly used words in cittadinese dialect, with English translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>frego (masc. sing.)</td>
<td>guy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frega (fem. sing.)</td>
<td>girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freghi (masc. pl.)</td>
<td>guys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freghe (fem. pl.)</td>
<td>girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gimmo</td>
<td>we go, let’s go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gito</td>
<td>went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pija</td>
<td>take, catch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scola</td>
<td>school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘l</td>
<td>the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘n</td>
<td>in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bamboccio/a</td>
<td>stupid, ignorant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The use of the youthy lingua franca referred to as *dialetto* was commonplace in school, among peers. In some cases, it might also be used by teachers from Cittadina in order to joke around with or scold students. In the rare case that a teacher who was from outside of Cittadina attempted to build solidarity with students by using a couple of words in *dialetto*, the students did not receive it well, laughing and making fun of the attempt under their breath. Some students made an effort to use as few elements of *cittadinese* as possible when they spoke to me, and others did not make such attempts. Those who felt more comfortable using *dialetto* would sometimes offer to translate the words for me that they suspected I did not know, and then continued to use them. However, when teachers heard students speaking to me in what they considered to be *dialetto*, many would snap at students to speak Italian so that I could understand them.

Looking back at the history of language-in-education policies in Italy, the only signs that regional dialects might have been destined to play a role in formal education are the education program of G. Lombardo Radice in the 1920s (which proposed that dialect be used as a systematic point of reference in the study of Italian language and literature) and the work of pedagogue Ascoli during World War I who considered bilingualism a ‘privileged condition.’ However, all possible bilingual programs (whether transitional or dual-language) were canceled under Mussolini’s regime. In fact, the linguistic principles of the Fascist education program, which endured in part into the 1950s, specified that teachers must avoid any “dialectal inflections, incorrect cadences, sloppiness, monotony, and emphasis” (De Mauro 1963, p. 341) and that even if teachers accommodated the students’ first spontaneous dialectal expressions in school, the teachers themselves must abstain from actually speaking dialect with the students. In
sum, since the beginning of post-unification national-level language planning, dialect and Italian were imagined as being entirely separate linguistic codes and as having entirely different social domains. This ideology holds true today: even in cases where they are not considered to belong to vastly unequal social domains, dialect and Italian are often considered to be distinct entities.

By the end of World War II, the de facto official status of Italian was taken for granted to such an extent that the 1947 Italian Constitution left out any clause that specified it as such (Senato della Repubblica, 1947). Despite the fact that dialetti survived Fascism and continued to be prevalently spoken throughout the 1950s, and despite their centuries-old literary traditions, no single formal writing system exists for any dialetto (Coluzzi, 2008) and no official domain (i.e., schools, government offices) recognizes contemporary written dialetto as being a valid form of communication\textsuperscript{11}. Meanwhile, modern Standard Italian (used in both spoken and written form, for both formal and informal purposes) is derived from the Italian of Tuscan literati from the 14\textsuperscript{th} century (Dal Negro & Guerini, 2011), and is thus indexical of educatedness—in the sense that it “points to” literacy, schooling, and knowledge of the national lingua franca—while the many forms of speech classified under the umbrella term “dialect” often index the opposite (Dal Negro & Vietti, 2011). De Mauro (1977), likely echoing many voices of his time, claimed that too many individuals (in the 1970s) were still unable to use the common language (i.e. Standard Italian) and that their limited ability rendered difficult

\textsuperscript{11} Although Lega Nord and Liga Veneta Repubblica, two far-right political parties that originated in northern Italy, have drummed up enough interest in the Venetan language that some elementary schools have begun to teach the local language/dialect as an enrichment activity during school hours (Perrino, 2019).
their participation in economic, political, and intellectual life in Italian society (pp. 13-14), thereby linking the exclusive use of dialect to social “ghettoization.”

The steady increase in literacy rates and school attendance is believed to have sped up the rate at which the population “Italianized” over the course of the 1970s and 1980s (Ruffino, 2006; Dal Negro & Vietti, 2011), and may have also played a role in the population's decreasing use of dialetti: Ruffino (2006) claims that there is no doubt that school has [always] been the principal tool for linguistic unification (p. 40, translation mine\textsuperscript{12}), and that this process of Italianization has normalized negative beliefs about dialetti and, by association, dialectal culture (p. 41). Italian Law No. 482, passed in 1999 as a means of protecting regional minority languages in Italy, such as varieties of French, German, Albanian, Slovenian, and Greek spoken in the border areas, does not guarantee protection or recognition of dialetti (Dal Negro, 2005). Standard Italian today is hegemonic: “the dominant position of Italian is currently beyond dispute and its official status is taken for granted” (Guerini, 2011, p. 124).

Notwithstanding (or maybe due to) its decline in use, however, dialetto has begun to develop a particular cachet in some contexts and is viewed favorably when it is used strategically by “Italian-dominant” speakers as a supplement to standard Italian (Coluzzi, 2008; Cavanaugh 2008, 2012, 2016; Dal Negro & Vietti, 2011; Guerini, 2011; Leone-Pizzighella, 2019; Perrino 2015, 2019). How the addressee perceives the speaker as being Italian-dominant is strictly a question of subjective judgement, although many attempts have been made to categorize the social and situational dimensions of (up to sixteen types of) language use in Italy (Sanga 1981; Berruto, 1989). While both dialetto and Standard

\textsuperscript{12} All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
Italian remain fairly nebulous terms, they have certainly not ceased to exist as identifiable entities in the popular imagination (e.g. Leone, 2016). This final point is critical in this dissertation, since the dialect-Standard distinction is so much a part of the fabric of everyday life in Italy that it is rarely ever explicitly discussed.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Exploring the intersection of language, class, education, and persona across three types of Italian secondary schools requires drawing on several overlapping areas of scholarly interest. One has already been discussed at some length—the questione della lingua—which lies in the background of all social interactions in Italy, and which rose to prominence on several occasions throughout my fieldwork via telling metacommentary (Rymes 2014) on the part of teachers and students. This language ideological metacommentary also plays an important role in academic discourse socialization (Duff 2008, 2010), which both precedes and continues throughout secondary school, and which is a focus of the present work. In fact, academic discourses and students’ proficiency in them play a major role in their decision to attend one type of school over another, in the way school success is constructed, and in the way that students learn to perform their knowledge for each other and for their teachers. This section aims to flesh out the connections I am making between language policies and ideologies, academic discourse socialization, and performances of academic knowledge in a social context (i.e. school) where so-called Standard Italian is hegemonic, by reviewing related literature and reflecting on how it applies to the classical lyceum, the technical institute, and the vocational school in Cittadina.
2.3.1 Language policies and ideologies in education

2.3.1.1 Legitimate language. The Ten Theses for a Democratic Linguistic Education\(^\text{13}\), issued by the Società Linguistica Italiana in 1975, state the following:

[t]raditional language pedagogy overlooks the reality of the student's often colloquial and dialectal background, *de facto* […]. Without knowing it, maybe without wanting it, traditional language education ignores and represses, and transforms into a cause of disadvantage, the dialectal, cultural, and social diversity that characterizes […] the Italian population. (*GISCEL*, 1975/2017, n. 7e)

These theses were intended to outline and define the foundational theoretical premises of a democratic linguistic education and to reach a wide audience of scholars in linguistics and education, school teachers, policy makers, and all people who considered themselves part of a democratic education system (*GISCEL*, 1975/2017). Part of a much longer set of critiques and proposed changes, this statement implies that students’ home languages should not be eliminated, but enriched and built upon, toeing the line that Italians are at risk of being fragmented from one another, excluded from civic discourse, and “ghettoized” into their small linguistic communities if schools don’t find a way to more effectively teach young people to use Italian (with dialect as a bridge to doing so). In this light, the Ten Theses contrast with what Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992) call a “funds of knowledge” approach, which would take an additive linguistic approach, by calling attention to the need to value and validate the knowledge that children bring with them from home. The Ten Theses instead take an educational rights (and language rights) approach, arguing that all children have the right to equal education and that their home language should not stand in the way of them receiving it. Such a stance, while to some

\(^{13}\) *Le Dieci Tesi per un’Educazione Linguistica Democratica*
extent warranted, allowed scholars and schools at the time to circumvent a more direct
discussion of Standard Italian’s socially superior position in contemporary Italy. The Ten
Theses, while calling teachers to be more humane and compassionate, did not seek to
complicate the *de facto* official status of Italian, nor did they suggest that this was in itself
problematic in any way.

A linguistic ethnography in this sociohistorical context needs to bring into focus
the power aspect of language in society and language in school. Taking this into
consideration, I draw from Heller’s (1996) work in a streamed/tracked French-immersion
secondary school in a historically bilingual context in Canada. Drawing on Bourdieu
(1977), Heller focuses on how language practices are legitimized in a school community,
how this serves the interests of different groups, and how multilingual education develops
power relations among these groups (1996, pp. 140-141). Her conceptualization of
language legitimization includes “being a legitimate speaker, addressing legitimate
interlocutors, under specific social conditions, in language that respects specific
conventions of form” (p. 140). Similar to educational standards in Italy, and to the
dispreferred “dialectalized Italian” that De Mauro (1963) described, the program
described by Heller (1996) treats monolingual norms as the model of correctness, despite
the prevalence of bilingual and translingual (García 2009) practices among the students
and throughout the school more generally. Looking across the various ability-level tracks
in this school, she observes that while French is the official language of the school, it
must also be of a specific type in order to count as legitimate (e.g. not Quebecois or
“vernacular”) (pp. 148-149). She also observes that translation and translanguaging
(García 2009), although not referred to as such, are so much a part of teachers’ pedagogy
that students whose preferred language is neither French nor English are, to some extent, at a disadvantage: for instance, she notices that teachers encounter difficulty explaining the meaning of a term when a Somali student doesn’t know it in French or in English (p. 147).

The interviews that I did with students and teachers in Cittadina in 2013, as well as interviews and observations from the 2016/2017 academic year, suggest that this might also be the case there: the students and teachers who were born and raised in Cittadina discounted the value of knowing the local dialect, while students not from Cittadina treated the local dialect as an essential part of their repertoire. When I interviewed students and teachers in Cittadina in 2013 about their attitudes toward various language practices, the teachers could not quite recall how young students are socialized to use standard Italian in school, nor could they quite agree as to whether the local dialect had any academic value at all. Students were likewise conflicted about local language resources: a foreign-born student (an L1 Moroccan Arabic speaker) told me that dialect was essential for his social life, while locally born students told me that dialect was hardly used anymore and that standard Italian was necessary to succeed academically. An academic year of observations in Cittadina has made clear that while Italian is the official language of instruction, creative uses of dialect, foreign languages, and digital literacies abound in unofficial, or “third spaces” (Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson, 1995) and frequently overlap with performances of schooled knowledge for both peers and teachers, as described in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.3.1.2 Heteroglossic and bivalent discourse. Ethnographic accounts of language and semiosis in the lives of young people and especially in school contexts provide
important reference points in the present research (e.g., Blackledge & Creese 2010; Bucholtz 1999, 2011; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Rampton 1995, 2006; Rymes 2001; Wortham 2004, 2005). In considering how work on the linguistic anthropology of education can be applied to the existing research on language in Italy, I review the ways that Italian sociolinguistic literature overlaps (or doesn’t) with linguistic anthropological work on heteroglossia and linguistic hybridity: such a comparison is important for identifying a starting point for an ethnography of socially-constituted linguistics in a context that continues to be thought of as monolingual, on the one hand, and as divided into hundreds of dialects (albeit framed as dialects of the national language), on the other. An exploration of these concepts is also important for a linguistic ethnography of education in a setting where language boundaries fluctuate between being heavily policed and entirely flexible or even nonexistent in everyday practice.

Further, a critical analytical move in the present linguistic ethnography of education in Italy is to de-emphasize descriptions of language form as though they were used unreflexively or unconsciously by individuals (e.g. Poplack 1980; Myers-Scotton 1993), and to instead emphasize how language can be consciously deployed by socially-situated agents and recognized as socially significant by interlocutors and overhearers (Goffman 1981) in interaction. As mentioned above, Coluzzi (2008) points out that while dialect is often associated with low socioeconomic status, lack of education, and southern regions of Italy, it is actually becoming increasingly understood as a sociolinguistic resource in the 21st century. For instance, many of the students and teachers in Cittadina explained that while dialect is a useful resource when joking around, it would be unacceptable to do a job interview in dialect even if both the interviewer and interviewee
spoke the dialect of the town where the interview was taking place. Along these lines, Rampton’s (1995, 1997, 2006) work on language crossing and stylization has proven important for considering how individuals style themselves as speakers of a particular variety instead of framing the use of that variety as unconscious and uncontrolled. Drawing on Bakhtin’s description of stylization as “an artistic image of another’s language” (1981, p. 362), Rampton elaborates that

[w]hen someone switches into a stylised voice or exaggerated accent, there is partial and momentary disengagement from the routine flow of unexceptional business, and the recipients are invited to use their broader understandings of society to figure out exactly what ‘image of another’s language’ this is actually supposed to be. …Overall, the stylised utterance constitutes a small, fleeting but foregrounded analysis, suggesting that the person, event, or act that occasions the switch-of-voice can welcome, ignore, or reject it in the interactional moves that immediately follow, celebrating or forgetting it in the activity after that (2006, p. 225).

Also particularly relevant to a reframing of the imagined dialect-Italian binary, Woolard’s (1999) work on simultaneity and bivalency reframes and reimagines what is commonly referred to as “interference,” arguing that linguistic “[c]ontrast and opposition do not have to do all their semantic work in absentia, through mutual exclusion” (p. 5). In her research, Woolard (1999) considers how forms that are in theory opposed to one another (such as Catalan and Castilian Spanish) can actually be simultaneously present in bilingual phenomena (p. 6), and how one can speak competing codes “at the same time” (p. 12). This does not mean, however, that bivalent speech is neutral, or that it denies that any difference exists between languages in the mind of the speaker. Instead, she writes, “[t]he opposition between linguistic codes is almost always socially and ideologically activated…even as it is challenged” (p. 11); “bivalency” recognizes that the use of Catalan and Castilian, for example, can index conflicting ideologies, and that the use of
bivalent terms is a kind of strategic performance rather than a neutral “lowering of the guard” (p. 14). Drawing on the concepts of bivalency and simultaneity in my research in schools in Cittadina has served to open up fruitful lines of inquiry regarding language awareness, both in terms of named regional/national codes and seemingly domain-specific registers (Agha 2007). That is, as I will argue especially in Chapter 6, students regularly use a combination of “school” and “non-school” voice in their social interactions with peers, and it is this ability to strike a careful balance between the two that allows students to occupy their preferred social positions and to develop particular social personae.

Drawing on translanguaging as bilingual pedagogy (García 2009; García & Wei 2014; Blackledge & Creese, 2010) and focusing on situated patterns of heteroglossic classroom interaction (Bailey 2007, Bakhtin 1981) are another means of exploring the nuanced picture of dialect, Italian, and other forms of language as they are used in schools. Translanguaging is a paradigm shift from codeswitching, and is focused on “languaging” or the use of socially and situationally appropriate means of communicating, rather than on treating languages as “hermetically sealed units” (Creese & Blackledge 2010, p. 106) between which a speaker switches when the grammar of an utterance allows him/her to do so. A translanguaging approach to language education (and to language-in-education) is an alternative to the strict separation of languages that was once believed to be necessary in language classrooms. Moving beyond named languages and taking the perspective of heteroglossia instead allows the researcher to consider all socially meaningful forms of talk, as well as their sociohistorical roots and their intertextuality (Bailey 2007).
In developing a conceptual framework for the present research, it is critical to examine the discourse around standard and nonstandard language through a sociopolitical lens. For this endeavor, Urciuoli’s (1991) and Zentella’s (1997) framings of Spanish and English in New York Puerto Rican neighborhoods are useful because they argue that how (and if) one draws the line between two named languages or varieties “depends on the dynamics of relationships, [as well as] on race, class, and gender” which “make language boundaries soften or solidify” from one interactional context to another (Urciuoli, 1991, p. 295). Therefore, what it means to identify (or be identified) as a speaker of Italian or of dialect is inevitably wrapped up in both the microinteractional context and the macrosocial processes that it both constitutes and is constrained by (Erickson & Schultz 1982; McDermott 1977). Part of exploring the intersection of language, social class, education, and “persona” (Urciuoli 1991) has been to interrogate the way that Italian and dialect are identified in everyday metacommunity (Rymes 2014) and to draw on empirical discursive data (in the form of institutional and classroom discourse, interviews, and narratives) as a means of describing the heteroglossic (Bakhtin 1981) nature of language.

2.3.2 Constructing the self and others in academic spaces. The aim of this research is to engage with how identities are enacted, performed, or assigned in academic contexts. As discussed above, there are many factors at play in the way that one is identified in any given context: issues of power, social status, gender, race, class, language, and so forth, all take on local meaning and must be negotiated in interaction. Insofar as particular signs are associated with particular types of schools, which in turn are associated not only with particular career possibilities, but also with different
lifestyles, different ways of being a student, and different values, they are also associated with different figures of personhood (Agha, 2011). One way of thinking about these signs and how local social identities are performed and taken up is by observing individuals’ communicative repertoires (Rymes 2010), as well as the circulating citizen sociolinguistic metacommentary (Rymes 2014) about elements of these communicative repertoires.

The communicative repertoire is “the collection of ways individuals use language and literacy and other means of communication (gestures, dress, posture, accessories) to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate” (Rymes 2010, p. 178). Citizen sociolinguistic metacommentary—or second-order descriptions of emblematic semiotic features—is a way to study which aspects of one’s repertoire are relevant in a given context, as well as a way of building critical awareness of the social value of different elements of an individual’s communicative repertoire, and awareness of how different features of an individual’s communicative repertoire may function in a given setting (Rymes & Leone 2014, p. 33).

As was illustrated by the subjects of Mendoza-Denton’s (2008) ethnography of Latina girl gangs in California, the length and thickness of one’s winged eyeliner, the crispness of the pleats in one’s pants, and whether or not one’s [t] is aspirated, says much—to those in the know—about the social identity being enacted. This same attention to a highly curated “look” can be found across contexts, including in the lyceum, technical institute, and vocational school in Cittadina. Layered on top of this is the way that these signs are talked about: what does it mean to have, or not have, a particular type of backpack, jacket, shoes, sunglasses, or hairstyle? What does it mean to
be seen, makeupless, rushing to school, carrying a five-inch-thick Greek dictionary, as opposed to being seen immaculately made-up, carrying a small handbag in lieu of a backpack, and strolling onto the school grounds as the final bell rings, cigarette in hand? These can prove to be important indexes of persona type, especially when set on the campus of a particular school and accompanied by a particular way of speaking.

As discussed at length above, judgements about types of language in Italy are ubiquitous and part of everyday life. In light of the concept of register proposed by Agha (2007), I treat speech labeled “dialect,” “standard,” “correct,” and so forth, as register phenomena. As Agha (2005) has asserted, enregisterment involves “processes whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users,” and that “registers are not static facts about a language but reflexive models of language use that are disseminated along identifiable trajectories in social space through communicative processes” (p. 38; see also Agha 2003, 2007). That is, registers come to be enregistered via sociolinguistic metacommentary (Rymes 2014). By treating one’s communicative repertoire as including many registers, as well as many other forms of semiosis as described above, and the communicative competence (Hymes 1972) to deploy these signs appropriately, we begin to develop a rich picture of how identities are enacted, assigned, or performed over time. This is perhaps especially true in “high stakes” social and academic situations.

2.3.3 Academic discourse socialization and classroom competence.

McDermott, Goldman & Varenne (2006) remind us that “educational institutions must be faced as historical, arbitrary, and artificial; that is, as cultural in the best sense of the term” (p. 4, emphasis in original). In other words, the practices associated with
educational institutions must be treated as cultural and therefore as needing to be *learned*. Schieffelin & Ochs’s (1986) concept of language socialization—socialization through language to use language—is an important part of this learning process and has been applied to research in educational contexts as a means of understanding how newcomers to an academic community are socialized into particular discursive practices (Gutierrez 1995; Morita 2000, 2004, 2009; Duff 2002, 2010). My research is focused on academic discourse socialization as it occurs in the classroom, or on the way that students learn to participate discursively in school spaces. In her definition of academic discourse, Duff (2010) includes forms of oral and written language and communication—genres, registers, graphics, linguistic structures, interactional patterns—that are privileged, expected, cultivated, conventionalized, or ritualized, and therefore, usually evaluated by instructors, institutions, editors, and others in educational and professional contexts. (p. 175)

Of course, academic discourse socialization, like all language socialization, can include both implicit and explicit instruction: while the teacher may give specific instructions about how s/he prefers that students take notes or participate in class discussions, students may learn more implicitly how to, e.g., make it seem like they know the answer to a question when they actually don’t, or how to lead the teacher toward a question that they *do* know the answer to. Additionally, as is the case in language socialization, academic discourse socialization is multidirectional, with teachers socializing students, students socializing teachers, and students socializing one another. For instance, newcomer teachers learn through language to use language in such a way that they can build rapport with students, conduct productive lessons, and evaluate student performance. Students also learn from each other how to manipulate their language so as to sound, for example,
more authoritative or confident in their performances. Importantly, and along these same lines, academic discourse socialization can include compliance and resistance: while some students may choose to adopt the discursive patterns and value systems of their academic community, others will refuse them and will seek alternative means of participating. At times, those who resist the norms of the academic discourse community manage to develop an alternative identity that has equal success to those who accept the norms of the discourse community, but at other times this is not the case.

Wortham (2005) describes the case of one student who, despite her teachers’ early identification of her as a student bound to be academically successful, becomes identified over time as a problematic student. Despite the fact that her contributions to class discussions do not change significantly over the school year, her provocative and jocular interactional style becomes framed across several interactions as problematic and as a model for other students of what not to do. Duff (2002) also describes how, in a high school classroom in Canada, students resisted the teacher’s implicit or explicit positioning of them as either “foreign” or “local,” often up-ending the teacher’s well-intentioned attempts to discuss cultural diversity and traditions. With the teacher eager to dole out turns to students she perceived as non-local, these students often rejected her positioning of them and either refused the turn or sought to end their intervention as quickly as possible. Also regarding socialization into classroom turn-taking patterns, Morita (2004) describes the experiences of Japanese international students at a university in Canada whose silence in class turns out to be motivated by very different factors: all of the students are among the more quiet students in their classes, but some have professors and peers who validate their silence and recognize it as a form of participation, while
others encounter professors and peers who read their silence as shyness, lack of preparation, or lack of English language skills. Morita’s (2009) study expands on this earlier work by taking into account how language, gender, and culture play a role in academic discourse socialization. In doing so, she draws on the idea that academic discourse socialization “potentially involves conflicts and power struggles that arise from different statuses, values, backgrounds, motivations, and needs of different (groups of) participants in a given academic community” (p. 444; Zuengler & Cole 2005). Gutierrez (1995) also observes that schools have not traditionally acknowledged the links between the development of discourse knowledge, the classroom context, the cultural expectations implicit in the activities in which students and teachers participate, and academic competence. Instead … 

She draws on Mehan (1979) and Hymes (1972) in formulating what she calls “classroom competence” (p. 28), which includes both discourse competence and academic competence as described above. Since my research is not solely focused on language socialization, but is also oriented toward how students learn to become successful in an academic community, it is important to highlight both forms of competence involved in “classroom competence.” On the one hand, discourse competence and academic competence overlap entirely, and are even one in the same, in the sense that expertise emerges in interaction (see esp. discussion of Carr 2010 and Cicourel 1997 in next Section). On the other hand, they overlap partially but not entirely, since developing academic competence (e.g., being able understand and use the Pythagorean theorem, describe the form of government during the High Middle Ages, or grade a garment from
a size 6 to a size 12) exists somewhat independently from discourse competence (e.g.,
being able to make decisions about what to say and how to interact in a given social and
interactional context). Developing classroom competence therefore entails socialization
through language to use language in such a way so as to emerge as competent in a
classroom context.

2.3.4 Performing academic knowledge. A sociolinguistic analysis of
performances of schooled knowledge takes into account the participants’ shared (or at
least overlapping) sociolinguistic/cultural knowledge, “content” knowledge, and
interactional norms, and acknowledges that language proficiency and content knowledge
are only part of what constitutes communicative competence (Hymes 1972), or classroom
competence as described above. These moments of classroom life are typically
demarcated in some way and constitute distinct speech events during the school day.
They may take the form of an extended IRE sequence (Mehan 1979), in which students’
participation is governed by a series of known-answer questions administered by the
teacher, or, in the case of laboratory sessions, they may not involve much on-task talk at
all. In either case, learning how to participate in public performances of schooled
knowledge requires undergoing academic discourse socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin
1995; Wortham 2005), including knowing when and how to participate in the
interactional routine.

McDermott and Varenne (1995), in describing the construction of ability and
disability, ask us to

[i]magine that the world consists of a wide range of tasks and that some achieve
competence on one set of tasks and others do well on other sets of tasks. Despite a
liberal lament that variation is wonderful, those who cannot show the right skills
at the right time in the right format are considered out of the race for the rewards of the wider culture (p. 335).

This “failure” to show the right skills at the right time in the right format could include anything from failing to participate as expected, to behaving in a way that is seen as disruptive (Wortham 2005), to not being able to use so-called “academic language.”

While not all performances of knowledge are evaluated for a grade, they nonetheless play a role in the development of a particular identity in a given context and are often high stakes in other ways. There is some amount of risk involved in volunteering an answer in a whole-class discussion, helping a classmate on a homework assignment, or whispering the answer to a test question across the row. Whether graded or not, these demonstrations of knowledge (or lack thereof) are important means of performing a particular identity, and framing such displays of knowledge as performance affords an interesting analytical perspective. As Bauman and Briggs (1990) have asserted,

> [p]erformance … provides a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes. A given performance is tied to a number of speech events that precede and succeed it … An adequate analysis of a single performance thus requires sensitive ethnographic study of how its form and meaning index a broad range of discourse types, some of which are not framed as performance. Performance-based research can yield insights into diverse facets of language use and their interrelations. (pp. 60-61)

In this sense, and especially in the case of displays of schooled knowledge, performance is a kind of ventriloquation, in which the speaker “populates [the words] with his own intention” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293). After scouring textbooks and class notes, listening to lectures, practicing in labs, asking questions, and talking with classmates, the student must draw on all of these voices to perform an image of him/herself as prepared, capable, and proficient in the material being evaluated. However, this must be done differently.
when displayed to the teacher and when displayed to peers, and knowing how to
differentiate between these modes is part of academic discourse socialization.

Framing tests and displays of knowledge as rituals or as performances (Bauman &
Briggs 1990) grants us a perspective of them as separate from routine classroom activity,
and as representing critical moments in the assessment of a student’s academic persona.
Students are often held accountable for synthesizing and demonstrating prowess in
information that was given to them at an earlier date by the teacher or by their textbooks,
and they are expected to ventriloquate these pieces of information in the appropriate
format (Bakhtin 1981). Evaluation of student performances is, however, sometimes a
matter of evaluating procedural display (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou 1989), in which
students are meant to demonstrate that they know how to perform doing being a good
student (e.g. Butler 1990). That is, it is not only about what is being said in the
performance of schooled knowledge, it is also about the interactional format. As Bloome,
Puro, and Theodorou (1989) have said, “[c]lassroom lessons are cultural events that are
accomplished through the cooperative display by teachers and students to each other of a
set of interactional procedures that can be counted (interpreted) as doing a lesson by
teachers, students, and members of the community” (p. 266). Important to note here is
that teachers and students display these procedures to each other: teachers act the part of
the tester and evaluator, as well as the expert, while students are positioned as novices
whose performance is constrained by tight parameters of correctness and incorrectness.
Failure to answer quickly enough, with the correct terminology, in the correct register,
and/or according to the local set of interactional norms can override one’s preparedness
to answer questions about the course material.
As Carr (2010) has pointed out, expertise is “inherently interactional” and “inescapably ideological,” arguing that expertise is “something that people do rather than something that people have or hold” (p. 18). She also asserts that enactments of expertise include more than simply stating correct facts, but rather that they include a communicative repertoire of gesture, dress, intonation, and facial expressions. In order for a novice to establish him/herself as an expert, they must master the associated register and communicative repertoire, they must learn to control interactions in which they are meant to display their expertise, and they must understand the role of the authorizing institution in their claims to expertise. However, I am also inclined to agree with Cicourel (1997) who states that “language is central to an understanding of novice and expert behavior” (p. 72, emphasis mine). I agree both in the sense that without being able to verbally perform in such a way that the evaluating expert can cull the denotational meaning of the utterance, the performance of knowledge or expertise falls flat, and in the sense that Cicourel specifies which is that one can sound expert to a fellow novice by mastering the appropriate register. The performance of schooled knowledge in the classrooms I participated in follows along with Carr’s and Cicourel’s descriptions of expertise in every respect.

2.4 Research questions

In this linguistic ethnography of education (Rymes, 2008; Wortham, 2008; Wortham & Rymes, 2003), I describe the ways in which the tripartite secondary school system in Cittadina creates differential forms of educational attainment and, in particular, how students attain proficiency in recognizing and deploying the signs required to
perform in this system. In a study of the intersections between language, social class, persona, and school success, it is critical to investigate how young people come to be part of these differential forms of schooling and how they are socialized (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Wortham 2005) to perform schooled knowledge according to the standards of each one. It is also critical to recognize how these divided schools, and those who teach and learn inside of them, may be influenced by social prejudices linking types of people to ways of being (Agha 2003). In light of this, I pose three interrelated research questions:

(a) **How are the student bodies of these three school types constructed via narrative and metacommentary?** (b) **How do students perform knowledge for peers and teachers?** (c) **What does “success” look and sound like within and across the three school types?** These questions are interrelated in that students tend to enroll at a particular school because they have certain expectations about the social and academic practices associated with it, which they must then also learn to navigate in such a way that they emerge as “successful” in those contexts.

(a) **How are the student bodies of these three school types constructed via narrative and metacommentary?** Considering that there are no legal or official barriers to entry in any Italian secondary school, how is it that students decide which type of school to attend? Each school inserts students into a different life trajectory, aiming them toward skilled labor, a professional career, or higher education; this is likely one of the factors that influences students’ decisions, but it is most likely not the only one. There may be an indirect influence of family finances on school choice (e.g., the cost of bus or train fare, school books, or foregone wages), or of family values on school choice (e.g., the importance of a reliable career, the value of higher education, or following family
tradition). Since this decision is made by young people at the age of thirteen, parents, teachers, family members, and older siblings may also be highly influential in the decision-making process. This question aims to uncover what students recall learning about schools even before attending them, how they learned about them, and how these circulating bits of information (whether they were school-generated official pieces of information or from other social channels) influenced their decision to set off on one life trajectory instead of another.

Italian schools’ efforts to meet educational demands are confounded by education policy changes resulting from the instability that has characterized Italian politics especially since Berlusconi was ousted in 2011\(^{14}\). In some areas, traditional and innovative modes of instruction appear to be butting heads, with classical, technical, and vocational schools often competing with one another for students. Enrollment in these schools changes from year to year according to economic prospects in different fields, policy changes, funding re-allocation, and according to the powerful word-of-mouth that many students cited during my fieldwork as the primary factor in their choice of school.

What we need to keep at the forefront of education in Italy, as is the case in the rest of the world as well, is how students are being formed into the next generation of law-makers, policy-makers, innovators, and citizens: is equal access to education enough? Taking a detailed look at what happens in three classrooms—at how teachers approach particular students, how students are trained into particular ways of being and ways of knowing (Duff 2008, 2010; Heath 1983), and at how larger social forces (like social class

\(^{14}\) The Italian government has seen six prime ministers pass through office between 2011 and 2019, each bringing with them a new Minister of Education with different political objectives. This has led to minimal stability in policies regarding education over the past eight years.
(b) How do students perform knowledge for peers and teachers? This research question is aimed at producing a linguistic anthropological account of the essential role of performance (Bauman & Briggs 1990) in Italian schools, and especially how certain performances reflect the particular ways of socializing (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984) students in each of the three school types specified above: lyceums, technical institutes, and vocational schools. In schools, only a fraction of the total number of linguistic and non-linguistic signs and behaviors are considered legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1996, 2001) forms of academic participation, and in order to be deemed appropriate they must also have occurred within the proper interactional format (Wortham, 2005). Being a student means participating in an ongoing social project in which young people continuously negotiate their social positions and their identities through interaction and performance (Bucholtz, 1999, 2011; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Rymes, 2001). In Italy, however, as we have seen, longstanding sociopolitical discourses about language varieties (Coluzzi, 2008; Dal Negro & Vietti, 2011; Tosi, 2001; Ruffino, 2006; Zuanelli Sonino, 1989) that are variously classified as “dialect” or “standard” have so far obfuscated local ways of strategically deploying elements of one’s communicative repertoire for academic purposes. Observing how these discourses about standard and nonstandard language manifest in the context of education in Italy includes exploring the heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981) language practices of the classroom and ideologies about
them (Jaffe 1999) in order to more thoroughly analyze what young people learn to do with language across the many speech situations in which they find themselves every day. Knowing how and when to appropriately deploy a given register for a given performative task is crucial for enacting communicative competence in school.

(c) What does “success” look and sound like within and across the three school types? Taking a social and linguistic focus to education spaces, this question aims to flesh out the complex of qualities and skills that a student must assemble and perform in order to be described as successful by teachers in a given school. This includes the students’ mastery of particular discipline-specific skills (e.g. a geometric proof, a technical design, a translation from Latin into Italian), their communication style (e.g. deferent, joking), and their language use (e.g. Standard Italian, nonstandard language varieties, foreign languages), as well as other criteria that their teachers specify. This complements the first research question in regard to the issue of whether schools attract or create different types of individuals, layering school-specific evaluations of student performance onto the student having already potentially self-identified as the type of person who goes to a given school. In answering this question, I intend to address how students learn to demonstrate proficiency in the skills that their schools value, how teachers talk about student performance, the criteria by which student performance is evaluated, how students in each school talk about good or correct academic performance, and whether or not models of success are school-specific. This research question is also designed to probe into Italy’s longstanding questione della lingua in order to investigate language-in-interaction in Italian schools, focusing on how ideologies about school success and language present a system of constraints and possibilities for students’
socialization into (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Garrett, 2008) institutional communities
e.g., school) and named language communities (e.g., Italian, regional varieties).

My research questions investigate how one does being a student (Sacks, 1984;
Butler 1990) from one school type to another—that is, how they learn to act like a
student—and specifically how one assembles the repertoire of communicative skills
required to perform the figure of “successful student” across three types of linguistically
and interactionally complex classroom environments which make up distinct curricula.

Talk about talk (Rymes, 2014) plays a critical role in how one assigns meaning to
particular ways of behaving in class. In other words, a teacher’s comment (e.g. “Finally,
someone got this question right!”) might frame a student’s performance as “successful,”
but a peer’s metacommentary might frame that same performance in a negative way
(“Ugh, she thinks she’s so perfect!”). As students come to think of themselves and/or
others as liceali (lyceum students) or professionali (vocational school students), or as
“successful” or “unsuccessful,” these different sources of commentary can have a major
impact on their academic and career trajectories. Answering these questions requires
careful consideration of the ways that school is done—and, equally importantly, how it is
believed to be done and how people say it should be done—within and across Italy’s three
school models. In Italy, linguistic boundaries are often drawn along social class lines,
which means that the way one speaks is interpreted as being indicative of one’s cultura,
educazione, and istruzione (culture, upbringing, and education), associating people
sometimes with figures of personhood (Agha 2003) that they may or may not identify
with. School has always promoted Standard Italian over any other “dialect” or regional
language: deviations from what is considered “standard” and “cultured” can mark a
student as difficult or unserious. A close analysis of classroom discourse, as well as talk
about classroom discourse, has the potential to highlight how and why certain forms of
talk are exalted while others are policed, as well as how students become labeled, and
how they either submit to or resist their categorization.
CHAPTER 3: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Data Collection

My exploration of the social life of classroom talk as both reflective and constitutive of broader social relations and ideologies across these three schools necessarily focused on the interactional complexity of the classroom. As discussed above, Italy’s contemporary linguistic complexity continues to be framed in terms of fairly static conceptualizations of dialect, standard, and their respective social domains, and most of all by Standard Italian as hegemonic. This is the case despite the myriad sociolinguistic phenomena in the heteroglossic reality of everyday life in Italy. Close analysis of classroom discourse, as well as talk about classroom discourse (Rymes 2014) highlights how circulating forms of talk and semiosis in schools are legitimized (cf. Heller 1996) as academic discourse, as well as how they are taken up for evaluation by peers and teachers. The aim of my fieldwork was to observe how students participated in specialized academic contexts which are associated with particular social types, or personae (i.e., hard workers, troublemakers, dialect-speakers, good students).

Data collection was divided into three overlapping stages, with the first stage (September and October 2016) involving spending each day of the five-day school week circulating through the twelve third-year classes at the three schools, talking with teachers and students, spending time in the teachers’ lounges and in the school cafés, and taking fieldnotes on school operations and daily school life. My aim was to gain an initial understanding of how the schools operated, how the teachers and students related to one another, and how their curricula were organized. An important goal for this stage of
research was also to identify three classes (one in each school) where I would spend the remainder of the academic year. The second stage (November 2016 to June 2017) included spending one day per week with each of the three focal classes I had selected, taking fieldnotes, doing audio recordings, and eventually also doing video recordings. The aim of this phase was to build a thick description (Geertz 1973) of everyday life in these classrooms, of how these particular students interacted with each other and their teachers, how they engaged with and/or negotiated academic demands, and how they performed their knowledge for peers and teachers. The final stage of research (March to May 2017) overlapped with and grew organically out of the second stage; the goal was to deepen my understanding of everyday school life and student experience by conducting group interviews with students. While there were several spontaneous interviews done with students over the course of the year, these interviews in the final stage were planned and had specific agendas as described below. Finally, over the course of the entire school year, I also conducted an interview with each of the 21 teachers whose classes I observed at the three schools, in addition to two interviews with the principal of the vocational-technical school. The following sections describe data collection during these three phases in more detail.

3.1.1 Phase 1: Exploring Cittadina and the schools. I first visited the secondary schools in Cittadina in early 2013 as part of a pilot project focused on the use of local dialetti, or dialects, in schools. At that time, I established contact with two English teachers (Manuela and Antonia) who acted as my gatekeepers at the classical lyceum, the technical school, and the vocational school when I returned in 2016. After explaining to a group of teacher participants that I was interested in observing the different school
models and the ways that students learn in each one, they suggested that I observe the third-year classes, which is the year in which the classes become highly differentiated into their specializations. I chose to follow this recommendation and found that, as suggested, the first year in the upper grades of secondary school (which is divided into the biennio, years one and two, and the triennio, years three, four, and five) represented an important transition from more general core content courses to more discipline-specific subject matter. After having observed every third-year class at the three schools for a minimum of two hours or a maximum of three school days, I found that the third-year students were far enough into their studies that they were familiar with the culture of their schools, but also relatively new to the specialized material for their academic track. The third year represented an adjustment for the students and presented challenges to many of them because of the demands placed on them by the new, highly specialized course materials, taught often by instructors they had never had before.

After circulating around all twelve of the third-year classes at these three schools, I narrowed down my focus to three focal classes: the 3BLC (at the classical lyceum), the 3 Meccanica (at the technical school), and the 3 Moda (at the vocational school). In the process of making this decision, I used ethnographic participant observation in official and unofficial school spaces (e.g. both in the classroom and in the hallways), took fieldnotes on classes in session and on other school activities, and I collected artifacts (e.g. pictures of homework assignments, textbooks, notices, examples of ungraded and graded student work) in order to build an understanding of how the three school types resemble and differ from each other in practice. An important part of this stage was also informing the wider school community (including teachers, administrators, students, and
parents) about my research as a means of helping them understand what I was doing there—and why they might find me in their classrooms or in the teachers’ lounge—and beginning to develop relationships with them. Originally intended to be a single month, this initial exploratory phase continued well into October, due in part to student-run strikes that were organized on several Thursdays and Fridays each week in the beginning of the year.

I chose the three focal classes because they represented a range of school realities, the students and teachers were willing to let me record their class sessions, they did not involve any conflicts of interest with my gatekeepers, and because I was able to build rapport with them from the beginning. The size and make-up of these three classes were also varied: the classical lyceum track (3BLC) had 19 students (84% female, 16% male), the mechanical track at the technical institute (3 Meccanica) had 22 students (100% male), and the sartorial track at the vocational school (3 Moda) had 9 students (89% female, 11% male). The schools do not keep statistics on students’ nationalities or ethnicities, but the classical lyceum track had no foreign-born or foreign-heritage students, while one third of the mechanical track had students with North African or Eastern European heritage, and just over one third of the sartorial track students had North African or Middle Eastern heritage. This reflects the distribution of so-called foreign\(^\text{15}\) students across Italian secondary schools in general: in the 2015/2016 school

\(^{15}\) The designation “foreign” is problematic in this case, since Italian citizenship laws follow *ius sanguinis*, not *ius solis*. Therefore, children born in Italy to non-citizen parents are considered “foreign” until they are allowed to apply for citizenship on their eighteenth birthday. Many of the students considered “foreign” in this document may have only ever lived in Italy.
year, the percentage of foreign students in vocational schools was 12.4%, in technical institutes 8.2%, and in lyceums only 3.9% (Borrini & De Sanctis, 2017).

3.1.1.1 Gatekeeping at the lyceum. On my first day at the lyceum in mid-September, five days after the students’ first day of school, I got to school at 10:00am after needing to go to the local Agenzie delle Entrate (the equivalent of the Social Security Office) to work out some kinks in my immigration paperwork. I walked down the path to the school and found Antonia, my main contact, chatting in the hallway with an English teacher colleague. She introduced me and briefly explained to the colleague what my research was about, and then proceeded to introduce me around to the people in the front office before taking me to the school bar—the nerve center of the school—where we both ordered cappuccinos. Antonia and I sat at one of the four tables (complete with four wicker armchairs with white cushions) and the young woman who worked behind the bar brought us our coffees. Antonia and I chatted about the different possibilities for me in terms of visiting the classi terze, or third-year classes. She had told me previously that the students in the human sciences strand (scienze umane) were pretty different from the ones in the classical strand (classico), and I told her that I was feeling torn about what to cover. With the scientific, artistic, and athletic strands of the lyceum housed in buildings in another part of town—and in a building where she did not personally hold any stakes or much clout—she pushed me toward focusing on the classical strand if I wanted to see “high culture” education. She had said that if I was more interested in dialetto, however, I might want to spend more time in the human sciences strand. Comments like these were common and came from several teachers and students throughout the school.
That day, I observed all three classes at the lyceum which took place on either side of the lunch break. The classes I observed, and the whole school, were predominantly female, with only three or four boys in each of the two classical strand third-year classes. The classical strand students were so silent at times that I felt self-conscious typing my notes, while the human sciences students asked me questions, goofed around in front of me, and tried to get peeks at my notes. During the lunch break between these classes, teachers came and went from the teachers’ room and a hush fell over the school. I took a peek outside the back door and found an ashtray stuffed full of cigarette butts and a couple making out in the corner. It seemed as though the whole school had emptied out, most teachers and staff included. Over the next three weeks, I spent a full day with each of the classes I had observed that day at the lyceum—the 3ALC, the 3BLC, and the 3ALSU—as a way to get a feel for what lyceum education looked like in general before ultimately selecting the 3BLC (in the classical strand) to continue with for the rest of the school year. This decision was motivated in part by my wanting to avoid any conflict of interest with my contact, Antonia, who was the English teacher for the other classical strand.

3.1.1.2 Gatekeeping at the technical institute. The next day, I went to the technical institute for the first time. My other main contact (and landlord), Manuela, asked me to get there at 9:00am so that she could come meet me and escort me to my first class. When I entered the school, the woman at the front desk stopped me and asked very sternly what I needed. When I told her I was waiting for Manuela, she broke into a big smile, shook my hand, and said, “Ahhh, Lei è la collega americana!” (‘Ahhh, you’re the American colleague!’). As I waited, a hall monitor yelled from the top of the steps that
one of the third-year classes was unattended. The front desk attendant ignored this issue and escorted me to the room where Manuela would be, as indicated by the schedule behind the front desk. I followed her down the hallway to the auditorium where I found Manuela accompanying her first-year students at a presentation about the dangers of sugar. The speaker explained to the students through a badly adjusted microphone that the sandwiches would be 30 cents more expensive than last year because the school had sought out salami and bread with fewer preservatives, which were made in Cittadina. This would be the subject of several strikes throughout the first month of the school year, where students would carry a banner reading “Bio non logico” (a play on the word ‘biologico,’ or ‘organic’), meaning “organic is not logical”.

After the presentation wrapped up, Manuela escorted me to my first classroom observation of the day, introduced me to the teacher, and had me sit at a desk right in the middle of the classroom. I observed five lessons with different third-year classes that day, noting major differences between classes in terms of their behavior and willingness to apply themselves to schoolwork, as well as notable differences between the lyceum and the technical school in terms of how subject matter was presented (but not as much in which subject matter was taught). Demographically, I noticed a higher number of males than females at the technical institute than at the lyceum (except in the biotechnology strand), as well as more students whose names suggested non-Italian origins. One of the classes I observed that day had an aid for two students diagnosed with learning disabilities (one with dyslexia and one whose diagnosis was not shared with me) and for two others with ADHD. In the other classes, there were no such issues mentioned by the teacher or made evident via teacher-student interaction or the presence of an aid. At the
end of the observations, Manuela brought me downstairs and introduced me to the principal, the whole administrative team, and the token do-it-all administrator who assisted me with immigration paperwork. I got home at 2:30 pm exhausted and starving, wondering how teachers did this all day and then went home to take care of a family or to their other work or hobbies.

Observations at the technical institute went on for some time, since there were nine specializations for me to rotate through and choose between. I observed each of these classes for at least one class period, if not for a full day, before beginning to narrow down the possibilities. When I eventually decided on the all-male Mechanical class (3 Meccanica), the principal was shocked and amused, having been certain that I would pick the more academically motivated Biotechnologies strand (known as ‘the lyceum of the technical school’). My choice was motivated in part by the relationships I was able to build with both the students and the teachers in the 3 Meccanica after just a few short observations, and by my desire to include a class in my observations that was not female-dominant in either its faculty or its student body.

3.1.1.3 Gatekeeping at the vocational school. Two days later, after spending a day navigating immigration bureaucracy in Perugia, I went to the building that housed the commercial technical school and the vocational school, a short walk from the (industrial) technical school. I was received warmly at the door by an English teacher and brought to the first class, which was in the commercial strand of the technical institute. The teacher wanted to have the students ask me questions in English as an ice-breaker activity, but it quickly turned into a conversation in Italian. One of my requests for clarification of a student question was accompanied by a reprimand from the teacher, directed at the
student: “Dai, non si può parlare dialetto, parla Italiano!” (Come on, [it’s not allowed] to speak dialect, speak Italian!). When he repeated the question in an exaggeratedly formal tone—which to me seemed substantially identical to the previous sentence—it was deemed “Italian” enough to receive a nod of approval from the teacher.

The next two class observations were in the vocational section of the building, which had the first floor all to itself. The first of the two vocational school observations was in an English class in the Fashion Design strand, where I noticed a dramatically different rapport between the students and teacher: the 8 students (7 girls and 1 boy) were sat around desks that had been grouped together into tables, silently working on reading an article in English. They periodically shared things with the teacher on their phones, and the teacher would lightly put her arm on their shoulders when she leaned in for questions or explanations, pulling up a chair at one table at a time to chat with the students (in Italian and sometimes in English) about what they understood from the texts. There was no teasing or reprimanding that even came close to embarrassing the students (unlike what I had seen that morning or in classes at the other two schools), and the teacher frequently used positive participant examples (Wortham 2005) to engage the students with the subject material. After this class, I went to the other vocational section, Electrical Maintenance, which was a class of nearly 30 boys. This particular lesson was similarly guided by a very positive teacher who coached them on note-taking skills and reminded them to use the technical language that they’d learned when they talked about the subject at hand. Any off-task behavior was quickly redirected to the lesson, which required constant vigilance on the part of the teacher, who carefully monitored and
stopped students’ side conversations, sharing of cigarettes, and other behavior that was not directly related to the lesson.

Over the following weeks, I spent one full day with the Fashion Design specialization (3Moda) and one full day with the Electrical Maintenance specialization (3A) before deciding to follow the 3Moda for the remainder of the year. In part, this decision was due to the difficulty I anticipated in recording the 3A, which was an extremely vivacious class who frequented classrooms with bad acoustics, and in part due to the feeling I had of there being too many cooks in the kitchen (between the subject teacher, the aids who came and went, and myself). When I explained this decision to the teachers and the principal, they seemed to have expected it—after all, they said, the 3A was nicknamed ‘le bestie’ (the beasts). The 3Moda, on the other hand, was a small class of mainly girls who seemed more comfortable with my presence and who I presumed would be easier to audiorecord.

3.1.2 Phase 2: Observing everyday life in three classrooms. The next phase, and the bulk of my time conducting fieldwork, went from late October or early November 2016 until the end of the school year in early June 2017. The fall and winter months of 2016-2017 were dominated by holiday breaks and a series of severe earthquakes\(^\text{16}\) and snowstorms in Umbria and neighboring regions, leaving schools closed for inspection for days at a time, students stuck at their homes far from school, and a general sense of anxiety among residents of Cittadina. Also during that time, due in part

\(^\text{16}\) There were earthquakes on October 26 and 30, followed by the November 4 holiday honoring national unity and the armed forces, followed by a school closing on November 25, the December 8 Immaculate Conception holiday, the winter holiday break from December 22 to January 6, school closures January 16-17 for snow, and an earthquake on January 18.
to the Good School Reform (*La Buona Scuola*), a wave of new school staff and faculty hires all over Italy had started a chain reaction of teachers transferring schools, keeping class schedules in flux well into November at the technical school and into January at the vocational school. My original plan had been to build my observation schedule in such a way that I would be able to observe each of the lessons that each of the classes took. That is, I had intended to jigsaw together a schedule that permitted me to regularly observe all of the core subjects at each school (Italian, history, math, religion, and physical education), as well as each strand’s specialized subjects. However, after several weeks of schedule changes and teacher transfers, this became impossible. I instead opted to do observations at the lyceum on alternating Tuesdays and Fridays, at the technical school on alternating Thursdays and Fridays, and at the vocational school on alternating Wednesdays and Thursdays. The free days of each week were used to get caught up on fieldnotes and to conduct interviews with students and teachers. This schedule gave my visits more regularity than the original plan, which I think made the teachers and students more comfortable (they knew exactly when to expect me), but it meant that I was not able to regularly observe every lesson for every class (although I did observe each lesson in each class at least once).

During this time period, I also attended parent-teacher meetings at the technical and vocational schools, spent time with teachers outside of class, attended extracurricular events and fieldtrips, participated in English language development initiatives for students and teachers, and acted as the in-house translator for the principal and teachers on an as-needed basis. All of these activities afforded opportunities to learn about the schools and the people who made up the school communities. In addition to taking
extensive ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 2011), documenting examples of students’ work, conducting ethnographic interviews (Spradley 2016) with students and teachers, observing parent-teacher meetings, and holding collaborative playback sessions with students (Rampton 1995) throughout the year, I recorded approximately 110 hours of in-class time at each school over the course of the academic year.

3.1.2.1 Participants’ interactions with recording devices. Throughout this phase, I spent one day per week observing and recording each of the three focal classes, first only with audiorecorders and later, as consent forms rolled in and as participants became more comfortable with my presence, with video. Three digital recorders were used during each class session, with one placed on the teacher’s desk and the other two assigned to a different pair of students for each lesson. The students’ and teachers’ hyper-awareness of the digital recorders took some time to get past, especially since we didn’t get to spend much time together in the period after they were first introduced (due to school closures mentioned above). The students in the 3Moda remained more skeptical of them throughout the year than the other classes did, and often whispered when they were around them so that their personal business would not be intercepted. The students in the 3Meccanica often beatboxed, rapped, or told jokes directly into the recorders, as if they were microphones, and many of the students played with them during lessons—tapping on them, tapping them on the desks, and rolling them around in their hands, thereby rendering the audio incomprehensible. The students at the lyceum often used them to whisper-narrate ongoing classroom events to me, tell me quick asides or updates, or express their relief at getting a good grade or not being called for an oral pop quiz.
Teachers likewise had different means of interacting with the recorders, with those at the lyceum seeming to be the least affected by it, perhaps because their lessons were done in the style of a frontal lecture (typically without any interruptions) and were perhaps more monologic than those at the technical or vocational schools, which tended to be more dialogic and dependent on student interaction. The vocational school teachers, particularly in the laboratory classes, did more facilitating than lecturing, and were often accompanied by lab technicians and teachers’ aids. These teachers often joked about striking certain comments (often gossip or teasing) from the record, or they would pull back a large piece of fabric they were working on to find a recorder underneath it, and would cover their mouths in surprise as if they had been caught red-handed. In this sense, they often oriented to the recording devices not as participants, but as surveillance devices. At the technical school, on more than one occasion, the recorders were used as a classroom management tool by the teachers (e.g., “be good, this is being recorded”), and there were even threats by a teacher on one occasion to take the recordings as evidence to the principal. As a reaction to this, the entire class rose to its feet in protest, saying that they read the consent form and they knew their rights. The teacher turned to me, desperate, and I confirmed that the students were right: the recordings were for research purposes only.

Once video was introduced (recorded via iPhone 6 and a gooseneck phone stand) students were comfortable enough with me, the audio recorders, and the usual procedures that it barely caused a ripple. I recorded video from my desk, with the screen facing me so as not to distract the students, and I made a point not to walk around holding the camera or deliberately point it at students when they were put on the spot by the teacher;
they were already heavily surveilled (by their peers, teachers, hall monitors, parents, me, etc.) and it felt wrong to turn the camera toward them as they argued, struggled to formulate an answer, doodled in their notebook, or got evaluated by a teacher. I instead tried to capture these moments in my fieldnotes, sometimes getting lucky and having them happen where the camera was already pointed and where the audio recorder was already stationed.

3.1.3 Phase 3: Group interviews. From March to May 2017, I held one group interview per week with students during the Monday lunch break. Due to a schedule change that had been put into place at the start of the 2016/2017 academic year, students no longer went to school on Saturdays, and instead went to school Monday through Friday. To accommodate the hours of school that were formerly held on Saturdays, each of the other five days had been extended slightly until about 2:00pm, with Mondays having an extra two-hour block added on to the end of the day. On Mondays at 1:00pm, students were dismissed for a one-hour lunch break between 6th and 7th period, and I took advantage of the fact that most students tended to stay on the school grounds during this time to set up group interviews. Since the students all had buses to catch or places to be immediately after school on the other days of the week, the Monday lunch break was the only time that they had an entirely free hour and were all in the same place. It was also the only time that they were not worried about a teacher overhearing them, since almost no teachers were to be found at the school during the lunch break. During these group interviews, I offered the students lunch in the form of pizza or piadine (a flatbread sandwich), cookies, and either Estathé juiceboxes or the coveted San Benedetto flavored iced tea. The topics of the interviews varied depending on the groups of students, and
since the goal of these interviews was to help me learn more about the students, particular moments in their class, or their experiences, this variation was justified.

While the larger 3Meccanica and 3BLC were divided into three groups each, the 3Moda was a small class and required only one interview. With at least one group from each class, I used the interview time to do a collaborative playback session (Rampton, 1995, 2006); using video and audio recordings, I took note of recurring types of interactional events and performances, as well as classroom underlife (Goffman, 1961), and I transcribed selections of these interactions. I then shared them with students as described below in Section 3.2.2. In other interviews, especially with groups that I thought would not have the patience for playback sessions, I focused on metacommentary and narrative about school choice and social personae by asking them for their thoughts on their schools, other schools, the students who attend them, why they chose to attend their particular school, and whether they feel they made the right decision when they chose their school. These interviews generated abundant talk about social stereotypes, about their families’ expectations about school, and about their decision-making processes regarding their choice of secondary school.

These interviews and playback sessions, along with recordings of classroom discourse, and explicit and implicit commentary about in-class discourse itself (Rymes 2014), were collected as a means of documenting the ways that students learned over the course of a school year to behave in the classroom, to participate in lessons, and to communicate with their peers and teachers (Kulick & Schieffelin 2004). Following Rymes (2009, 2016) and Wortham (2005), I frame classroom talk as both reflective and constitutive of broader social relations and ideologies, which makes both classroom
observations and student reflections on them some of the fundamental aspects of my research design.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

In my analysis, I draw on in-class recordings to trace students’ trajectories over the course of the academic year (Wortham 2005) and to seek out how their interactions position them positively or negatively by the teacher, therefore assigning them “successful” or “unsuccessful” identities across several contexts over the course of the academic year. How members of the school community talk about these performances and interactions is critical to my analysis of “success” not as pre-defined, but as an emergent, local construct. By using discourse analysis (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Bucholtz 1999; Gee 1999; Heller 2001; Rampton 1995, 2006; Rymes 2015; Wortham 2005) to analyze the audiovisual recordings and transcripts of the class sessions I observed, I have found that beliefs about how language and education should be are often at the forefront of teachers’ laments about student performance, but that it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly causes interactional difficulty. For this reason, I conducted interviews with students and teachers about their experiences at a given school, and have drawn on narrative analysis (Bruner 1986, Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008, Ochs & Capps 2001) to analyze how participants frame their stories about language-in-education and about school choice. Narrative analysis of conversational narratives and small stories (e.g. Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008) adds another layer of reflection onto these interactions, and serves to understand how participants take stances toward and make sense of their education experiences, school choices, and their present successes and struggles within the context of their school.
In my analysis, I also take into account the fact that how students and teachers interpret a particular interaction in the context of a particular social situation draws on normative notions and local models of school participation, and from macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of language-in-education policy (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997). That is, the way that teachers talk with each other about particular classes has a real influence on the way that class comes to be known in the school, and on the way that teachers interact with that group of students. Teachers rarely get the chance to see their students outside of the context of their own lessons and therefore they only ever witness a small slice of their students’ school lives; often, they construct more comprehensive images of their students through conversations with other teachers who have an equally limited idea of a given student’s capabilities. In these cases, students may find themselves trapped in a role: their witty comments may be misunderstood as back-talk, their masterful comedic skills as insubordination, and their creative wordplay as incorrect speech.

In the analysis of these data, I paid special attention to the way that different moments in class (e.g. taking an exam, talking with a friend, or buttering up a teacher) called for different elements of students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge to be displayed (Rymes 2010), which involved the simultaneous consultation of fieldnotes, audio recordings, and video recordings, as well as the production of written transcripts that took into account the verbal and nonverbal aspects of classroom interaction. It also depended on sociolinguistic metacommentary (Rymes 2014) and, more generally, on noting the reflexivity inherent in language use (Lucy 1993).

An analysis of the complexity of the Italian classroom must also take into account the fact of linguistic hybridity as it is embedded within the hegemonic status of Standard
Italian as the dominant image of Italy as a monolingual state. In my analysis, I have paid special attention to the way that different speech events call for different elements of participants’ communicative repertoires (Rymes 2010), or a laminating of multiple repertoire elements. While the identification of linguistic tokens as icons (Bolinger 1985; Irvine & Gal 2000) of academic success or failure is critical to a linguistic anthropological analysis of school success, it is the metacommentary (Rymes 2014) about these tokens, which type of subject produces them, and under which circumstances they can be perceived that is most relevant and informative for this study in a covertly multilingual community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991): an Italian classroom.

3.2.1 Transcription. As Rymes (2016) has mentioned, “flattening” the “textures of classroom interaction” (p. 82) into written format requires making a set of decisions about which data you will go on to work with in your analysis. Decisions about whether (and to what extent) to include paralinguistic and nonlinguistic features of classroom interactions, for instance, inevitably reflect the researcher’s preconceived ideas of what count as data, as well as the researcher’s prejudices about accent, speech style, and other features that might appear to the researcher as “marked” in some way, while they do not appear so to others. Ochs (1979) further reminds the researcher to be “conscious of the filtering process” (p. 44) involved in transcribing interactional data, and to have clear guidelines for what is included and what is not, given that it is necessary to be selective. Considering the multiparty nature of classroom discourse, the development of transcripts for this research necessitated selectivity from the very beginning: in a flattened medium, accurately representing the interactions of multiple parties (sometimes the entire class) was not only impossible, but undesirable for analysis due to the interaction being
rendered incomprehensible by all of the layers of talk. Instead of attempting to transcribe a given interaction and all of the talk surrounding it, I focused on particular speech events throughout the school day (e.g., openings and closings, narratives and “small stories,” exams and evaluations, peer-peer interactions) rather than on entire lessons or class sessions. I generated complete transcripts for all of the one-on-one teacher and principal interviews I conducted throughout the year, but my transcripts of classroom discourse and group interview data were informed by preliminarily coding my fieldnotes (inductively) and then tracing the themes that emerged from this coding back to the recordings associated with them. From this point, I coded relevant video and audio segments, and then transcribed excerpts of them for analysis (including as much linguistic and paralinguistic detail as possible).

3.2.2 Collaborative Playback Sessions. As mentioned above, some of these transcripts were also analyzed in cooperation with the students during collaborative playback sessions (Rampton 1995), which provided the opportunity for students to talk about or comment on the display of linguistic and cultural knowledge in different moments of classroom interaction. During these sessions, I provided the students with a copy of a transcript from their own class and played particular segments of classroom discourse back to them, asking them to reflect on the interactional moves, linguistic choices, and evaluative comments in that talk segment as a means of elucidating the mechanisms behind everyday school interactions. These playback sessions helped trace how particular language forms accrue local meaning and how they are legitimimized or delegitimimized in schools. The aim of these playback sessions was both to familiarize myself with the non-standardized orthographic conventions of the local dialect and to
understand how students and teachers strategically deployed local linguistic features. This type of “insider” information would likely otherwise be lost on me, but with the insight from students, I was able to correct and/or better understand transcripts of classroom occurrences. These collaborations with students helped to clarify any misinterpretations in my preliminary analyses and also served as further data collection by means of gathering metacommentary and eliciting conversational narratives from students. These playback sessions also served to help me understand how evaluations of talk and associated ideas (or stereotypes) about students come about. While students during playback sessions did not explicitly walk me through every element of the transcript and accompanying audio and/or video, particular interactional moves sometimes emerged as salient for them. For instance, a student’s eagerly raised hand might signal to the teacher that this student has studied hard and learned the material, but it may signal to the student’s peers that s/he is a teacher’s pet. Likewise, during an oral exam, a long pause may be perceived by the teacher as the student being deep in thought, but it may signal to the student’s peers that s/he is waiting for hints to be whispered to him/her. Masterful explanations of subject material in dialect might be very effective when students are reviewing for an exam together, but would not be appropriate for performing content knowledge to the teacher in the context of a test. The playback sessions with students served to identify such moments.

3.2.3 Discourse analysis. As Rymes (2016) has defined it, classroom discourse analysis is about “looking at language-in-use in a classroom context (with the understanding that this context is influenced also by multiple social contexts within and beyond the classroom) to understand how context and talk are influencing each other” (p.
In the case of the three classes that I observed, and the position that I was in as—depending on the moment—participant observer, teaching assistant, or quasi-student, it was important to attempt to see the multiple sides and multiple voices of classroom interactions. This included noticing who was included in or excluded from interactions, who was praised and who was reprimanded, and how students performed academic expertise publicly (for teachers), privately (for peers), and multidirectionally (for both). Analysis of classroom discourse was also important for making sense of the way that students simultaneously or in quick succession occupied various stances in relation to their peers, teachers, school work, and myself: sustained engagement over a long period of time allowed me to develop a more complex (but still far from complete) picture of students’ various identities. As Gee (2014) states, discourse analysis foregrounds “saying (information), doing (action), and being (identity)” (p. 20), in the sense that it studies intertextuality, pragmatics, and performance of self. He argues further that “we interpret saying and doing in terms of identities…I cannot really tell what you are trying to do or what you are really intending to say or imply unless I know who you are and who you think I am or want me to be” (p. 21, emphasis mine). This has multiple layers of applications for research in school settings, especially in high-stakes social or academic interactions (i.e., how students performed various personae or identities depended on who was present and what the expectations were).

Applying Rymes’s communicative repertoire approach to (critical) classroom discourse analysis (2016) provides an additional perspective for relating language to identity via the analysis of talk, as well as a reminder that “misreading a student on the basis of his or her words (or silence), storytelling style, or other communicative behaviors
can lead to a career of remedial education experiences—and the socially constructed identity of ‘bad student’” (p. 20). A close analysis of language-in-use which takes into consideration how language functions when used by particular speakers in particular contexts is therefore fundamental to developing an understanding of the dynamics of classroom talk (and, further, to identifying problematic interactional routines that rob students of a chance at full participation). Individuals (both students and teachers in this case) who are claiming and occupying particular social positions in a given interaction might draw on elements of their communicative repertoires (Rymes 2010) as a means of keying the tone of the interaction, establishing their role in it, and orchestrating others’ participation in it. In combination with contextualization cues (Gumperz 1982), one’s communicative repertoire elements can be deployed and interpreted in a variety of ways especially in classroom contexts, where teachers and students establish often tacit standards and expectations around the rhythm of talk and turn-taking, as well as participant structures (Philips 1983). While these often become routine and taken-for-granted, the criteria for participating “correctly” or “successfully” in them is not always entirely transparent and can often be quite ambiguous. As discussed further in upcoming chapters, some students came up with strategies for participating (even in ways that teachers might deem unconventional) while others continued to struggle.

### 3.2.4 Narrative analysis

Metacommentary and other social commentary is gathered in everyday talk about talk, as well as in narratives by both students and teachers. Numerous feminist and critical theory scholars have pointed out the connections between critical pedagogy and the importance of taking storytelling seriously. Indeed, as Razack (1998) has said, “for many of us who would describe ourselves as teaching for
social change, storytelling has been at the heart of our pedagogy” (p. 36). Taking a critical perspective in this study, I have treated the experiences of students and teachers as central to my research, aiming to open up space for reflection on what may have previously been overlooked or suppressed. By listening to, observing, and comparing the narratives of students at vocational schools, technical schools, and lyceums, I have sought to understand how these different subjectivities frame the experience of school and what their different perspectives can offer the field of education (see Epstein et al., 1998; Kendall and Tannen, 1997; Weiler, 1988).

I approach the student interviews analyzed in this research through a narrative analytic lens, drawing on Bruner’s (1986) narrative mode of analysis, Ochs & Capps’ (2001) account of experiential logic, and Bamberg & Georgakopoulou’s (2008) “small stories” approach. Narratives are critical for constructing a web of meaning around one’s educational experiences, and I draw on them to develop a multifaceted picture of how students relate to their progression through the Italian school system. Students, like all people, have trajectories of socialization through which their identities “solidify” (Bartlett, 2007; Wortham, 2005), and a narrative analytic approach offers a means of understanding the events that may have been influential in the solidifying of an individual’s identity. As Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 378) describe this approach,

The guiding assumption here is that stories are privileged forms/structures/systems for making sense of self by bringing the coordinates of time, space, and personhood into a unitary frame so that the sources ‘behind’ these representations (such as ‘author,’ ‘teller,’ and ‘narrator’) can be made empirically visible for further analytical scrutiny in the form of ‘identity analysis’.
Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) argue that such an assumption is also applicable to narratives arising from conversational contexts, from the everyday stories people tell themselves and others “in order to create (and perpetuate) a sense of who they are” (p. 378). These types of stories, which they call “small stories” because of both their length and their focus on ephemeral personal experiences, are included among the narratives analyzed in the present research.

I focus in my analysis not on narrative as structure, but on narrative as mode (Bruner 1986, De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012). Bruner (1986) separates the narrative mode from what he terms the logico-scientific or paradigmatic mode, with the latter relying on mathematical reasoning and logic in order to formally prove the nature and existence of relationships between X and Y. The narrative mode, on the other hand, deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place (Bruner 1986, p. 13).

Ultimately, however, Bruner argues that the narrative mode and the paradigmatic mode come to coexist in that narratives express a perhaps embellished and dramatized version of lived events which “constitutes the psychological and cultural reality in which the participants in history actually live” (p. 43). In my analysis, I overlay this concept on Ochs and Capps’s (2001) account of the explanatory sequence of narratives—as opposed to the temporal sequence—in which one event is framed in the narrative as causing other events. While explanatory sequences can resemble logical, scientific explanations,

Scientific and logical explanations … tend to be cast as universal, ahistorical laws, while narrative storylines tend to be cast as specific, situated affordances, wherein some particular property, condition, or behavior facilitates and makes probable the realization of some other property, condition, or behavior. … These
narrative affordances are based on tellers’ and listeners’ knowledge of autobiographical and historical precedent and immediate situational contingencies that render a course of events more or less probable (pp. 157-158, emphasis in original).

In Chapter 4, I analyze narratives of students at the vocational school, technical institute, and lyceum about how they came to attend the school, and specialization, that they currently attend. These narratives frequently emerged as an important part of my broader research project early on in my fieldwork, occurring both spontaneously and in group interview situations as co-authored “interactional achievements” rather than extended monologues (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 3). These narratives afford analysis through the lens of the explanatory sequence because the nature of the storytelling context often elicited an answer to a question, requiring participants to work backward from their current status and reflect on their journey.

I call these stories “narratives of becoming” in that they are stories participants told about the way they or others came to be in a certain social role or hold a specific position, in a specific place, at a specific point in their lives, and they tell of the circumstances surrounding their decision-making throughout this process. Analysis of these narratives of becoming includes exploring how students’ actual and imagined trajectories align with or depart from one another, how students frame their agency in the decision about which school to attend, and how they align or distance themselves as tellers from themselves as characters in their narratives.

In the upcoming chapters, I use these four analytic methods to unpack narratives about school choice, stereotypes about schools and students, performances of academic
expertise for peers and teachers, and the casual evaluative language that is used in schools every day.
CHAPTER 4:
SOCIAL PERSONAE & SCHOOL CHOICE
IN THE ITALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

4.1. Introduction

In any given school, there are expectations and standards set by students, teachers, administrators, the community, the region, and the State for how students should behave and what they should be able to do. An explicit version of these often appears in official written material, policy documents, professional development seminars, and in student-directed discourse, but an unofficial set of expectations and standards also circulates. For instance, in Italy, when the time comes for middle school students to decide which secondary school to attend, they will encounter marketing campaigns from various secondary schools, they will attend orientation days at prospective schools, and their parents will be given advice by their middle school teachers based on their child’s past academic performance. However, the widely circulating everyday metacommentary (Rymes, 2014) about these schools, such as in Figures 3, 4, and 5 shown below, also makes its way to students, their peers, and their families, and potentially yields a powerful influence on their decisions about which school to attend. Middle school students seeking information about secondary schools may seek it out on the school website and at orientation events, but they likely also talk with their older siblings and peers about how hard the school work is at a given school, they likely hear rumors about

the teachers and the students, and they likely try to find out which school their friends (or
other types of people they identify with) are going to attend.

Understanding the choice students are faced with when it comes time to decide
which secondary school to attend is particularly important in the context of Italian
secondary education in light of its division of students by academic specialization. A
number of desires, exigencies, and prejudices play a part in how students come to attend
particular schools, how teachers approach (and assess) a given group of students, and
how students’ actual and imagined trajectories align with or depart from one another. In
this chapter, I introduce three tokens of citizen-generated discourses\textsuperscript{18} about secondary
school types and the students who attend them as a means of illustrating an example of
widely circulating metacommentary about the three different types of schools offered in
Italian secondary education. I then analyze students’ brief, co-constructed narratives—
what I term here “narratives of becoming”— about how they came to choose their current
school and/or specialization, via Bruner’s (1986) narrative mode of analysis, Ochs &
Capps’ (2001) account of experiential logic, and Bamberg & Georgakopoulou’s (2008)
“small stories” approach.

\[4.2\ \textbf{Representations of school types circulating via social media}\]

Circulating metacommentary (Rymes, 2014) about which types of students attend
which types of schools—or which types of schools create which types of students—

\[\textsuperscript{18} I \text{ use the term “citizen” here in the sense specified in Rymes & Leone (2014, p. 26) in the definition of
Citizen Sociolinguistics: “people who use their senses and intelligence to understand the world of language
around them.” In this case—which is more citizen semiotics than citizen sociolinguistics—the meanings
that everyday people attribute to one anothers’ clothing, accessories, and affiliations become important
sources of information for others navigating that same world.}\]
contributes to the ideologies around particular social personae or figures of personhood associated with each of these schools (Agha, 2011) and reinforces their indexical links to particular ways of being. In the memes presented below (Figures 3, 4, and 5), certain scenes—some from school and others from non-school settings—depict behaviors that are linked to specific social personae, e.g., burnouts and troublemakers, which are recontextualized by the creators of the memes as pertaining to Italian secondary schools. In so doing, the memes’ creators draw a connection between non-school contexts (like the prison yard), the social types who frequent these non-school contexts (like “troublemakers”), and school contexts (like the vocational school). I obtained Figures 3 and 4 during a brief period in which I was part of a WhatsApp group with the students in 3 Meccanica, and I came across Figure 5 upon exploring further the Instagram profile of the account associated with them. All of these images come from an Instagram account called nascecreceignora (the username could be translated as “be born, grow, ignore”), and received many laughs and crying-laughing emojis when they were shared in the WhatsApp group.

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19 A mobile phone messaging application
Figure 3: School trips (nascecreseignora 2017b)

Figure 3 comments on what school trips look like in four different types of schools, including the scientific lyceum (*liceo scientifico*, or simply *scientifico*), the industrial technical institute (*ITIS*), the vocational school for industry and artisanship (*IPSIA*), and the *alberghiero*, a vocational school for hospitality. The scientific lyceum students (males and females) are posed with teachers in an orderly row in front of the façade of an important-looking building. Perhaps this is a trip to a nearby city, or to visit their cultural exchange partners in another country in Europe. The technical institute’s school trip, on the other hand, is depicted as a riot. The participants run around with bandanas over the lower half of their faces, hoods up, swinging blunt objects—boards, sticks, or paddles of some kind—on a paved surface backgrounded with a cloud of smoke. For unknown reasons, the floating head of Jack Skellington, a character from Tim Burton’s *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, also appears in the right-hand corner of the image, stamped with the word “gastone.” The vocational school for hospitality is
depicted as six men standing in a field of marijuana plants. Two (possibly three) of the men wear their hair in dreadlocks, a hairstyle that is—in my experience—associated among youth in Italy as being associated with smoking marijuana. Finally, the vocational school for industry and artisanship is depicted as people behind bars, but wearing everyday clothing rather than prison uniforms. The faces of the people are barely visible through the bars, but those that are visible appear to be of men.

Figure 4: Physical Education (nascecreseignora 2017a)

Figure 4 comments on what gym class looks like in four different types of schools, also including (as in Figure 3) the scientific lyceum (liceo scientifico, or simply scientifico), the industrial technical institute (ITIS), and the vocational school for industry and artisanship (IPSIA). Instead of including the alberghiero used in Figure 3, however, Figure 4 uses the artistico, or the artistic lyceum. The scientific lyceum is depicted with young men and women jogging around a school gym, in athletic clothes, in an orderly
group. The technical institute is depicted as two young men in a physical fight in the hallway of the school, hands at each other’s throats. There is one male onlooker, and two figures who are presumably teachers (one man and one woman) walking toward the fighting students, possibly in order to intervene in the fight. The artistic lyceum shows five hands passing marijuana joints in what looks to be a parking lot or some other outside space paved in cement or asphalt. The vocational school for industry and artsanship is, again, depicted as a prison. In this scene, a shirtless man does pull-ups on rusty metal equipment in “the yard,” flanked by two other men working out on nearby equipment. In the background is a group of other shirtless men, wearing just the pants of their orange prison jumpsuits, walking around the prison yard. No guards are visible in this image.

Figure 5: Types of backpacks (nascecrecesceignora 2017c)
Figure 5 comments on what types of backpacks students of different schools use, featuring the scientific lyceum, ITIS, and the artistic lyceum as in Figure 4, but adding agrario, or the vocational/technical school for agriculture. It appears that, despite the artistic lyceum and the hospitality school being two different categories of school, they are associated with similar figures of personhood (both Figures 4 and 5 feature marijuana as their defining characteristic). Also shown in Figure 5, the backpack of the scientific lyceum is a plain, light gray, nondescript Eastpak brand backpack. The backpack of the artistic lyceum, on the other hand, is a black backpack adorned with a pattern of marijuana leaves, striped yellow, green, and red. The technical institute’s backpack is not a backpack at all, but a large bomb inside of a duffel bag. Finally, the “backpack” attributed to the agriculture program is a backpack grass-trimming tool used by gardeners and landscapers.

The figures of personhood associated with each type of school are made very apparent by these three composite images. The scientific lyceum depicts the archetype of a class trip in Figure 3, showing a large group of students accompanied by adult chaperones posed in front of an important-looking building, and of gym class in Figure 4, showing a group of students in athletic wear, jogging in formation around a school gym. Even the backpack of the scientific lyceum student in Figure 5 is framed as plain, clean, and neat. In ITIS, on the other hand, physical education is depicted as a fight between two boys in the hallway of the school and class trips are depicted as a riot of masked young people (seemingly all male) running through a smoke-filled, urban-looking scene. The backpack bomb in Figure 5 further complements this image of ITIS as troublemakers. Framed as even more deviant than the ITIS students, however, the
vocational school (IPSIA) is given the prison theme in Figures 3 and 4, with class trips being depicted as men behind bars, and gym class being depicted as shirtless men working out in a prison yard. There are no females in the images for ITIS, IPSIA, or alberghiero except the female teacher who is on her way to intervene in the fight between the two male students in Figure 3. Females are only shown in the pictures designated for the scientific lyceum. The photo used for artistico does not provide any indication of whether females or males are present, although the absence of jewelry and nail polish could suggest that the creator of the meme did not make an attempt to highlight the presence of female students at this school.

These three composite images, in poking fun at what gym class looks like, what school trips look like, and what backpacks look like in different types of schools, hint at the communicative repertoires of secondary school students in Italy and which elements emerge as salient in different contexts. In these memes, particular scenes—some from school and others from non-school settings—depict behaviors and repertoire elements that are linked to particular social personae, e.g., burnouts and troublemakers, which are recontextualized by the creators of the memes as pertaining to Italian secondary schools. In so doing, the memes’ creators have drawn a connection between non-school contexts (like the prison yard), the social types who frequent these non-school contexts (like “troublemakers” or “criminals”), and school contexts (like the vocational school).

The uptake of these figures of personhood by secondary school students and by middle school students who are in the process of choosing schools may reinforce existing stereotypes and inform citizen and official discourses about schools and the people inside them. That is not to say that people interacting with these memes readily accept the
representations of each of these schools, but many Instagram users did post comments in response to them, such as the ones below regarding Figure 3 which came in response to other users’ questions about what IPSIA is:

serena__pisano: Will you tell me what the fuck this IPSIA is?
s Gabess: @serena__pisano it’s a vocational school, but one of the ones made for the people who don’t feel like doing shit.
io_non_sono_leggenda: @serena__pisano a school where you learn to be a mechanic, etc… The ones who don’t feel like studying go there. io_non_sono_leggenda: @serena__pisano the vocational school basically
_yassintibaldi_@its_francesco_1 ITIS the public industrial technical institute [is where] those who feel like studying go (unfortunately it’s lacking in girls) and there they teach you electronics, informatics, logistics, and other nice things while IPSIA is a kind of center for vocational education but with 5 years and for people who don’t feel like studying.

This exchange between users highlights the circulating metacommentary about vocational schools, and about IPSIA (the vocational school for industry and artisanship) in particular, as being for people who do not like studying. The representation of school trips in IPSIA as people behind bars in Figure 3 may suggest that the IPSIA students—when left relatively unsupervised—get into serious trouble. This representation, which is both born from and contributing to existing discourses about school types and the students who attend them, provides telling commentary and a moralistic discourse around low academic performance, laziness, and a lack of desire to study by associating those qualities with criminals and incarceration. In the case of this representation of IPSIA,

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20 Original posts in Italian:
serena__pisano Mi dite cosa cazzo è sta ipsia?
s Gabess @serena__pisano è un professionale, ma di quelli proprio per fatti per la gente che non ha voglia di fare un cazzo
io_non_sono_leggenda @serena__pisano scuola dove si impara a fare il meccanico, ecc.. Ci vanno quelli che non hanno voglia di studiare
io_non_sono_leggenda @serena__pisano il professionale in poche parole
ma.r.i.a. @serena__pisano sarebbe un istituto professionale
_yassintibaldi_@its_francesco_1 ITIS istituto tecnico industriale statale ci va chi ha voglia di studiare(sfortunatamente è privo di ragazze)e li ti insegnano elettronica informatica logistica e altre cose carine mentre l’ipsia è una specie di cfp ma con 5 anni r ci va chi non ha voglia di studiare
many of the commenters appeared to agree with or at least appreciate the connection between vocational school students and incarcerated criminals, but other users took issue with the way other schools were represented. The exchange below occurs in response to the representation of the artistic lyceum students as users of marijuana—“burnouts”—in Figure 3.

*ama_v_12*: enough with these discriminations. It’s not true that everyone smokes weed at the artistic lyceum. Maybe a little but not everyone does it.

*Chiaraadominici @ama_v_12*: really because I want to go to the artistic lyceum but I’m scared.

*ama_v_12 @chiara_dominici13*: really they’re just discriminations. This friend of mine is in the second year and he doesn’t smoke doesn’t drink and at his school they don’t sell weed, but not even in others so don’t worry

*Chiaraadominici @ama_v_12*: thank you so much 💟

In this exchange, a prospective student appears to be comforted by the reassurance of another person who has a personal contact in the artistic lyceum that not everyone at the school “smokes weed.” As mentioned above, metacommentary such as these three Figures is not intended to be taken up by users without any reflection; instead, they can provide jumping-off points for discussions and contestations, as was done by these two users. The importance of taking citizen sociolinguistic metacommentary seriously—rather than brushing it off as too biased—lies in the wealth of interactions it facilitates and the wealth of perspectives that emerge in response to it. On this topic, and in relation to narrative, Moore (2015) asserts that

[...] Citizen Sociolinguists are unreliable narrators. Sweeping generalizations, tendentious claims, pseudo-expert posturing and downright prejudice are all richly on display in online discussions of such matters as ‘accent’. But these “biases” become virtues once we ask not about the accuracy of ordinary people’s

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21 Original in Italian:

*ama_v_12*: Ma avete rotto con queste discriminazioni. Non è vero che all’artistico si fumano canne. Forse un po ma non tutti lo fanno.

*Chiaraadominici @ama_v_12*: davvero perché io voglio andare all’artistico ma ho paura

*ama_v_12 @chiara_dominici13*: davvero sono soli discriminazioni. Questo mio amico è in 2 e non fuma non beve e non si droga e a scuola sua non si spaccia ma nemmeno in altre quindi tranquilla

*Chiaraadominici @ama_v_12*: grazie mille 💟
metacommentaries on language, but about the conventions governing their production and reception, and the performative implications of the act of expressing them—which is to say, the conditions under which they become effective (and, perhaps, worth “liking” or “sharing”). (p. 4)

The narratives presented in the remainder of this chapter are a further iteration of citizen metacommentary, both drawing on and contributing to popular formulations of school types and student types such as those proposed in Figures 3, 4, and 5. These narratives about school choice, in which students recount—often via an explanatory sequence (Ochs & Capps 2001)—their past desires to attend particular schools, who and what was involved in influencing their decision, and how they feel about the decision today, often rely on the audience and co-tellers to accept as a fact that there are qualitative differences between the schools in addition to differences in subject matter.

4.3 Student narratives of school choice

The narratives presented in this chapter are drawn from both scheduled and spontaneous interviews that I conducted between October 2016 and March 2017 with students from the vocational school, technical institute, and the classical lyceum. The students whose narratives are presented below were from the three focal classes that I observed, and they were all third-year students at the time (mostly age 16-17, with two older students).

4.3.1 The Technical School. The first interview excerpt I present here is from a longer improvised interview with four male students from the 3 Meccanica. This particular third year class was all male, with students ranging from ages 16 to 19. The
participants in this interview are Ivan, Luca, and Akram & Otmane (identical twins whose voices are also identical), and me.

Figure 6a: Typical classroom set-up in 3 Meccanica

*The students marked with asterisks were often absent, and I usually sat in one of their seats when this was the case. On the rare occasion that all students were present, I sat with Ivan.
Ivan, one of the oldest students in the class at age 19, had joined the class the previous year after moving to Italy from Moldova and joining his mother and sister, who had been living in Italy for some time. Energetic and funny, but also motivated and with high standards for himself, Ivan walked the line between being highly participatory and highly disruptive depending on the moment. He often sat in the front row of the classroom in the middle seat, directly in front of the teacher (see Figure 6a for the typical student seating arrangement). As far as I could tell, he enjoyed sitting in this spot, although it was never clear to me if he selected it himself or if he was put there so that the
teacher could keep an eye on him. His spoken Italian was outstanding and included abundant dialectal features, despite his having been in Italy for only a little over a year, and he took great pride in correcting me when I made errors in gender or number in my spoken or written Italian. We often sat next to each other in class because, unlike most of his other classmates, he was the only one who routinely sat alone at his double desk. Out of all of the students in this interview, I had the best rapport with him. Luca was quite the opposite: very quiet and introverted. He also sat in the front row, but near the door, and shared a desk with a much more talkative good friend of his who often got in trouble for being off-task and joking around with Ivan (who sat on the other side of the aisle). Luca was very friendly, and seemed to enjoy being around talkative people, although his own contributions to talk were usually minimal, and limited to smiling, laughing, and the occasional one-liner. Akram and Otmane shared a desk in the opposite corner of the classroom from Luca, in the far back near the window. They were generally very friendly with me and their peers, and their participation varied wildly from class to class, with a clear preference shown for the technical subjects over the more humanistic subjects. They were born in a nearby town to Moroccan parents and were proud to tell me that they spoke dialetto, Arabic, and Italian.

This interview occurred on a day when the majority of the students in the school were on strike, so there were only these four students in class, along with a substitute teacher (see Figure 6b). I took advantage of this ora buca (literally ‘hole hour,’ or free period) to ask them about why they decided to pick the Mechanics specialization instead of others. As this was conducted in late October 2016, less than a month after I had begun
regularly frequenting their class, we didn’t know each other very well yet and I had not yet heard any stories about how they had come to be in this school.

*Transcript 1:* Choosing the Mechanics specialization (3Mec 2016.10.28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>ALP: Perché avete scelto questo indirizzo?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A/O: Allora, io ho scelto questo indirizzo meccanico perché sugli indirizzi che offriva questa scuola è quello che mi prendeva di più. Poi l’ho frequentato dal secondo perché gli indirizzi si inizia dal biennio. In questa scuola ti mischiano con gli altri indirizzi, con gli altri studenti, quindi non è dagli indirizzi. Poi dal biennio si comincia, si inizia a fare questi indirizzi e le materie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>((I ask Luca, joking a little, if he chose this school because he lives close by. He says yes, but then I ask him again seriously.))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>ALP: E’ diverso da informatica?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>L: Sì, per il meglio. Ci sono i sistemi e questa roba che mi piace di più dell’IT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...  

| 26 | ALP: E tu Ivan? Perché hai scelto di venire qua?  
| 27 | I: Io da sempre mi piacciono le macchine, cose di quel tipo, e quando mi sono trasferito qua, vabè sono un po’ universale io. Universale. Mi piace tutto a me. Informatica, meccanica, mi piace tutto, però ho scelto meccanica perché non posso sceglierle tutte e ho pensato che meccanica sarebbe meglio, cioè un po’ [xxx] mi piace, si può anche dire così. Insomma, mi trovo bene. |

In these small stories, Akram, Otmane, Luca, and Ivan express their affinity for the Mechanics specialization, even though the first three frame it not so much an affinity in itself as being relative to what is available at the school (lines 3-6, 23-24). Importantly,

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22 Unable to distinguish which twin is speaking.
while they mention considering other specializations within the technical school, in this
telling they do not mention their consideration of any other type of school (e.g.,
vocational or lyceum). Ivan justifies his decision to study the Mechanics specialization by
orienting to a point earlier in his life, suggesting that his decision to study Mechanics is
from a real affinity for it and not because he picked it out of a limited line-up:

I: I’ve always liked machines, stuff like that, and when I moved here—I don’t know, I
guess I’m kind of universal. Universal. I like everything. IT, Mechanics, I like
everything, but I picked Mechanics because I can’t pick all of them and I thought that
Mechanics would be best…

He claims to have ‘always liked machines,’ albeit along with many other
technical subjects, and frames his narrative so that his interest in Mechanics precedes his
arrival in Cittadina and, therefore, his knowledge of what the school offerings were. In
his telling, it is a happy coincidence that the school offered Mechanics because that’s
what he thought ‘would be best’ anyway. Here, Ivan positions himself as a jack of all
trades, as ‘universal,’ and as in a way being restricted by his need to choose only one
specialization (‘I can’t pick all of them’).

Akram/Otmane, and Luca, on the other hand, orient their decision to follow the
Mechanics specialization at the point when they understood what the specialization
options were or when they had a point of comparison (lines 3-6, 23-24).

A/O: Well, I picked this mechanics specialization because out of the specializations that this
school offers, it’s the one that interested me the most.

L: I was already coming here but before I was doing Informatics (IT). Then from
Informatics I changed to Mechanics.

Akram or Otmane frame their choice as being based first on a preference for a
technical institute (‘out of the specializations that this school offers’) and then for the
Mechanics specialization (‘it’s the one that interested me the most’), rather than as being
between multiple types of schools. Luca frames his choice to take the Mechanics specialization as a switch ‘for the better’ (line 17) from IT. All of the students in this interview narrated their decisions to take the Mechanics specialization as, in hindsight, the right choice. All also frame the decision as a personal choice, based on their interest in the subject, rather than on external pressures from family, middle school teachers, or past academic performance (e.g. having done well enough to succeed in this specialization, or alternatively, having failed elsewhere).

On another occasion later in the school year (at the end of March 2017), I held a group interview with Ivan and seven other students from the Mechanics specialization. The participants in this interview were Rocco, Ruggero, Zied, Wassim, Lukas, Ilir, Giacomo, and Ivan, and I held the interview around a large table in a spare mechanics lab. During this interview, Wassim and Lukas were having a separate side conversation at the far end of the table, much like they did in class when they were disengaged from the lesson at hand. Ruggero was a quiet and respectful young man and was by far the most serious student in the class, almost always paying attention, taking notes, and asking appropriate questions during lessons. Rocco was quite the opposite: sarcastic, boisterous, almost always off-task in class, and almost never taking anything seriously. He always sat in the back corner of the classroom and often had his phone out, scrolling through social media apps. Giacomo was among the most disruptive students in the class, often getting belligerent with teachers and classmates, swearing at and talking back to teachers, leaving the classroom whenever he felt like it, and even sometimes getting ostracized by his peers as a result of his behavior. Ilir seemed much younger than his classmates, partially due to his small size and his tendency to mumble in what seemed like an
exaggeratedly deep voice. He was often distracted and seemed to enjoy being on the periphery of mischief in the classroom, especially when Rocco or Zied were leading the way. Zied, like Ivan, was older than his classmates (he was almost 20 at the time of this interview) and was often the ring leader of the class. He excelled at math, often proudly helping his classmates and/or letting them pass around his work to copy from, but he had originally begun his secondary school career at the linguistic lyceum in the next town over. Born in Tunisia to Tunisian parents and brought to Italy as a baby, he told me that he spoke Arabic, Tunisian Arabic, and French in addition to Italian, some English, and some German, so the linguistic lyceum seemed an obvious choice for him. Finally, there was Ivan, who had seated himself somewhat apart from the others during the interview. He had turned 20 a few months prior.

After reminding the students about the memes shown in Figures 3 and 4 (shown again below for reference), which they had introduced me to—and asking them if they had prejudices, or knew about prejudices, toward particular types of schools and/or students (which they confirmed they did), I moved on to asking them if the prejudices had a role in their decision to come to the technical school.
Transcript 2: I came for the friends (3Mec 2017.03.27)

1. ALP: Però ciò voi quando avete deciso di venire a questa scuola, ad esempio, avete pensato a questi pregiudizi anche o--?
2. Ro: No io -- io sono venuto per gli amici
3. Il: Io prima [xxx] all’IPSIA
4. Ro: Io ci sono venuto per gli amici
5. ALP: ((to Ilir)) Hai cominciato all’IPSIA?
6. Il: No [xxx] per fa’ Meccanica, ma siccome
7. ALP: Meccanica non c’era, ho cambiato e son venuto all’ITIS. Quando mi hanno chiamato all’IPSIA mi hanno detto, “eh, comunque Meccanica c’è,” ma [xxx]
8. G: Io invece avevo scelto il commerciale, poi mi hanno bocciato e sono venuto qua all’ITIS
9. Ro: Io per gli amici sono venuto.
10. Ru: ((sarcastically, to G)) HAHA::
11. Il: ((giggles))
12. Ro: Io per gli amici
13. L: Per gli amici di calibro suo
14. Ss: [xxx]
15. ALP: Che cosa?
16. Ru: Io voglio andare a fare ingegneria meccanica all’università.
17. ALP: E quindi hai fatto-- non volevi andare al liceo scientifico?
18. Ru: ((shaking his head)) no no
19. Z: Io invece ho fatto il linguistico
20. ALP: But like when you (pl.) decided to come to this school, for example, did you think about these prejudices too, or--?
21. Ro: No I— I came for the friends
22. Il: I first [xxx] to IPSIA
23. Ro: I came here for the friends
24. ALP: ((to Ilir)) You started at IPSIA?
25. Il: No [xxx] to do Mechanics, but since they didn’t have Mechanics, I changed and I came to ITIS. When they called me to IPSIA they told me, “eh, anyway, we have Mechanics here,” but [xxx]
26. G: I, instead, chose the commercial school, then they failed me and I came here to ITIS.
27. Ro: It’s for the friends that I came.
28. Ru: ((sarcastically, to G)) HAHA::
29. Il: ((giggles))
30. Ro: Me, for the friends.
31. L: For friends of his caliber
32. Ss: [xxx]
33. ALP: What?
34. Ru: I want to go do mechanical engineering at university.
35. ALP: And so you did—you didn’t want to go to the scientific lyceum?
36. Ru: ((shaking his head)) no no
37. Z: I, instead, did the linguistic [lyceum]
This brief stretch of talk includes several small stories, as well as hints of untold narratives. The format of the interview was such that students could elaborate if they so desired, or could choose to keep their contributions short. However, the multiparty format also meant that I, as an interlocutor, could not always respond in the ways that the students might have liked so that they could continue or develop their narratives, and I counted on the students to resort to their usual side-talk to tell any stories that they wanted to elaborate on. Rocco’s response to my question about whether circulating stereotypes had influenced their decisions to attend the technical school (lines 1-3) sets the tone for the rest of the student contributions by recontextualizing my question as “Why did you decide to come to this school?” His narrative—or attempted narrative, which emerges throughout the interview as shown here—is also highly consistent and insistent:

**ALP:** But like when you (pl.) decided to come to this school, for example, did you think about these prejudices too, or--?

**Ro:** No I—I came for the friends

**Ro:** I came here for the friends

**Ro:** It’s for the friends that I came

**Ro:** Me, for the friends.

**L:** For friends of his caliber

Rocco clearly frames his decision to come to the technical institute as being based on social factors rather than on academic or career factors. He repeats four times that he came to ITIS because of ‘the friends’ (lines 4, 6, 16, 19), although he doesn’t specify whether it was the prospect of making friends that drew him to the technical institute or if he already had friends who attended the school. Lukas’s ironic comment in line 20 (‘for friends of his caliber’) does not get refuted by Rocco, and therefore possibly serves as a summary of what Rocco was getting at: he came to the technical institute because, based on circulating discourses like those in Figures 3, 4, and 5, he thought he would find
people like him, i.e. other guys who don’t take school seriously and who like a good dose of chaos in their lives.

Rocco’s initial attempt at his narrative gets overshadowed by Ilir launching into a narrative about considering pursuing his secondary school career at IPSIA, the vocational school (line 5).

Il: I first [xxx] to IPSIA
ALP: ((to Ilir)) You started at IPSIA?
Il: No [xxx] to do Mechanics, but since they didn’t have Mechanics, I changed and I came to ITIS. When they called me to IPSIA they told me “eh, anyway, we have Mechanics here,” but [xxx]

This was, it seems, because he was interested in doing Mechanics, and not because he wanted to attend the vocational school itself. Until a few years prior to my arrival, the vocational school offered a mechanical specialization that had dropped so much in enrollment that it had to be closed down – it appears here that Ilir here is referring to that program being of interest to him at first. By bringing up IPSIA as being his first choice, however, Ilir is positioning himself as a decidedly non-academically-oriented student, drawing on the circulating stereotypes about the school to speak for themselves in this context.

Giacomo, perhaps picking up on Ilir’s move to position himself as a guy who doesn’t care that much about school, tells his small story (lines 13-15) about having failed at the commercial technical school and transferring to the industrial technical school:

G: I, instead, chose the commercial school, then they failed me and I came here to ITIS.
Ru: ((sarcastically, to G)) HAHA::
Il: ((giggles))
According to the ‘downward mobility orientation’ typical among students in Italian secondary schools, this brief story positions the commercial technical school as being “higher” than the industrial technical school and positions Giacomo as having originally set his sights higher than Ilir (as evidenced by his use of ‘instead’ to introduce the story). The brevity and straightforwardness of this potentially tragic tale, possibly in combination with Giacomo’s consistently out of control behavior in class (which is inconsistent with the “higher” level of the commercial school) get some laughter out of Ruggero and Ilir.

Ruggero then changes the collective storyline a bit, moving away from stories about the vocational school, school failure, and non-academic reasons for attending ITIS, and shares that he wants to study mechanical engineering at university (lines 23-24):

**Ru:** I want to go do mechanical engineering at university.

**ALP:** And so you did—you didn’t want to go to the scientific lyceum?

**Ru:** ((shaking his head)) no no

By bringing this up, he is setting himself apart from his peers to some extent by being the only one who expresses future objectives (rather than coincidence or past error) as factoring into his desire to study at the ITIS. However, he also shakes his head hard and says ‘no no’ (line 27) when I ask if he had wanted to go to the scientific lyceum. By distancing himself from the type of person who goes to the scientific lyceum, Ruggero is able to maintain his image as a technician rather than as a (‘wannabe’) *liceale*, again likely drawing on his peers’ prejudices about the scientific lyceum to build up this persona for himself without needing to elaborate.

Finally, perhaps wanting to pick up on the lyceum thread, Zied volunteers (line 28) that he actually started off at a lyceum—the linguistic specialization—which then
sparks another phase of the conversation (Transcript 3) in which tensions around academic performance, school type, and associated social personae begin to arise.

Transcript 3: You’re twenty years old (3Mec 2017.03.27)

| 1 | Z: Io invece ho fatto il linguistico |
| 2 | ALP: ((to Zied)) Ah sì? |
| 3 | Iv: Ti hanno bocciato HAHA:: |
| 4 | Z: Mi hanno bocciato perché= |
| 5 | S: [xxx] 75 materie |
| 6 | Iv: ((laughing)) 75 lingue |
| 7 | Z: =facevo un casino della madonna vabbè ...eh...vabbè m’hanno bocciato e poi sono venuto qui, ho fatto l’informatica-- |
| 8 | Iv: Ti hanno bocciato... |
| 9 | Il: Ti hanno bocciato? |
| 10 | Z: No no |
| 11 | Ss: ((laughing)) |
| 12 | Iv: ((laughing)) Ti hanno bocciato un’altra volta e sei venuto con noi |
| 13 | Ro: ((to Zied)) Ecco vedi?! ((laughing)) |
| 14 | Z: [xxx] |
| 15 | S: ((to Ivan)) [xxx] e ancora parli? |
| 16 | Iv: Si però non mi hanno bocciato ma— |
| 17 | Z: C’hai vent’anni |
| 18 | Ro: ((to Zied)) Ecco vedi?! ((laughing)) |
| 19 | Z: [xxx] |
| 20 | S: ((laughing)) |
| 21 | Iv: ((laughing)) They failed you again and you came with us |
| 22 | Ro: ((to Zied)) There, you see?! ((laughing)) |
| 23 | Z: [xxx] |
| 24 | S: ((to Ivan)) [xxx] and you still talk? |
| 25 | Iv: Yeah although they didn’t fail me but— |
| 26 | Z: You’re twenty years old |
| 27 | Ro: ((to Zied)) Twenty years old bro ((laughing)) [xxx] |
| 28 | Z: ((laughing)) |
| 29 | Iv: What is that supposed to mean? |
| 30 | Z: You’re twenty years old. So? |
| 31 | Iv: Yeah but I wasn’t failed! |
| 32 | Z: Yeah. And I was failed. So? |
| 33 | Iv: And so? |
| 34 | Z: So? And you’re twenty years old ((laughing)) |
| 35 | Iv: Yeah. |
| 36 | Ro: ((to Ivan)) And he’s more advanced than you but he’s younger than you. |
| 37 | Iv: He’s not more advanced. He’s the same. |
| 38 | ALP: Ok so help me understand something… |
| 39 | Iv: But I also did lyceum…whatever |
| 40 | Z: Me too |
| 41 | Ro: Me too, when I was in middle school. |
| 42 | Iv: ((under his breath, to Zied)) And they failed you |
| 43 | ALP: Help me understand something… |

This excerpt represents Zied’s attempt at a narrative about how he went from the linguistic lyceum to the Mechanics specialization at the technical school, and Ivan’s
failed attempt to co-author it. It appears that Ivan draws on the storytelling template that was provided by Giacomo in Transcript 2, lines 13-15, and Ruggero’s accompanying teasing tone in line 17 of Transcript 2, printed again here for reference:

G: I, instead, chose the commercial school, then they failed me and I came here to ITIS.
Ru: ((sarcastically, to G)) HAHA::

Drawing perhaps on this template, Zied launches his own story in Transcript 3, line 1, and Ivan attempts to co-author this story in line 3, using the same sarcastic ‘HAHA::’ that Ruggero had previously used when reacting to Giacomo’s narrative. The following excerpt shows Zied’s struggle to retain control of the story despite Ivan’s attempts to jump in.

Z: I, instead, did the linguistic [lyceum]
ALP: ((to Zied)) Oh yeah?
Iv: They failed you HAHA::
Z: They failed me because=
S: [xxx] 75 subjects
Iv: ((laughing)) 75 languages
Z: =I caused a lot of trouble, alright… uh…so they failed me and then I came here, I did Informatics—

Zied ignores Ivan’s first attempt to co-tell his story (‘they failed you HAHA,’ line 3), and states that ‘they failed him’ (line 4) because he caused trouble, so he came to the technical school to do Informatics. This, in a way, is face-saving for Zied: even though the students of the 3 Meccanica did not go out of their way to act as “good students” or to demonstrate their academic prowess to each other, they did not want to be labeled “dumb” either: better to be labeled “disruptive,” “trouble,” or something along those lines. Zied attributes having been failed (carefully avoiding framing himself as an agent in the failure) to his bad behavior rather than to the idea of not being able to make the cut academically.
When Zied introduces this intermediate phase between his first choice (linguistic lyceum) and where he ended up (Mechanics), Ivan jumps in again to attempt to co-tell the story:

\[
\begin{align*}
Z &: =I caused a lot of trouble, alright… uh…so they failed me and then I came here, I did Informatics— \\
Iv &: They failed you… \\
Il &: They failed you? \\
Z &: No no \\
Ss &: ((laughing)) \\
Iv &: ((laughing)) They failed you again and you came with us
\end{align*}
\]

When Ivan suggests that Zied also failed Informatics (‘they failed you,’ line 10), Ilir seems alarmed, turning to Zied and asking in surprise, ‘they failed you?’ (line 11), to which Zied responds somewhat impatiently that they did not. Zied’s expertise at math was often attributed to him having taken classes in Informatics, which was thought to have a more rigorous math program. So, Ivan supplying this alternate narrative that framed Zied as deficient at math, among other things, was akin to picking a fight. The meaning of the students’ laughter that followed is ambiguous, but it egged Ivan on enough so that he elaborated on his alternate co-telling, saying (laughing) that ‘they failed you again, and then you came with us’ (lines 14-15). It’s possible that Ivan was attempting and failing here to gently tease Zied, not realizing that he had struck a nerve, but this version of the story of how Zied came to be in the 3 Meccanica appears far from welcome, and begins to turn into a tense verbal altercation picking on Ivan’s age:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ro &: ((to Zied)) There, you see?! ((laughing)) \\
Z &: [xxx] \\
S &: ((to Ivan)) [xxx] and you still talk? \\
Iv &: Yeah although they didn’t fail me but— \\
Z &: You’re twenty years old \\
Ro &: ((laughing)) Twenty years old bro ((laughing)) [xxx] \\
Z &: ((laughing)) \\
Iv &: What is that supposed to mean? \\
Z &: You’re twenty years old. So?
\end{align*}
\]
The other students appear to have picked up on Zied’s being irritated by this characterization of him by this point, and they all start to talk at once, apparently taking Zied’s side, with one unidentified student pointing out what they seem to see as Ivan’s hypocrisy in line 18: while the utterance is not entirely audible, the irritated tone of this student’s voice and Ivan’s response of ‘Yeah although they didn’t fail me but’ (line 19) points to the student having made some point about Ivan’s age or academic progress before saying ‘and you still talk?’ (line 18), as if to say “who are you to talk about failing?” Ivan’s attempt to frame Zied’s arrival in the 3 Meccanica as the result of a series of failures turns into a personal attack on Ivan’s age, leading to Ivan trying to position himself as a superior student compared to Zied, saying that he didn’t fail out of his old school (line 21), but this is interrupted by Zied throwing in Ivan’s face ‘you’re twenty years old’ (line 22), which gets a big laugh from Rocco. As of this point, Zied and Ivan, both of whom fancy themselves top students in the class, are struggling to save face: Zied has been portrayed as a failure by Ivan, and Ivan has been portrayed as somehow delayed by Zied, who has pointed out that Ivan is two to three years older than most of his classmates. These implicit commentaries on each other’s intelligence continue for a few more turns before Rocco makes them explicit in lines 32-33:

Iv: Yeah but I wasn’t failed!
Z: Yeah. And I was failed. So?
Iv: And so?
Z: So? And you’re twenty years old ((laughing))
Iv: Yeah.
Ro: ((to Ivan)) And he’s more advanced than you but he’s younger than you.
Iv: He’s not more advanced. He’s the same.
ALP: Ok so help me understand something…
Iv: But I also did lyceum…whatever
Z: Me too
Ro: Me too, when I was in middle school.
Iv: ((under his breath, to Zied)) And they failed you
ALP: Help me understand something…
By Rocco saying, ‘he’s more advanced than you but he’s younger than you’ (lines 32-33), he renders explicit what Zied has been implying about Ivan being 20 years old in the third year of secondary school. Ivan begins to argue that Zied is not actually more advanced than him, at which point I step in and try to change the subject (‘ok so help me understand something’). Ivan returns to the topic of the lyceum, brought up at the beginning of this exchange by Zied, saying that he also went to a lyceum (referring to his former high school in Moldova), to which Zied responds with a sharp ‘me too.’ Rocco, perhaps also sensing the escalation of the conversation, makes a joke saying that he also did lyceum when he was in middle school (which is not possible), possibly playing off of his previously established stance as a non-academically oriented type of student. Once Zied’s attention is turned toward Rocco, Ivan takes a final shot in response to Zied’s ‘me too,’ saying ‘and they failed you’ (line 39). I make a quick move to change the subject and this time succeed, ending the tense discussion about Ivan and Zied’s age discrepancy with the rest of their classmates and what this implies about their academic proficiency.

Transcript 3 illustrates the fine line that must be walked by students (especially males, and perhaps even more especially ethnically Other males) who have failed a year of school: on the one hand it comes with social benefits (being the oldest and most physically developed often means being the most sexually active, which comes with associated bragging rights, not to mention that having failed a year might earn a student a favorable reputation amongst his academically unmotivated peers), and on the other hand it comes with the shame of having been declared “not good enough.” Further, both Zied and Ivan come from immigrant backgrounds, and although their experiences in secondary school are, from what I gathered, very different from one another, they are both a
“statistic” in the sense that they are “foreign” students in a technical-vocational education track (see Section 3.1.1). Their mothers both appeared very grade-oriented when I met them at a parent-teacher meeting: they both made serious inquiries about their sons’ grades and how they could do better, with Zied present in his mother’s case so that he could translate parts that she did not understand. Compounding their status as two of many “foreign” students in the technical institute is the fact of their age: students who graduate from technical institutes on time or without having failed a year do so at the age of nineteen: to turn twenty years old with two years of school to go might come as a particularly hard blow, especially to a more academically motivated student like Ivan. Zied’s twentieth birthday was the month after this interview, so his attack on Ivan may have been out of wanting to highlight that at least he’s not the oldest in the class, and Ivan’s response was instead oriented to the fact that at least he hadn’t failed the lyceum.

4.3.2 The Vocational School. The students I interviewed from the majority-female Fashion specialization at the vocational school had a different take on their school choice narratives. Primarily, they cited their academic performance in middle school as an important factor in their choice to attend the vocational school, which (being girls) meant the Fashion specialization in particular. The only other choice of specialization at the vocational school in Cittadina was the electrical maintenance specialization (the aforementioned class of 30 boys, nicknamed ‘the beasts’). Unlike some of the students at the technical school, who mentioned a variety of entry points into the technical school and into the Mechanics specialization in particular, the students I interviewed from the Fashion specialization seem to have been funneled into it by default. These excerpts are
taken from a longer impromptu interview I conducted with some of the students from the 3 Moda (a class of eight girls and one boy).

The participants I focus on here are Sonia and Roberta, both age 16. At this point in the semester, relations were fairly tense among the students, and Sonia and Roberta could be considered among the highest ranking (socially) in the class hierarchy. Sonia was very formal with the teachers, using the polite or formal Lei form with them and with me, and she tended to be fairly secretive. She was born in Morocco, but her family came to Italy when she was very young. She spoke dialect fluently but was also very selective about when to use it (often reserving it for moments when she wanted to appear tough). She routinely skipped class to smoke cigarettes, and took offense when teachers pointed out that she wasn’t putting her best foot forward in class. Roberta, like Sonia, had a strong personality. An avid and artful speaker of dialect, she used it in almost every interaction I witnessed, preferring what she described as its “realness” (calling it more real, or ‘più vero’) over what she told me seemed too phony or just plain “weird” (strano) in Standard Italian. She often used nicknames and the informal tu with teachers and with me (unless she was reminded to use Lei), but it was never treated as insubordination. She would often be the one who could get control of her peers on behalf of the teacher, and often took on the role of speaking on behalf of the class when they, as a whole, had something to tell the teacher. Academically speaking, she was also the star of the class.

This interview took place during the end of one of five two-hour-long special laboratory sessions in which a well-known costume designer from the area collaborated with the third- and fourth-year students in designing and realizing replicas of 15th century
clothing, based on the portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino. Due to some power struggles between the fourth and third-year students, with the fourth-year students being given and/or claiming the more interesting work and leaving work such as cutting and tracing to the third-year students, the third-year girls slowly started to sneak out of the session. I came across them in the hallway outside the classroom and asked them if I could interview them.

Transcript 4: The easiest school (3Moda 2017.01.25)

| 1 | ALP: Noi ancora non abbiamo parlato di come voi avete scelto questa scuola quindi forse possiamo cominciare da lì. |
| 2 | R: ☺ Hmmmm...mm mm mm...((suckteeth)) ((S & R laugh)) |
| 3 | ALP: ((laughing)) |
| 4 | R: Allora... io-- parlo personalmente-- sono arrivata alla fine di settembre tra terza media e il primo che ancora non— all’inizio di settembre scusa-- che ancora non avevo deciso dove andare. |
| 5 | ALP: Ah sì? |
| 6 | R: E quindi il babbo e la mamma hanno praticamente, si sono buttati sulla scuola più facile perché io alle medie non andavo tanto bene. Alla scuola più facile — sono venuta qui, e invece ho capito che mi piace quindi... |
| 7 | ALP: Ho capito. E quindi quando dici che non andavi bene... nel senso di studiare? |
| 8 | R: Alle medie, sì. |

Roberta’s narrative here is prefaced with some suspense (line 4), acknowledged by Sonia who joins in on Roberta’s laughter before Roberta launches her story with an emphatic ‘Well’ (line 7):

| ALP: We still haven’t talked about how you (pl.) chose this school, so maybe we can start from there. |
| R: ☺ Hmmmm...mm mm mm...((suckteeth)) ((S & R laugh)) |
| ALP: ((laughing)) |
| R: Well... |

23 The Diptych of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza by Piero della Francesca
With this suspenseful beginning, she indicates that she indeed has a story to tell me about this moment in her life, and that Sonia is also clued in as to the can of worms I have just opened by asking my opening question. She continues her narrative, telling me of how her decision about which school to attend was made just before she was supposed to begin her first year of secondary school (lines 7-12).

R: Well…I—I’m speaking for myself—I arrived at the end of September between the third year of middle school and the first [year of high school] and I still didn’t—at the beginning of September, sorry—that I still hadn’t decided where to go.

ALP: Oh yeah?

The official sign-up period for secondary schools is in February of the last semester of middle school, but Roberta claims to have let the decision go until the very last minute, at the beginning of the following September. While this decision is initially framed as being a unique experience (‘I’m speaking for myself’) and having been up to her (‘I still hadn’t decided where to go’), she ultimately suggests that her parents took matters into their own hands and signed her up for the vocational school as a last resort.

R: And so my dad and mom practically, they threw themselves on the easiest school because in middle school I wasn’t doing too great. On the easiest school—I came here and actually I understood that I like it, so…

She says that her mother and father ‘threw themselves’ on ‘the easiest school,’ indicating that they were the ones who made the decision in the end. Further, this decision appears to have been based on Roberta ‘not doing too great’ (lines 16-17) in middle school, which hints at her difficulty in school and perhaps to a lack of academic support resources outside of school or at home. She does not include in her narrative anything about the Fashion specialization being a draw for her, nor does she mention having considered or tried other options. Indeed, with the only other option at the vocational school in Cittadina being the Electrical Maintenance specialization (which was
all male), Roberta had virtually no other feasible option: as a low-performing female student, the obvious choice was the Fashion specialization at the vocational school, which, by chance, she ended up liking.

Sonia’s story shares similarities with Roberta’s in that she attributes part of her decision to attend the Fashion specialization to her low academic performance in middle school and she also frames the decision as not emanating from an intrinsic interest in Fashion but rather from the prospect of the school accommodating low academic performers.

Transcript 5: Here you don’t do anything (3Moda 2017.01.25)

ALP: Ok. ((to S)) E la tua storia cos’è?
S: Allora io sinceramente ascoltavo le voci che giravano sulla scuola. Inizialmente dicevano “eh alla scuola non si fa niente”… e dato che manco io andavo bene, cioè mi hanno—
ALP: Hai sentito queste voci quando tu eri alle medie?
S: Sì…dicevano che ‘ah qui non si fa niente.’ Allora ‘vabbè,’ dico, ‘provamo.’ Sono venuta il primo anno, ho smesso… cioè mi sono smentita di tutto quello che avevano detto. Non è vero che non si fa niente. E poi mi è iniziato a piacere la moda e… anche perché mi piaceva anche da prima, però quando sono venuta qua mi è piaciuta ancora di più.
ALP: Ok. Quindi in generale credete che le vostre… cioè i vostri modi di scegliere questa scuola sono comuni tra le persone?
R & S: sì sì
R: Comunque sia, diversi dicevano “che scuola fai, che—?” io dicevo “l’IPSIA,” no? E allora mi dicevano “come si chiama? il professionale?” e se mettono a ridere. Ho detto “guarda che è una scuola come le altre, è uguale.”

ALP: Ok. ((to S)) And your story, what is it?
S: Well I honestly listened to the voices around me about school. At first they said “eh at the [vocational] school you don’t do anything”…and given that I wasn’t doing well either, I mean they—
ALP: You were hearing these voices when you were in middle school?
S: Yes…they were saying that “oh here you don’t do anything.” So “well,” I say, “let’s try.” I came the first year, I sto—like I took back everything they said. It’s not true that you don’t do anything. And then I started to like Fashion and…also because I liked it from before, but when I came here I liked it even more.
ALP: Ok. So in general do you (pl.) think that your…like your ways of choosing this school were common among people?
R & S: Yes, yes
R: Anyway, different people would say “what school do you go to, what—?” I would say “IPSIA,” right? And then they would tell me “what’s it called? The vocational school?” and they would start laughing. I said “look, it’s a school like the others, it’s the same.”
Sonia’s narrative puts an emphasis on the third party ‘voices’ she heard around her when she was at middle school (line 2), not specifying if they belonged to classmates, teachers, administrators, parents, or figures outside the school itself.

**ALP:** Ok. ((to S)) And your story, what is it?
**S:** Well I honestly listened to the voices around me about school. At first they said “eh at the [vocational] school you don’t do anything”...and given that I wasn’t doing well either, I mean they—

**ALP:** You were hearing these voices when you were in middle school?
**S:** Yes...they were saying that “oh here you don’t do anything.” So “well,” I say, “let’s try.”

These ‘voices’ that Sonia mentions told her that ‘at the vocational school you don’t do anything,’ which she frames here as being an appealing aspect of the school, considering that she ‘wasn’t doing well’ in middle school. She, unlike Roberta, frames the decision as ultimately being hers to make, but she attributes her decision to the unnamed voices that she heard around her. She does not mention her parents as playing a role, which is interesting considering the fact that her father proved to be quite vocal about his daughter’s decisions over the course of the school year and often came to the school in person when he had a bone to pick with the teachers or the principal about them hiding his daughter’s bad behavior (like smoking cigarettes) from him. Sonia takes a somewhat rebellious stance in this narrative in hinting that she decided to come to the school because she heard that ‘they don’t do anything,’ but then starts to suggest a turning point:

**S:** Yes...they were saying that “oh here you don’t do anything.” So “well,” I say, “let’s try.” I came the first year, I sto—like I took back everything they said. It’s not true that you don’t do anything. And then I started to like Fashion and...also because I liked it from before, but when I came here I liked it even more.

Despite having initially been attracted to the school because she heard ‘they don’t do anything,’ she frames her experience during her first year as turning that rumor on its
head: ‘I took back everything they said.’ She found not only that the Fashion specialization at the vocational school did require her to work hard, but also implies that this had a transformative effect on her: ‘and then I started to like Fashion.’ As a turning point narrative, this story frames Sonia as transforming from a student who didn’t do well in middle school to a student who works hard and enjoys being challenged in her current school experiences. In fact, it almost exactly mirrors the plot of Roberta’s turning point story in that both stories tell of:

1) Not eagerly involving themselves in the decision-making regarding which school to attend; attributing their registration at the vocational school to the will of others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonia’s turning point story</th>
<th>Roberta’s turning point story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S: Well I honestly listened to the voices around me about school.</td>
<td>R: Well… I arrived at … the beginning of September…that I still hadn’t decided where to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R: And so my dad and mom practically, they threw themselves on the easiest school …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Signing up for the vocational school because they heard/knew that it was the most appropriate school for those who don’t shine academically.

<table>
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<td>S: At first they said “eh at the [vocational] school you don’t do anything”…and given that I wasn’t doing well either … So “well,” I say, “let’s try”</td>
<td>R: And so my dad and mom practically, they threw themselves on the easiest school because in middle school I wasn’t doing too great. On the easiest school…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Realizing to their surprise that they liked the vocational school and/or Fashion specialization.
S: I came the first year, I sto—like I took back everything they said. It’s not true that you don’t do anything. And then I started to like Fashion and…also because I liked it from before, but when I came here I liked it even more.

R: I came here and actually I understood that I like it, so…

These parallel narratives frame Roberta and Sonia as individuals who used to be bad students, but who are now good students, with the turning point occurring along with their entry into secondary school. This framing also has implications for the ways their student identities have changed over time from “bad” to “good” student: speaking from their current position as “good” third-year students in the Fashion specialization, they frame their trajectory from middle school to the vocational school as motivating a shift in their orientation to academics. When I ask them if they think their ways of choosing a school (i.e. based on how easy people say it is) are common, they reply that they do think so (line 22), and Roberta offers a follow-up narrative about having to defend her choice to attend the vocational school.

ALP: Ok. So in general do you (pl.) think that your…like your ways of choosing this school were common among people?
R & S: Yes, yes
R: Anyway, different people would say “what school do you go to, what--?” and I would say “IPSIA,” right? And then they would tell me “what’s it called? The vocational school?” and they would start laughing. I said “look, it’s a school like the others, it’s the same.”

This narrative leads me to believe that Roberta thought that I wanted to know if many people go to the vocational school because they don’t think the students ‘do anything,’ when what I had intended to ask was whether they felt that many students make the decision based on what their peers say and what their middle school academics are like. Nonetheless, Roberta’s narrative tells of ‘people’ who would ask what school she attended (lines 23-26), and when she would respond ‘IPSIA,’ they would respond
with ‘the vocational school?,’ and ‘would start laughing.’ Based on her follow-up comment, it appears that she is framing these individuals as making fun of her decision to attend the vocational school, and also of her attempt to legitimize it by using its official name, IPSIA. The individuals she voices in her narrative retort by referring to IPSIA generically as ‘the vocational school.’ By responding, ‘Look, it’s a school like the others. It’s the same’ (lines 27-28), she is framing her past self as believing in the vocational school, maybe even in the way she does now. This represents a turning point on her part, contrasting with her initial idea that one does nothing at the vocational school, and situating her current outlook on the school as one that legitimizes her identity as the star pupil of her class. Thus, in terms of the ways that social identities emerge across different social contexts, two students who were identified as low academic performers (and perhaps also as generally “problematic,” based on what their former first-year teachers told me) in the context of the middle school, are identified as on-track in the vocational school and even as high academic performers in certain contexts within it. Roberta’s and Sonia’s narratives provide a different take on the vocational school from the ones that circulate more widely: the vocational school is not a repository for hopelessly bad students (or even bad people), but a transformational space where ex-bad students become good students—or at least, as one teacher told me, good citizens (see Chapter 7).

With school-level discourse in mind, and the role that institutional policies about school choice play in the individual students’ decision-making processes, I asked Sonia and Roberta about the period in which they needed to make a decision about which school to attend (the last year of middle school), and about how they informed
themselves. I asked them if they had school-sponsored orientations of some kind, where they were, and what they were like. Below is a brief excerpt from this interview.

Transcript 6: Open Day (3Moda 2017.01.25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S:</th>
<th>All'inizio quando facevo la terza media, al professionale e al ITIS non ci hanno mai portati. Ci hanno portato solo a licei e basta.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>E’ vero.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
<td>E ci dicevano “se volete andare a visitare il professionale e l’ITIS ci andate con i genitori.” E quello è l’Open Day... e quindi ci facevano visitare le scuole, ci invitavano a scuola, ci spiegano come era...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R:</td>
<td>Basta... uguale.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sonia states that in her final year of middle school, ‘they never took us to the vocational or to the technical school’ (lines 2-3). ‘They’ in this case refers to the teachers and administrators at the middle school, who are in charge of helping middle school students make informed decisions about which upper secondary schools to attend the next year. She specifies that the school took them only to the lyceum (lines 3-4), not to the technical or vocational schools, and Roberta confirms that this is also true in her experience (line 12). Since they went to two different middle schools, this is very interesting. These narratives frame the middle school as officially approving only of the lyceum as a valid option for continued study, telling the students that they and their families can visit the technical and vocational schools on their own time (lines 6-8).

Sonia tells of the technical and vocational schools inviting the prospective students to ‘Open Day,’ an event which is held several times leading up to the sign-up deadline for incoming students, and whose purpose is to publicize the school’s resources, course offerings, and facilities.
Thinking back to Figures 3 and 4, as well as Transcripts 4 and 5, the action taken by the middle school does little to undo or work against the stereotype of technical and vocational schools as being generally worse than lyceums. In Sonia’s narrative, the middle school takes a similar stance to the memes in nascecreseignora’s Instagram account. However, Sonia and Roberta’s narratives begin to reframe this perspective, citing their personal lived experiences as proof that these circulating discourses are inaccurate. They mention their transformations from bad student to good student, possibly from disinterested to invested students, as occurring when they moved from middle school to the Fashion specialization at the vocational school.

4.3.3 The Classical Lyceum. After the first two interview situations with the students at the technical school and at the vocational school which were dedicated to eliciting students’ narratives of becoming, the storytelling setting emerged slightly differently at the classical lyceum. During two back-to-back free periods in which the substitute teacher had left me in charge of keeping the students under control, students ended up gathering around my desk to chat and I took advantage of this to conduct an impromptu interview. However, with only ten days to go before winter break, and having spent the previous three months trying not to be seen as an authority figure among the students, this made for a very noisy interview environment, with students coming and going from the conversation. The excerpts of this interview are therefore presented in short pieces of intelligible conversation.

The participants in this section of the interview were Chiara, Sofia, Federica, Noemi, Daniela, and Melissa, all young women in the third year of the classical lyceum. These students are all ethnically Italian and Italian-born, and all of them were 16 or 17 at
the time of the interview (the typical age of students in the third year). Chiara was one of the *rappresentanti di classe* (class representatives)—a role held by students who are willing to mediate between their peers and their teachers, who act as the voice box of their classmates, and who generally take on a leadership role in their class. She was studious and typically appeared attentive in class, and was often visibly stressed or nervous about oral and written exams, suggesting that grades were important to her. Sofia was similarly engaged and studious, and often appeared genuinely engrossed in her teachers’ lectures. She seemed much older and more mature than her peers; a budding fashion photographer, she seemed more comfortable in an observer role, and had a calm and peaceful demeanor. She also often struck up conversations with me about my work out of what appeared to be genuine attempts to make me feel welcome. Daniela, another very studious student who typically got high marks, was one of the quieter students as well, although very self-confident and always with a sarcastic comment ready. She was typically engaged in lessons, but even when she was off-task, her deadpan facial expression never gave her away. Noemi was a lovable and unpretentious girl who didn’t shine academically or socially, but she had a good time with her classmates, she was always good natured, and she took her struggles in stride, never obviously disengaging from lessons, unlike a couple of her peers. Federica was not a particularly confident student either, but she was more vocal about her frustrations during break time. She often seemed worried about her schoolwork. Finally, Melissa changed noticeably over the course of the year from being somewhat ditzy and distracted (when she shared a desk with her two good friends) to being much more engaged and serious (when she was
moved to a different seat). She often volunteered answers in class, and seemed increasingly more confident in her academic ability as the year went on.

At the beginning of this interview, these students and I talked for about fifteen minutes about their siblings that went to the classical lyceum before them, about the teachers that they had had, and about what their siblings had told them about the teachers. This led to a multiparty conversation about the scariest teachers, the hardest subjects, and other similar information. I asked them, taking all of this into consideration, why they had then chosen the classical lyceum.

Transcript 7: I ask myself that every day (3BLC 2016.12.13)

| 1 | ALP: E quindi perché avete scelto il liceo classico? |
| 2 | |
| 3 | all: ((laughing)) eeeeh |
| 4 | M: ☺ Ogni giorno me lo chiedo ☺ |
| 5 | S: ☺ "Ma che c'avevo in testa quel giorno?!" |

ALP: And so why did you (pl.) choose the classical lyceum?
all: ((laughing)) eeeeh
M: ☺ I ask myself that every day ☺
S: ☺ “But what did I have in my head that day?!”

My question in line 1 gets a big laugh out of the group, along with a prolonged ‘eeeh’ (indicating that there was much to say and that they were thinking about or considering the answer very carefully). The students make fun of themselves and their decision to go to the classical lyceum, with Melissa jokingly telling me that she ‘asks herself every day’ why she decided to do so, and with Sofia jumping in on the joke to voice Melissa (or perhaps herself) with ‘But what did I have in my head that day?!’ This scene-setting for their co-told narrative indicates that they, for the most part, have had a shared experience of their journey to the third year of the classical lyceum, and that they share similar feelings about it: namely, that they have suffered through it together. Rather than elaborating further on this, however, they seem to rely on my knowledge of their school experience, based on the many observations I had conducted up to this point, to
fill in the blanks. This topic, however, prompts Melissa to share the other option she considered before choosing the classical lyceum, as well as why she ultimately chose the classical lyceum. Sofia follows by offering up her initial preference, and Federica does the same. They also share some information about why they ultimately decided not to pursue those options.

Transcript 8: Other schools and specializations (3LC 2016.12.13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M:</th>
<th>Io volevo sempre andare all’ITIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALP:</td>
<td>Quale indirizzo?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M:</td>
<td>Biologico. Pero’ tutti mi dicevano,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visto che alle media andavo abbastanza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bene no? Anche [xxx] all’orientamento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>delle scuole superiori,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[xxx] biologico e mi piaceva, si, [xxx] ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>come faccio a [xxx]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M:</td>
<td>Ma quando è arrivato questo insegnante,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>come parlava, io non lo so, mi è talmente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appassionata che ho scelto questa scuola.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M:</td>
<td>[inaudible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S:</td>
<td>A me piaceva tanto l’artistico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F:</td>
<td>A me piaceva il pedagogico ma--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C:</td>
<td>[xxx] conosco delle ragazze che ci vanno e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>Io vedo il mio fratello che fa l’artistico,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>il gemello è, e non fa niente.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niente.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Melissa tells of ‘always’ having wanted to ‘go to ITIS,’ or the technical institute (line 1), and when I follow up and ask her ‘which specialization?’ (line 2), she says ‘biological’ (line 3), which was the nickname given to the biotechnology strand both by students at the technical school and elsewhere. Throughout the school year, teachers and students at the technical institute and the lyceum often suggested that the only real
alternative for the students who do the classical and scientific lyceums would have been the biotechnology strand of the technical school: seen as the most rigorous of the technical specializations and referred to multiple times throughout my fieldwork as “the lyceum of the technical school.” Here, however, it is not clear whether Melissa is trying to position herself as radically different from her classmates by indicating, at first, an interest in ‘ITIS’ in general, as opposed to ‘biotechnology,’ specifically. She chooses not to elaborate on why she was interested in that specialization, or why she (herself) eventually decided to come to the classical lyceum, instead citing third parties as being influential in her decision:

M: Biological. But everyone told me, considering that I was doing pretty well in middle school, right? Even [xxx] at orientation for the high schools. [xxx] biological and I liked it, yes, [xxx] but how can I [xxx]?

[inaudible]

M: But when this teacher [from the classical lyceum] arrived, how he spoke, I don’t know, I felt so passionate about it that I chose this school.

She points to her having done ‘pretty well’ in middle school as reason for ‘everyone’ to persuade her either against signing up for the technical school or to sign up for the classical lyceum. She leaves this part hanging and implied (‘but everyone told me, considering I was doing pretty well at middle school, right?’ lines 3-5). An inaudible section follows, in which she continues narrating the story of her decision-making, and she concludes with a brief story from her orientation at the classical lyceum in which she was impassioned by a teacher and ‘how he spoke’ (line 10), which led to her eventually signing up for the classical lyceum. Neither in her move away from the technical school nor in her move toward the classical lyceum does Melissa tell of having control over or agency in her having signed up for the lyceum. She tells of being dissuaded from the
technical school by ‘everyone,’ even though she liked it, and of signing up for the lyceum only after being impassioned by the presentation by one classical lyceum teacher.

This decision—which Melissa frames as being based on a moment of madness in Transcript 8—is similar to the way in which she and Sofia presented their decision to pursue the classical specialization as being beyond their control in Transcript 7:

M: ☺ I ask myself that every day ☺
S: ☺ “But what did I have in my head that day!??” ☺

While these moments in the overall narrative are fleeting, they are also telling in that they orient these students to their academic pursuits in a way that is strikingly different from the narratives told by the students at the vocational and technical schools. While the students in the vocational and technical schools oriented their decision-making toward several different factors—ranging from family preference to their previous academic performance to their interests in the subject matter—the students at the classical lyceum chalk up their registration in this particular specialization to something they can’t quite understand or rationally justify. It is possible, and likely, that students like Melissa and Sofia come from family backgrounds where a lyceum education is fully expected, and that their reasoning for choosing the classical lyceum is therefore hard to pin down. The alternative choices are the ones that are more marked and that, possibly, therefore require more justification:

S: I really used to like the artistic [lyceum]
F: I used to like the pedagogical [specialization] but--
S: The problem is that here the artistic [specialization] isn’t an institute anymore, but a lyceum, so this also made me [xxx] general because it was born as an institute, not as a lyceum, but then – they advised me against it.

Sofia and Federica chime in afterward with the schools that they used to like: the artistic and the pedagogical specializations, respectively. Federica’s ‘but’ in line 15 gets
interrupted by Sofia, who goes on to explain to me that her original favorite, the artistic specialization in Cittadina, is no longer a technical institute but a lyceum, indicating that this had some significance in her decision not to attend it. She adds the fact that it was ‘born’ as a technical institute and since became a lyceum, which perhaps hints that the artistic specialization at its core is not a real lyceum, which might be the reason why ‘they’ advised her against it. Because of the background noise, it is not possible to make out whether the former classification of “institute” was a positive or negative attribute for her, but it again puts her in line with her classmates who all claim that the classical lyceum was not their first choice.

On this note, Chiara jumps in and adds that she heard from ‘some girls who went there’ that ‘you don’t do anything,’ perhaps aiming to build on Sofia’s point about the artistic specialization being ‘born’ as a technical institute and, therefore, having been ‘advised against it’:

C: I know some girls who go there and they don’t do anything.
N: I see my brother who does the artistic [lyceum], he’s my twin, and he doesn’t do anything. Aaanything. Anything.

Noemi builds on this by sharing her observation that her twin brother, who attends the artistic specialization, ‘doesn’t do anything.’ This co-constructed narrative, unlike Roberta’s and Sonia’s in Transcript 4 and 5, frames ‘doing nothing’ as an undesirable characteristic of the artistic specialization which makes it a bad fit for Sofia, and possibly also Noemi and Chiara. It also aligns with the representation of the artistic specialization in Figure 4. Throughout this excerpt, as students make every effort to walk me through their supposed number-one choices for secondary school, and to explain to me that they did not actually want to attend the classical lyceum, it appears that—as
hypothesized above—the classical lyceum was in fact the unmarked choice for them. The thought of going anywhere else was what generated discussion and stories about contention amongst their families and/or among the other third parties they mentioned as being influential in their decisions to ultimately attend the classical lyceum.

These students, like Roberta and Sonia, are generating narratives about their school choice that parallel one another. The narratives also parallel Roberta’s and Sonia’s narratives to some extent in that the lyceum students frame their enrollment at the classical lyceum as:

1) being attributed to the will of others, and

2) being due to their academic performance in middle school being a good match for the lyceum.

The narratives differ from those of Roberta and Sonia, however, in that the lyceum students frame their former selves as being torn about all of their possible options. Several of them claim to have had an interest in a different specialization prior to ultimately enrolling at the classical lyceum. However, as pointed out above, even this aspect mirrors Roberta and Sonia’s narratives in that there seemed to have been an obvious choice of school for the lyceum students, who were doing well in middle school—in the same way that it seemed unthinkable for Roberta or Sonia to enroll at the classical lyceum, it may have seemed equally unthinkable for Melissa, Chiara, Sofia, Noemi, and Federica to enroll in the vocational school. All of these students frame other people’s evaluations of their academic performance in middle school as being a primary factor in their enrollment at a given school.
Fifteen minutes later in the conversation, the topic shifted a bit toward the reputations of the various specializations and schools. In the following transcript, Daniela, Federica, Chiara, and Sofia discuss their rankings of the schools according to what they have heard from others and what they believe based on their own experience. They also bring up the concept of ‘doing nothing’ again and introduce the concept of ‘studying and that’s it, which is what they claim they do at the classical lyceum. This is also framed negatively, at though it is at the opposite end of the spectrum from ‘doing nothing.’

*Transcript 9: A hierarchy of school reputations (3LC 2016.12.13)*

| 1 | D: Il classico, se vai ai licei, è meglio.  |
| 2 | E’ il più qualificato del liceo.           |
| 3 | F: Il pedagogico è il professionale      |
| 4 | delle donne, è diventato                   |
| 5 | D: C’è il tecnico, c’è il commerciale,    |
| 6 | e il professionale. Al professionale      |
| 7 | ci vanno tutti quelli o bocciati o che       |
| 8 | non hanno voglia di studiare.          |
| 9 | C: Ci sono delle scuole che la gente dice |
| 10 | “io la prendo perché so che non fanno     |
| 11 | niente,” tipo al pedagogico, magari  |
| 12 | l’ITIS, professionale...                 |
| 13 | They say that at the Open Day, the people |
| 14 | from the classical lyceum told them “No,   |
| 15 | no, non studierete e basta. Ci sono anche  |
| 16 | altre attività!” (No, no, you won’t just study |
| 17 | and that’s it. There are also other activities!) |
| 18 | S: Agli Open Day fregano perché dicono    |
| 19 | “non vi fate spaventare, non è una scuola   |
| 20 | dove [xxx], ”ma non è per niente vero     |
| 21 | perché ogni attività—neanche ce le         |
| 22 | propongono le attività, ma solo la         |
| 23 | classica lezione con l’antica vecchia[xxx] |
| 24 | -- la Negroni è più interattiva, e anche la |
| 25 | Pecorari è brava -- ma il resto, tutti ”voi |
| 26 | zitti, io parlo.”                          |

| 1 | D: The classical, if you go to the lyceums, is better. |
| 2 | It’s the most qualified of the lyceum.                |
| 3 | F: The pedagogical [strand] is the vocational school |
| 4 | for women, [that’s what] it’s become.                 |
| 5 | D: There’s the technical, there’s the commercial,    |
| 6 | and the vocational school. To the vocational school |
| 7 | go all of those who have failed or that              |
| 8 | don’t want to study.                                 |
| 9 | C: There are some schools where people say          |
| 10 | “I’m picking it because I know that they don’t do    |
| 11 | anything,” like at the pedagogical, or maybe at     |
| 12 | the ITIS, the vocational school…                    |
| 13 | They say that at the Open Day, the people from the  |
| 14 | classical lyceum told them “No, no, non studierete e |
| 15 | basta. Ci sono anche altre attività!” (No, no, you  |
| 16 | won’t just study and that’s it. There are also other |
| 17 | activities!)                                        |
| 18 | S: At the Open Days they trick you because they say |
| 19 | “don’t be scared! It’s not a school                  |
| 20 | where [xxx],” but it’s not at all true               |
| 21 | because every activity—they don’t even              |
| 22 | propose activities to us, but just the              |
| 23 | classic lesson with the ancient old [xxx] –        |
| 24 | Professor Negroni is more interactive, and also     |
| 25 | Pecorari is good, but the rest are all, “Be         |
| 26 | quiet, I’m talking.”                                 |
This transcript renders explicit some of the ideologies about school types and person types that were tacitly expressed in the previous transcript. The ranking of the Italian secondary schools is kicked off by Daniela, who states that the classical lyceum is ‘the most qualified’ specialization of the ones offered in the lyceum (lines 1-2), and Federica builds on this by comparing another specialization at the lyceum—the ‘pedagogical’ (line 3)—to the vocational school, hinting that it is not of the same caliber as the classical specialization.

D: The classical, if you go to the lyceums, is better. It’s the most qualified of the lyceum.
F: The pedagogical [strand] is the vocational school for women, [that’s what] it’s become.

The pedagogical specialization, like the artistic specialization mentioned in Transcript 8, was originally an institute and not a lyceum. However, in recent years the pedagogical institute has been subsumed by the lyceum and renamed “human sciences.” Federica’s mention of it here as ‘the pedagogical’ strand or specialization and not as its current designation of ‘the human sciences specialization’ is, I believe, intended to support Daniela’s claim that the classical specialization is ‘the most qualified’ by pointing out that the [former] pedagogical specialization is like the ‘vocational school for women’ (lines 3-4). This comment reaches outward to the popular discourses circulating about the types of students who attend vocational schools (e.g., Figures 3 and 4; Transcripts 4 and 5) and to their previous comments about institutes-turned-lyceums, such as those mentioned in Transcript 8 (see also Figure 4). By referring to the human sciences strand of the lyceum as the ‘pedagogico’ (line 3), Federica situates it within a time period when it was an institute, therefore implicitly ranking it lower than the classical lyceum.
Daniela, perhaps as a means of offering me clarification, renders explicit her imagined qualities of the vocational school’s student body:

**D:** There’s the technical school, there’s the commercial school, and the vocational school. To the vocational school go all of those who have failed or that don’t want to study.

**C:** There are some schools where people say “I’m picking it because I know that they don’t do anything,” like at the pedagogical, or maybe at the ITIS, the vocational school…

If the vocational school is reserved, in her account, for ‘all of the students who have failed or don’t want to study,’ then one might conclude that in the human sciences lyceum (the former pedagogical institute), one would find ‘all of the women who have failed or don’t want to study.’ Chiara picks up and expands on Daniela’s point by elaborating on a subject that she had brought up earlier, about how students ‘don’t do anything’ at particular types of schools. This time, she explains that there are some people who pick particular schools precisely because ‘they don’t do anything’ at that school, and she cites as examples the ‘pedagogical specialization, or maybe at the ITIS, and the vocational school.’ Thus, rumors about ‘not doing anything’ appear to extend across all school models—lyceums, technical institutes, and vocational schools—but the connotations of that vary for different prospective students and their families. Looking back to Transcript 7 and the students’ good-natured self-criticism about having chosen the classical lyceum, this narrative about other students who want to ‘do nothing’ is interesting: the classical lyceum students in this interview appear to be positioning themselves as academically superior to their peers in other schools, but being somehow also burdened by this framing of themselves as such. This topic gets picked back up at this point when they discuss Open Day:

**S:** At the Open Days they trick you because they say “don’t be scared! It’s not a school where [you study and that’s it],” but it’s not at all true because every activity—they don’t even propose activities to us, but just the classic lesson with the ancient old [xxx] –
Professor Negroni is more interactive, and also Pecorari is good, but the rest are all, “Be quiet, I’m talking.”

Sofia straightforwardly says that at Open Day, ‘they trick you’ into thinking that the curriculum at the classical lyceum offers alternatives to ‘studying and that’s it’ in the form of educational activities. She says that while there are exceptions to the norm, the majority of the teachers do frontal, teacher-centered lessons in the form of a monologue, as evidenced by the way she voices the typical professor saying, “Be quiet, I’m talking.” Therefore, while ‘doing nothing’ is seen by the classical lyceum students as an undesirable characteristic of vocational and technical schools, as well as of the artistic and human sciences strands of the lyceum, ‘studying and that’s it’ is framed negatively, too. However, the only characteristic of the classical lyceum that is identified by these students as setting the classical lyceum apart from all of the other schools and specializations is the amount that they study. Thus, while the students here go out of their way initially (in Transcripts 7 and 8) to complain about their decision to attend the classical lyceum and to point out the schools they would have preferred to go to, the conversation ultimately turns to the framing of the classical lyceum as a school where one cannot ‘do nothing’ and where studying is taken very seriously.

From their position as tellers in the narrating context of this interview (Wortham 2001), none of the classical lyceum students frame their past selves as identifying with the persona associated with the classical lyceum. Instead, they frame that identity as having been attributed to them by others. By narrating their past selves as would-be students in biotechnology, human sciences, or art, they claim a set of interests and
personal characteristics that go beyond the plain Jane identity that often circulates about the “serious” lyceums (i.e. the classical, the scientific) as shown in Figures 3, 4, and 5.

4.4 Discussion

The narratives and small stories presented above illustrate that the decision-making behind their choice of school is differently “tellable” by different narrators and their co-authors (Ochs & Capps, 2001): for some their school and/or specialization is represented as their only choice (as is the case for Roberta and Sonia at the vocational school), while for others it is framed as an inevitability (at the lyceum), and for others as a good fit (as is the case for some of the boys in the 3 Meccanica). For some it is framed as being out of their hands, and for others entirely within their control. The narratives by the students in the Fashion specialization at the vocational school represent their choice of school as fairly straightforward: if you’re a low-performing female middle school student, you go to the Fashion specialization at the vocational school and if you’re a low-performing male middle school student, you go to the Electrical Maintenance specialization at the vocational school. The girls in the Fashion specialization tell about their decision as having been informed by the reputation of the vocational school as easy, which they frame as being a match for their lower academic performance in middle school. Both girls also mention the influence of a third party in their decision-making, with Roberta citing her parents as having been highly influential in the decision (even making the decision on her behalf) and Sonia mentioning the ‘voices’ at middle school which swayed her in the direction of the vocational school. In their tellings, Sonia and
Roberta do not hint at any other possible option for their secondary school careers, but neither do they mention their dissatisfaction with the single option they see as having been available to them. Their turning point—liking the Fashion specialization (in Sonia’s case ‘even more’ than before) and becoming motivated students—occurs in their narratives after they signed up for the Fashion specialization at the vocational school. This differs significantly from the stories of the students in the 3 Meccanica, who all claim to have first either liked mechanics or known they wanted to go to the technical institute, and then signing up for it. Roberta and Sonia tell about their experience as the opposite: signing up for the vocational school (which meant the Fashion specialization by default) and then realizing that they liked it. Ochs & Capps (2001) note that this telling of a past experience may “reinforce a sense of continuity” (p. 183) in which “the past is … cast as a logical warrant for tellers’ current and future states and actions” (p. 184). Ochs & Capps (2001) invoke the concept of “affordance” to describe the way that tellers recount their past experiences as a means of opening up a possible path for interpreting what has yet to come, or as providing, as they call it, “a blueprint” (p. 192). These turning-point narratives may provide a logical framework for reconciling their past low academic performance and their present and maybe future high grades in their classes. By framing themselves as not having much to do with the choice of the vocational school, they also in a way avoid identifying as “the type” who seeks out and attends the vocational school (i.e. as a social deviant, as represented in Figures 3, 4, and 5).

The boys in the Mechanics specialization have variable frames for their narratives about entry into the technical school, with some focusing on the appeal of the Mechanics
specialization itself, others arriving at it after testing out a different specialization beforehand, and still others having arrived at Mechanics as a fallback after failing a year in a different specialization or school. None mention either their performance in middle school or their family’s wishes as being a factor in their decision-making, unlike the students at the vocational school and the classical lyceum. Instead, they frame the decision as being theirs alone to make—even in the case of those who failed in other schools or specializations. None of them discuss having been “sent to” the technical school or having “been signed up” for it as though it happened against their will. Even Zied and Giacomo, who came to the industrial technical school after having failed at the linguistic lyceum and at the commercial technical school, respectively, narrate the series of events such that the failure merely precedes their enrollment at the technical school—it is not framed as causing it. The overall image of what leads one to this specialization as portrayed by the narratives is quite heterogeneous, which is consistent with what the principal of the technical and vocational schools told me one day in an interview: the very high achieving students go to the lyceums, the students who have the most difficulty to to the vocational schools, and everyone else goes to the technical institute. The boys offered up several narratives around their enrollment in Mechanics, from wanting to go where their friends went, to wanting to learn how to work with machines, to wanting to attend university afterward, to having failed elsewhere not due to academic shortcomings but because of their behavior. In this sense, there appears to be a tension between Mechanics as being a place for budding mechanical engineers and as being a catch-all for those who failed at other specializations or otherwise aren’t particularly interested in
academics, and thus a less unified student identity emerges from the narratives in this class.

At the classical lyceum, however, the topic of school choice evokes intense participation and co-authorship from the students, many of whom seem to have had similar experiences leading up to their decision to enroll in the classical lyceum. Nearly all of the students frame the classical lyceum as superior to the other schools and specializations in terms of academic rigor, but not originally as their top choice (perhaps as an attempt to disalign from the figure of personhood typically associated with the classical lyceum). They mention several other specializations that would have interested them—mostly lyceums, but also the biotechnology specialization, i.e., ‘the lyceum of the technical school’—but none seem to have actually pursued any of these alternatives because of advice from family members and peers. Thus, their depiction of their ultimate enrollment to attend the classical lyceum as having been somewhat out of their hands may serve to preserve any “cool” factor they have achieved by carefully avoiding being seen as a secchione, or nerd, while still attending a school that is known as being for high-achieving and/or upper-middle-class students.

4.5 Conclusion

Taking a critical perspective in this study, I have treated the experiences of these students and their peers as central, aiming via an analysis of student narratives to open up space for reflection on what may have previously been overlooked or taken for granted in these students’ trajectories. By analyzing these narratives, I have sought to identify how
different (gendered, classed) subjectivities frame the experience of school and how the collection and analysis of such narratives might push back against the reproduction of the *status quo* by calling on the voices of those who have traditionally not been listened to in the field of education.

Based on this analysis, I assert that school folklore and folk taxonomies of schools and people are critically important to understanding the social context in which student identities develop. Narratives about school successes, failures, and experiences in general—which are told and retold by students—pave the way for the “real life” circumstances under which inequalities are produced and reproduced in school spaces. That is, widely circulating discourses about school types, studenthood, and personhood may influence the choices that children make about secondary school.

As evidenced by Sofia’s reporting of the Open Day presenter in lines 15-16 of Transcript 9 (“Don’t be scared! It’s not a school where you study and that’s it!”), popular discourse about schools and specializations circulates widely, from Instagram posts to official, school-supported, student-facing marketing. Members of a school community are aware of the prejudices and stereotypes about their school, and in the age of the neoliberal subject (e.g. Urciuoli, 2016) and related discourses about education and school choice in Italy, they must find a way to not only address these pre- (or mis-)conceptions, but work together to construct counter-narratives such as the turning point stories told by Roberta and Sonia at the vocational school, and the diversity of experiences behind the enrollment of those in the 3 Meccanica. At the time of these interviews, students’ narratives of how they came to be in their school/specialization would lead me to believe
that word-of-mouth and preconceptions about what one does (or does not do) in each type of program are the primary means by which they made their decisions. In fact, as noted previously, these multi-party and co-constructed narratives about school choice indicate that there is some alignment of student views within each interview context. The nature of the group interview likely led in part to this alignment of views and narratives, whether they were actively co-constructed by classmates or simply told in the presence of peers. However, the themes across these interviews highlight the pressures and constraints—from family, school officials, peers, and policies—that students encounter at the early stages of the school selection process.

Wortham (2003) argues that one source of social identity development in academic spaces is the curriculum itself, in that teachers and students draw on particular curricular subjects and themes in order to position themselves and others. He posits that identity categories exist at sociohistorical timescales, that they develop over ontogenetic time, that they are then used in mesolevel contexts, and that these mesolevel contexts then encompass situational or microgenetic patterns of interaction deploying these identity categories. In sum: social identification is a multilevel and longitudinal process, by which both macrosocial and locally relevant categories are drawn on and applied across diverse contexts and interactions—what he calls “trajectories of socialization” (Wortham 2005). He also poses an important question in light of the connections he draws between curricular content and identity formation: “If teaching often shapes students’ identity development, do educators have moral responsibilities to examine the types of people their students are becoming?” (Wortham 2003). This question takes on
further significance in light of the present study, considering the dramatically different curricula offered in the lyceum, technical institute, and vocational school, as well as the different life trajectories that young people are asked to choose for themselves by selecting one of these types of school: it is possible that the curriculum of one specialization affords more possibilities for particular types of social identification than do others.

The analysis of student narratives in this chapter has aimed to address broader questions about education policy and practice in Italian secondary schools. Many studies of Italian education focus on elementary education, and most use surveys or quantitative methods. In this analysis, rather than exploring only test scores, survey answers, and policy documents, I have reached toward an understanding of student realities as they directly explain them. Instead of exploring only how policy documents and curricula frame a student’s progression through their school career, I have treated students’ insider perspectives—their collaboratively constructed and socially situated narratives of becoming—as a means of giving a voice to what lies beneath the famously bureaucratic Italian education system. Students are governed by infinite layers of social expectations, political influence, and family obligations, and these narratives have been a means of showcasing how individuals develop highly localized communicative repertoires that are rooted in the culture of their schools in which they take part. The stories that are told and retold within each school community both attract and create different types of students.
CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC PERFORMANCES OF SCHOOLED KNOWLEDGE IN ITALIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 we learned how students develop stories about their school choice and relative success, combining circulating stereotypes with their individual histories and current experiences to collaboratively tell recognizable stories about themselves as students, and as successful in terms of their own stories of becoming. In this chapter, we look at how students in th 3BLC, 3 Meccanica, and 3 Moda perform success for their teachers and peers in public performances of schooled knowledge. I use “public” in this sense to mean performances done in “official” classroom space; that is, primarily for the teacher (who holds the power to evaluate these performances for an eventual grade), although classmate bystanders also observe the performance and may comment on or interact with it as well (which carries a certain social weight). What is performed is of course dependent on the parameters set out by the teacher and/or the performative ritual, varying from school to school, from class to class, and even from moment to moment during a lesson.

As shown in Chapter 4, abundant metacommentary circulates about school types, their academic rigor, and the people who attend them, suggesting that there are differences in what might count as schooled knowledge, how it might be performed, and what might count as a successful performance in each context. This analysis uses the framework of performance (Bauman & Briggs 1990) to highlight how individuals in these schools draw on the semiotic resources in their communicative repertoires (e.g.,
registers, symbols, intonation, gesture, posture) in order to enact “doing being” a student across contexts. It also draws on the elements of these performances to flesh out the ways that students are socialized into legitimate forms of academic participation (Heller 1996, 2001; Wortham 2005).

The focus on “public” performances of schooled knowledge in this chapter differs from the analysis of “peer-to-peer” performances of expertise to come in Chapter 6 in that the four speech events detailed below constitute high-stakes interactions with teachers and/or performances for teachers. These public performances might take the form of oral or written tests, presentations, laboratory work, or other demonstrations of skill; they are often done in exchange for a grade (as in a test), but they may also be done knowing simply that the performance will be taken into account when an eventual grade is assigned later (as in the behavior grade, or voto di condotta, described in Chapter 7). These performances are typically contributed during class time, whether solicited or prompted by the teacher (often in the form of known-answer questions) or volunteered by the student.

The two types of public performances that are discussed in this chapter are interrogazioni and laboratory sessions. The interrogazione24 is a staple of Italian secondary schools (especially liceo classico) and is typically deployed by teachers as a means of evaluating students’ knowledge about a particular topic. This knowledge is displayed either in the form of (often at least partially memorized) monologues in

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24 While recent education directives have shifted toward use of the term “verifica orale” (oral test), it appears that the definition of this term overlaps significantly—if not entirely—with what teachers and students referred to as interrogazioni in Cittadina.
response to known-answer questions posed by the teacher, similar to the félélés in Hungarian schools described by Duff (2005). While interrogazioni are a form of assessment, teachers also use them variably to review material, to conduct mini-lessons clarifying difficult points, as jumping-off points for introducing new material, and even as a form of punishment for students who misbehave in class. Since participation in interrogazioni can be random, predictable, planned, voluntary, or involuntary, they can serve different purposes in terms of classroom management and student conduct: they are often a major source of stress and anxiety for students, and the prospect of being interrogato (called to participate in an interrogazione) is what drives students to study, memorize facts, and perfect their oral presentation skills. They are typically conducted either one-on-one or in a pair or small group in front of the entire class, at the teacher’s desk (Figure 7). Teachers typically make a point to arrange the students participating in the interrogazione in such a way that they cannot “suggest” answers to each other or easily hear suggestions from their classmates. Thus, they typically get clustered at one end of the teacher’s desk (side by side rather than face to face), and preferably with their backs to their classmates (to avoid being able to lip-read answers suggested to them by their peers) (Figure 8). Some teachers do interrogazioni al posto (at the students’ desks), walking around the room, carrying on a discussion about a given topic, and then calling on a student to finish a sentence, to provide more information, or to give a particular fact about a theorem, historical figure, or literary work (Figure 9).
Figure 7: Interrogazione configuration 1 (two participants)

Figure 8: Interrogazione configuration 2 (four participants)
The *interrogazione* is therefore framed as a solo public performance (although observations prove that it is more often a joint effort between teacher and student) with ratified overhearers. In these performances, precision of language is important because it is only with precise language that knowledge of the subject can be verified by the professor; at the lyceum especially, the *interrogazione* register is easily recognized by observers and participants. The use of specialized terminology is expected, as is the use of a more formal register of Standard Italian, e.g., *scelta del lessico errata* (misstated lexical choice) rather than *parola sbagliata* (wrong word) (Fieldnotes 2017.03.07), *poiché* rather than the more common *mentre* or *perché* and *ovvero* instead of the more common *o* or *oppure* (Fieldnotes 2016.11.08). The student should typically also act alone in responding to specific questions by the professor. And finally, while behaving
appropriately is expected, it is not explicitly mentioned as being part of the grade. These speech events are highly structured, with the teacher typically determining the order in which students participate, the topics they discuss, and the amount of time that they are allotted for each question. However, students also sometimes find ways to gently redirect the discussion away from topics they feel less confident discussing and toward a list of related facts that they feel more secure about. Learning to participate successfully in an interrogazione typically involves being socialized into both the academic knowledge required by the teacher and into the rhetorical strategies available to students to make their performance come across as proficient.

Laboratory sessions, another form of publicly observable performance, differ from interrogazioni in that they tend to be more overtly collaborative, and in that they tend to produce physical, tangible products which are evaluated. Students’ ability to explain how they produced a given product is not as important in a laboratory session as the final product itself and the quality of the work that was put into making it. In fact, talk is often about something else during lab, while manual work is focused toward a particular objective (e.g., achieving a particular shape of metal using a specific machine, achieving a particular effect when using acrylic paints). The use of specialized terminology is sometimes expected, but the use of specialized measurements, diagrams, and models is typically more important during the laboratory session itself. Quite differently from the interrogazione, a student during a laboratory session is expected to guide his/her own work and to check in at points with the professor; however, he/she is not expected to be given a series of orders that need to be followed one by one. Time
management and the ability to work independently are part of what is assessed for a grade during lab sessions. In this sense, behavior is of utmost importance and is seen as indicative of working hard; it is therefore also part of the grade students are eventually assigned.

5.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

As Carr (2010) has pointed out, expertise is “inherently interactional” and “inescapably ideological,” arguing further that it is “something that people do rather than something that people have or hold” (p. 18). She also asserts that enactments of expertise include more than simply stating correct facts, but rather that they include a communicative repertoire of gesture, dress, intonation, and facial expressions. In order for a novice to establish him/herself as an expert, they must master the associated register and communicative repertoire, they must learn to control interactions in which they are meant to display their expertise, and they must understand the role of the authorizing institution in their claims to expertise. Cicourel (1997) further states that “language is central to an understanding of novice and expert behavior” (p. 72, emphasis added).

These two formulations of how expertise is enacted or performed are illustrated in the presentation of data in this section. That is, students must be able to meet the expectations set by the teacher and by the context of the speech event itself, verbally performing in such a way that the evaluating expert can cull the denotational meaning of the utterance—otherwise the performance of knowledge or expertise falls flat. However, in the interactional context of the performance, teachers’ speech may range from very formal to more informal, even laughing with or at the student being evaluated. The
teacher takes the role of the interactional manager (De Smedt & Van Hout 2016), determining the topic on which the student will be asked to demonstrate expertise, the questions that will be asked of the student, how long this examination will last, and what will constitute a sufficient display of the student’s knowledge. As legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger 1991) in the community of expert mechanical engineers or Greek scholars—as are the two cases presented here—students Thus, students must not only develop expertise in the register associated with the evaluative speech event, but they must also be able to navigate into and out of it flexibly. Further, public performances of expertise (which typically occur for teachers, but in view and earshot of classmates) may be interpreted in a variety of ways by those with varying exposure to the terminology and language associated with a given subject, and to the types of performance required to convincingly demonstrate expertise. As Cicourel specifies, one can sound expert to a fellow novice by mastering the appropriate register.

This section presents a discourse analysis of the participants involved in four different evaluative speech events, and the performances of expertise that emerge from the interplay of the voices involved in them. I present several excerpts of classroom discourse which come from (1) an oral exam (interrogazione) in Latin class in the 3BLC; (2) an interrogazione in Mechanical Systems class in the 3Meccanica; (3) a laboratory session in Fashion Lab in the 3Moda; and (4) an evaluation in Design Lab in the 3Moda. I describe each of these speech events and their participation frameworks, and I present an analysis of each as being illustrative of students’ public performances of schooled knowledge and of how they are socialized to participate in schooling.
Transcripts 10-16 are taken from an audio recording of Latin class in the 3BLC at the classical lyceum. Transcripts 10-14 are taken from the first 6 minutes of class, as the class prepares for an interrogazione, which took place during the fourth and fifth period on Tuesday, November 8, 2016. The interrogazione continues for an hour and 11 minutes (not including the ten-minute break between the fourth and fifth period), with the first half mainly focused on translations and the second half mainly focused on history and culture. Transcripts 15 and 16 are taken from the last ten minutes of the interrogazione.

Transcripts 17-23 are taken from a video recording of Mechanical Systems class at the technical institute, during an interrogazione. The excerpts are all taken from a 6-minute segment at the beginning of the interrogazione, which took place during the sixth period on Thursday, March 2, 2017.

Excerpts 24 and 25 are taken from the beginning of the laboratory class known simply as Moda (Fashion) at the vocational school, which took place during third and fourth period on Wednesday, March 29, 2017. Excerpts 26-28 are taken from a grading session during Design Lab at the vocational institute one week later.

5.3.1 Interrogazione in Latin class at the classical lyceum. As was typical throughout my observations of the 3BLC, the moment Professor Galetti appeared in the doorway of the classroom, a hush fell over the class. I caught her on her way to the desk and said that I would like to record, if that was ok with her. She nodded, I placed the recorder on her desk, and then I went to distribute the other two recorders among the students. Looking out at the students as she lowered her purse onto the desk, she greeted them with the following:
**Transcript 10: Getting ready for the interrogazione**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prof:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Prof:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Facciamo a caso? O chiamo io?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Let’s do it randomly? Or I call?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>((sits down))</td>
<td></td>
<td>((sits down))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forza Filippi. Forza Marinelli.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Let’s go Filippi. Let’s go Marinelli.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rather than greeting the students with a more traditional “hello,” the teacher immediately sets the scene for the *interrogazione* to come, taking a seat at her desk and calling students by last name. Since the students knew an *interrogazione* would happen that day—and she knew they knew—they were especially quiet when she walked in; there was no need for her to remind them of it, ask them to quiet down, or do any extra work to set the stage for the upcoming speech event. She never mentions the *interrogazione* explicitly at all. While at first it seems as though she might give the students the option to volunteer to participate in the *interrogazione* (*‘Let’s do it randomly?’*, line 1), she immediately follows up with *‘Or I call?’* (line 1), said with a downward intonation. These two questions, the second of which seems to serve more as an answer to the first than as a question for the students, serve as an opening to the class session, not as a means of engaging students in a discussion or to invite them to participate in the selection process. She then uses the hortative *‘forza’* (lines 3-4), often used to incite increased effort by fans and players in sporting events (similar to the English *‘let’s go!’* or *‘come on!’*), to call students up to her desk for the *interrogazione*; this in itself sets the scene for a performance of sorts. As Filippi, Marinelli, Venturi, and Damati drag their chairs up to the teacher’s desk at the front of the classroom, where they will sit for the *interrogazione*, some of the students who have not been called begin to
gather around Professor Galetti to ask questions about course materials, due dates, etc.

This continues for about a minute as the students to be tested get settled.

In the meantime, as I placed the audio recorder down on the desk of two students (Micheli and Palazzi) in the back of the classroom who had not been called for the *interrogazione*, I could see one of them was red in the face and bouncing up and down in her seat as if ready to explode. The second the recorder was turned on, she snatched it up and, in a scream-whisper, expressed her relief at not being called:

*Transcript 11: Students express relief at being spared*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALP</th>
<th></th>
<th>ALP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(handing audio</td>
<td></td>
<td>(handing audio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recorder to M&amp;P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>recorder to M&amp;P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ecco. È partito.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Here. It’s ready.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>((grabbing the</td>
<td></td>
<td>((grabbing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recorder and</td>
<td></td>
<td>recorder and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>holding it</td>
<td></td>
<td>holding it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>close to her</td>
<td></td>
<td>close to her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mouth)) SI!!!</td>
<td></td>
<td>mouth) YES!!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>((to ALP, fast))</td>
<td></td>
<td>(((to ALP, fast))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vedi cos’hai fatto?</td>
<td></td>
<td>See what you did?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Quando hai messo il registratore di lì,</td>
<td></td>
<td>When you put the recorder over there,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>le hai fatto chiamare le più brave,</td>
<td></td>
<td>you made her call the best ones,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | capito? hahaha   | | understand? hahaha
| 9 | È vero::!        |   | ☺               |
| 10| hahaha           |   |               |
| 11| Ilenia! Chià, Chiara! Perché ha         |   | Ilenia! Chià, Chiara! Because she left |
| 12| lasciato il registratore con lei, ha     |   | the recorder with her, she chose |
| 13| scelto le più brave!             |   | the best ones!  |
| 14| Perché c’ha messo il registratore, ha   |   | Because she put the recorder, she |
| 15| chiamato le più brave!             |   | called the best ones! |
| 16| Gesù ti ringrazio.    |   | Jesus I thank you.|
| 17| ☺ Grazie registratore, grazie! ☺      |   | ☺ Thank you recorder, thank you! ☺ |
| 18| ((squeaking in happiness)) | | ((squeaking in happiness)) |
| 19| ☺ Grazie ☺        |   | ☺ Thank you ☺    |

As would become my usual practice in all of the classrooms where I conducted observations, I placed one audio recorder on the teacher’s desk when she walked in and then distributed the other two to different pairs of students every day. I had only begun recording the week of this *interrogazione*, and the presence of the audio recorder must have felt more obvious in the beginning than it did later in the school year. According to Micheli’s speculation (lines 5-8), Professor Galetti may have taken into consideration the
presence of the audio recorder and as a result had decided to call ‘the best’ students in the class for the *interrogazione*, rather than selecting students who were maybe due for an *interrogazione* but were not as proficient in Latin.

M ((to ALP, fast)) ☹ See what you did? When you put the recorder over there, you made her call the best ones, understand? hahaha ☹
P It’s tru::e!
M hahaha
P Ilenia! Chià, Chiara! Because she left the recorder with her, she chose the best ones!
M Because she put the recorder, she called the best ones!

In her understanding of the event, it was because of me (or rather the recorder, specifically) that the teacher had called those four students (‘See what you did? When you put the recorder over there, you made her call the best ones, understand?’). Palazzi agrees (‘It’s true!’) and she and Micheli share this observation with their nearby classmates, Chiara and Ilenia (lines 11-13). Giddy with relief, Palazzi and Micheli thank Jesus and the recorder (lines 16-19) for sparing them from what would turn out to be a particularly long and challenging *interrogazione*.

P Jesus I thank you.
M ☹ Thank you recorder, thank you! ☹
P&M ((squeaking in happiness))
M ☹ Thank you ☹

This thanking of Jesus for having spared them from the interrogazione is also a performance of sorts, in which Palazzi and Micheli lean into their identities as “bad at Latin” (Palazzi often earned scores of 3 ½ or 425 on her Latin translations, and Micheli scored only slightly higher), being sure to point out their theory and their relief to other students who might also not be brilliant at Latin (such as Ilenia, who also often received low scores on her Latin translations). Through this performance, they seem to find

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25 On a scale of 1-10, where 6 is passing.
solidarity in an “us” and “them” categorization of those who are not so good at Latin and those who got called for the interrogazione, respectively. They then turn their attention to the interrogazione, where Venturi (a high-achieving student and one of three male students in the class) is nervously waiting for the questions to begin:

Transcript 12: Deciding on the material and on the first victim (who receives encouragement from the peanut gallery)

As Professor Galetti begins to call the interrogazione to order, she starts to describe what the topic will be (lines 1-2, ‘let’s start with the section you had for today’): the translation that they had been assigned as homework. As she specifies the topic, Venturi interjects with ‘yes’ (line 3), which gets a half-joking comment from the teacher in reply, ‘I see that Venturi is very anxious to read’ (lines 4-6), indicating that she sees him as being the most eager to start or at least to get his turn over with. In the midst of some teasing about Venturi’s generally anxious character (lines 7-10, and 13), Palazzi starts jokingly encouraging him from the back of the class, in a loud whisper:

P Come on Timothy! Show her who you are!
P Go Timothy!

Prof Alright, uh: let’s start with: the:: with the section you had for today=
V Yes=
Prof =which was the one on 156 or am I wrong? I see that Venturi is very anxious to read so
V I Prof am anxious=
Prof =On your own. When [you’re interrogated even a little bit more, no?
P ((whispered loudly)) [Come on Timothy! Show her who you are!
V Eh Prof, that’s the peak [xxx]
P ((whispered loudly)) [Go Timothy!
Prof ((to P)) Enough.
P Sorry.

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|   | Prof | Allora, eh: cominciamo con: la:: col brano che avevate per oggi=
|   | V | =Sì=
|   | Prof | =che era quello di 156 o sbaglio? Vedo che Venturi è molto ansioso di leggere quindi
|   | V | Io Prof sono ansioso=
|   | Prof | =Di tuo. Quando [sei interrogato ancora un pochino di più, no?
|   | P | ((whispered loudly)) [Forza Timothy! Fagli vedere chi sei!
|   | V | Eh Prof, quello è l’apice [xxx]
|   | P | [Dai Timothy!
|   | Prof | ((to P)) Basta.
| P | Scusi. |
The ludic nature of this encouragement is made evident by Palazzi’s use of an anglicized version of Venturi’s first name (turning Timoteo into Timothy, pronounced as ‘timoti’). As the teacher begins to convene the *interrogazione*, she shuts down this joking with ‘Enough,’ reminding the students that they are not so much spectators in this participation framework as they are ratified overhearers: that is, they are not to make contributions, they are to observe. Then the *interrogazione* actually starts, with Professor Galetti giving Venturi a section of text to translate from his Latin textbook.

*Transcript 13*: Giving Venturi his first task

**Italian, Latin, English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th><em>Per te vale quanto sopra detto.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>((reads the section in Latin))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td><em>Benissimo. Allora. Vogliamo trovare tutti i verbi.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>=Si</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td><em>E poi traduciamo.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>V</td>
<td><em>Allora. Repugnavat, cognovèrat—</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td><em>Perché cognovèrat?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>V</td>
<td><em>Cognòverat.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td><em>Cognòverat.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>V</td>
<td><em>Offenderet e verbatue</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td><em>Bene. Allora, traduci.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>You can do the part above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>((reads the section in Latin))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Very good. Alright. We want to find all the verbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>=Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>And then let’s translate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Alright. <em>Repugnavat, cognovèrat—</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Why <em>cognovèrat?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>V</td>
<td><em>Cognòverat.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td><em>Cognòverat.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>V</td>
<td><em>Offenderet and verbatue</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Good. Alright, translate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Venturi’s turn begins with an evaluation of his reading and pronunciation of the Latin text (‘very good,’ line 3), and then an inclusive invitation to identify parts of speech (lines 3-4) and then to translate (line 6). Professor Galetti uses the first person plural in her instructions to Venturi, saying ‘we want to find all the verbs’ (lines 3-4) and ‘let’s translate’ (line 6), hinting that this will be a collaborative process. However, once Venturi has identified the infinitive forms of the four verbs (lines 7 & 11), corrected his pronunciation of *cognoverat* (lines 8-10), and has been evaluated (‘good,’ line 12), the
teacher uses the second person imperative form to tell him (and him alone) to move on to the translation phase of this evaluation (‘alright, translate,’ line 12). While in Transcript 14 it becomes evident that this is indeed a collaborative effort at a translation, involving both Professor Galetti and Venturi, the weight of the responsibility to do it correctly lies on Venturi alone. As he does the translation, his classmates (and fellow interrogati) follow along with the text and are not permitted to contribute any help or suggestions. His ability to competently translate this text will be reflected in his grade.

Venturi commences with the translation, as instructed, but doesn’t get far before the teacher stops him and calls his attention to a particular word (unum) in the sentence that he has just attempted (line 4):

_Transcript 14:_ Venturi begins his second task (with scaffolding)

**Italian, Latin, English, TRANSLATED TEXT, emphasis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>Alora, ehm:: DOPO AVER RESPINTO QUESTE COSE tipo ehm—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>No aspetta. Is rebus— Is omnibus rebus unum repugnavat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Ah ehm: A TUTTE QUESTE COSE, UNO RISPONDEVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>No. Unum, non unus. Unum. È neutro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Un eh: UNA COSA -- UNA SOLA COSA ANDAVA CONTRO E RISPONDEVA. Ciòè: o vero che? Ehm: I FR—ehm:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Cognòverat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Sì. Il, ehm, CHE IL FRATELLO DI DIVIZIACO—no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Cognòverat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Sì. AVEVA CONOSCIUTO ovvero il FATTO che ehm: IL POP:OLO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>CONOSCEVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>CONOSCEVA ehm: ehm: LA FEDELTÀ DE—eh VERSO IL POPOLO ROMANO, ehm: LA SUA EGREGIA FIDUCIA, LA SUA GIUSTIZIA TEMPERATA, GIUSTA, ehm: LA SUA GRANDE VOLONTÀ ehm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Alright, um:: AFTER HAVING WARDED OFF THESE THINGS like um—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>No wait. Is rebus— Is omnibus rebus unum repugnavat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Ah um: TO ALL OF THESE THINGS, ONE RESPONDED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>No. Unum, not unus. Unum. It’s neuter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>A uh: ONE THING — ONE SINGLE THING RESISTED AND RESPONDED. THAT IS: or in fact? Um: THE BR—um:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Cognòverat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Yes. The, um, THAT THE BROTHER OF DIVICIACUS—no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Cognòverat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Yes. HAD KNOWN or rather THE FACT that um: THE PEOPLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>KNEW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After his second attempt to translate the phrase in lines 3-4, the teacher remains dissatisfied and gives him a hint in lines 5-6, ‘No. Unum, not unus. Unum. It’s neuter.’ In an insistent tone, she contrasts the term with one similar to it, seeking to underline for him that this word is not gender that he thought it was. This seems to get him on the right track and he continues the translation into the next sentence, but is again almost immediately stopped with Professor Galetti’s ‘cognoverat’ in line 12 and again in line 15, by which she attempts to call his attention to a mistake in his translation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prof</th>
<th>Capito?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Si si</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Venturi struggles to address what she is hinting at, rephrasing the translation around the various ways the verb could be translated, Galetti offers the Italian translation
‘conosceva’ or ‘knew’ (line 18), which Venturi works into his translation (line 19). After this point, Venturi’s translation proceeds well for three lines and does not receive any interjections from the teacher, eventually being evaluated as satisfactory with a pleased-sounding ‘Mm’ in line 26. Venturi continues:

V

Indeed, um: um: He feared, he feared that his, the agony of Diviciacus offended his spirit.

Prof

He feared indeed…that… ((reads in Latin))

V

((reads in Latin along with Prof))

Prof

He feared that… [with his sentence he offended the spirit of Diviciacus.]

V

[ ((reads translation along with Prof))

Prof

Understand?

V

Yes yes

Professor Galetti offers additional scaffolding after Venturi’s first attempt at translating the next line of text, by rephrasing what Venturi had just said in line 27 (‘He feared indeed…that…’, line 30). After reading the Latin text in unison, and then the Italian translation in unison, the teacher checks in with him to make sure he has understood the form of the translation (line 38), and receives the preferred response of ‘yes yes’ (line 30) from Venturi, which she takes as confirmation that he has understood.

Venturi’s turn in the interrogazione continues on in this way for several minutes, until Professor Galetti is satisfied and moves on to the other students. She uses much the same scaffolding technique with all of the students, although some need more or less help than others. Not all of the students are asked to do translations, and not all of them are asked to identify parts of speech, as Venturi was instructed to do. Damati, whose turn comes at the very end of the interrogazione, is asked to talk about historical developments in literary production during a given time period. She is not asked to do any translations. Her performance is like Venturi’s in that she has been given a series of known-answer questions to respond to. However, she has more freedom to “spin” the
discussion in ways that might benefit her and might make her seem more proficient, while Venturi’s turn was so highly structured that literally every word had to be chosen carefully.

*Transcript 15: Damati’s monologue Part I*

| Prof | Alright. Our Damati remains. And so our Damati will talk to us about the literatu—about (.) uh:: pre:literary production. What we can affirm based on preliterary production. |
| Prof | Alright first of all we have to refer to some texts that aren’t exactly preliterary, but that make us understand uh about [xxx] us too, um if um the cu- uh the writing was less common among the Roman people and also regarding the topics that they dealt with. And we can refer to um uh let’s say (.) to the descriptions, that were done on: stone or in bronze. We can take the example uh of the Cista Ficuroni that was done in bronze, on which we find, precisely, an inscription uh that tells us who was the sender and the receiver of this gift. And so it was with this— the client not the sender |

| Prof | Allora. È rimasta la nostra Damati. E quindi la nostra Damati ci parla della letteratur-- della (. ) eh:: produzione pre:letteraria. Quello che noi possiamo affermare a proposito della produzione preletteraria. |
| D | Allora inanzitutto dobbiamo fare riferimento a dei testi che non sono proprio preletterari, ma che fanno capire eh a [xxx] anche noi, ehm se eh la cu- eh la scrittura era meno diffusa all'interno del popolo romano e anche riguardo agli argomenti che avevano trattati. E possiamo fare riferimento aumi eh diciamo (.) alle descrizioni, che venivano fatte su: la pietra o sul bronzo. Possiamo prendere l'esempio eh della Cista Ficuroni che era a base di bronzo, sulla quale troviamo, appunto, un'iscrizione eh che ci dice chi era il mittente e il destinatario di questo done. E quindi era con questo-- il committente non il mittente |

The teacher dramatically brings her attention to Damati (‘our Damati remains,’ line 1) and then takes a moment to figure out exactly which topic she wants Damati to discuss, framing the first pair part not as an interrogative, but as an introduction to the audience of what Damati will discuss (‘And so our Damati will talk to us about… what we can affirm based on preliterary production,’ lines 1-6). In response, Damati launches into a monologue in the general vicinity of this assigned topic (‘Alright first of all we have to refer to some texts that weren’t exactly preliterary,’ lines 7-9). Damati positions
herself as a member of ‘we,’ just as the teacher does in her own statement, and as the teacher did with Venturi, framing the information in her monologue not as her own, but as part of a general knowledge base: ‘we have to refer to’ (line 7), ‘make us understand’ (lines 9-10), ‘we can refer to’ (line 10), ‘we can take the example of’ (lines 12-13), ‘we find’ (line 20), ‘tells us’ (line 21). Whether this ‘we’ refers to the group being interrogated, to her class as a whole, or to all students who study Roman preliterary production, Damati is making clear that these are not her own ideas—which is what appears to be expected by the professor, based on the way the original ‘question’ was posed in lines 1-6.

Throughout her response, Damati works around the topic of what can be affirmed based on preliterary production, and instead names and describes specific artifacts (e.g., the Cista Ficuroni, lines 18-19). In her explanation of the Cista Ficuroni, however, she mischaracterizes the inscription (lines 21-23):

D: We can take the example uh of the Cista Ficuroni that was done in bronze, on which we find, precisely, an inscription uh that tells us who was the sender and the receiver of this gift. And so it was with this—

Prof the client not the sender

Accidentally stating that the inscription ‘tells us who was the sender [il mittente] and the receiver [il destinatario] of this gift’ prompts the teacher to swiftly interject with a correction: ‘the client [il committente] not the sender [il mittente]’ (line 24), although she doesn’t seem preoccupied by the fact that these are entirely different words with different meanings, which could have indicated that Damati’s understanding of the Cista Ficuroni was incorrect. Instead, Damati makes quick work of acknowledging this correction and moving on with her monologue.
Transcript 16: Damati’s monologue Part II

1 D Il committente. Uehh (.) e que—diciamo che
2 con queste iscrizioni capiamo
3 eh l’utilizzo che eh svolgeva l’ai—eh la
4 scrittura nella vita pratica e nella vita
5 privata dei romani. Poi abbiamo anche i
6 Fasti, che erano dei calendari, i quali
7 venivano pubblicati annualmente dai
8 pontefici. Sui quali appunto troviamo
9 scritti eh inizialmente i giorni fasti e i
10 giorni nefasti, che erano i giorni in cui
11 si potevano o meno concludere degli affari
12 dei politici, e pubbli- e pubblici anche. E
13 successivamente vengono arricchiti di
14 altre informazioni, eh infatti eh
15 successivamente [xxx] scritti appunto anche
16 eh le cariche eh e [magistrali?]
17 appunto che erano in carica quell’anno.
18 Eh:::m (.) anche quale pontefice ehm era
19 sulla--sulla cattedra papale—
20 Prof OH papale? -- mica c’erano i papi!
21 D Il pontefice. 😊 È vero 😊 la--quindi—uehh
22 Prof ((laughing)) il papa=
23 D imperatore 😊
24 Prof =ancora... no, per carità eh?
25 D ok
26 Prof Imperatori no; (.) Allora i fasti
27 consulari e i fasti triunfari.
28 D mm. Appunto. mm.
29 Prof Fermiamoci qua 😊
30 Ss ((laughing softly))

D The client. Uehh (.) and th—let’s say
that with these inscriptions we understand
uh the use that uh developed the ai—uh the
writing in practical life and in the private
life of the Romans. Then we also have the
Fasti, which were calendars, which were
published annually by the
pontiffs. On which, precisely, we find
writings uh initially the dies fasti and the
dies nefasti, which were the days in which
they could or couldn’t conclude political
business and publi- and public too. And
successively they become enriched with
other information, uh in fact uh
successively [xxx] writings precisely also
uh the roles uh and the [magistrali?],
precisely, that were in charge that year.
U:::m (.) also which pontiff um was in the—
in the papal seat—

Prof OH papal? – there weren’t any popes!
D The pontiff. 😊 It’s true 😊 the—so—uehh
Prof ((laughing)) the pope=
D emperor 😊
Prof =still...no, for God’s sake, eh?
D ok
Prof Emperors no; (.) So the consular Fasti
and the Fasti triumphales.
D mm. Precisely. mm.
Prof Let’s stop here 😊
Ss ((laughing softly))

Damati quickly acknowledges the teacher’s correction (‘the client,’ line 1) and
continues where she left off. She continues her strategy of naming particular artifacts
(this time, ‘the Fasti,’ lines 5-6) and describing them rather than giving a more general
explanation of what can be affirmed based on preliterary production. She speaks more
and more quickly, with more pauses, as her explanation of the Fasti continues, eventually
slipping up when she states that the Fasti showed ‘which pontiff was in the—in the papal
seat’:

D And successively they become enriched with other information, uh in fact uh
successively [xxx] writings precisely also uh the roles uh and the [magistrali?], precisely,
that were in charge that year. U:::m (.) also which pontiff um was in the—in the papal seat—

Prof   OH papal? – there weren’t any popes!
D      The pontiff. 😊 It’s true 😊 the—so—uehh
Prof   ((laughing)) the pope=
D      emperor 😊
Prof   =still…no, for God’s sake, eh?
D      ok
Prof   Emperors no: () So the consular Fasti and the Fasti triumphales.
D      mm. Precisely. mm.
Prof   Let’s stop here 😊

The teacher immediately and emphatically calls her out on this mistake (‘OH papal? There weren’t any popes!’), using an expression of surprise ‘OH’ as well as a more colloquial expression of negative concord ‘mica.’ After this sudden change of tone, Damati hastens to correct herself (‘the pontiff,’ line 21) and continue her explanation, as she did earlier in her monologue (with the mix-up between ‘the client’ and ‘the sender’), but the teacher is still laughing about Damati’s mistake (line 22) and is about to explain more about why ‘papal’ was an inaccurate characterization. Mistakes of this caliber—especially when they appear to shock and amuse the professor so much that she laughs out loud—often triggered a short lecture by the professor about exactly why the answer is wrong, and might even involve calling on a student not taking part in the interrogazione to correct his/her classmate. However, Damati, perhaps eager to self-correct so as to avoid this, comes out with ‘emperor’ (line 23), as a correction to her initial mistake (‘pope’) and her second mistake (‘the pontiff’). In response to this third attempt at repairing her monologue, the teacher goes from laughing to a quite serious tone, using again colloquial language (‘no, for God’s sake, eh?’) to emphasize that Damati is way off-track. She offers to Damati a prompt that there were the consular Fasti and the Fasti triumphales (lines 26-27), perhaps expecting these prompts to right Damati in her course,
and for Damati to offer her own explanation of these two types of Fasti. However, Damati responds with ‘mm, precisely, mm,’ (line 28), not fulfilling the teacher’s expectation and signaling to the teacher that Damati has exhausted her arsenal of information about preliterary production. The teacher takes mercy on Damati and, smiling, says ‘let’s stop here’ (line 29). The tension around this series of mistakes is acknowledged by the students in the class, who all recognize the break in the tension by laughing quietly (and possibly in relief) in response to this merciful move on the part of the teacher.

After nearly one and a half hours of the interrogazione, which while not represented in its entirety here, maintained much the same tone and discourse style throughout, the Professor’s final remarks (and the sole explicit evaluation of the interrogazione) are:

_Bene. Allora. I fanciull:i vanno a posto. L’interrogazione è finita. Te [?] buona interrogazione (.) Adesso noi cominciamo a fare Ennio. ((begins the lesson))_

_Good. Alright. The children go to their seats. The interrogazione is done. You [?] good interrogazione (.) Now we begin to do Ennio. ((begins the lesson))_

As can be seen in the analysis of the excerpts above, while the interrogazione serves as a test of students’ content knowledge in this Latin class, there are also interactional nuances and performative requirements that students must master in order to succeed. At times, there are different strategies available to students. In the case of Venturi’s translation, he was constrained in his ability to steer the line of discussion and was therefore limited in the rhetorical and interactional moves that he could make. However, Damati successfully avoided directly addressing the topic that she was assigned, talking instead about tangentially related artifacts for which she had more detailed information at her disposal.
Further, this was deemed at least a somewhat successful performance of her knowledge: the teacher did not stop her to re-state the topic and insist that she address it directly. Instead, she allowed Damati to list the facts that she knew.

Simply allowing students to proceed in their responses is a sign that they are performing successfully. Many teachers, including Professor Galetti, barely hesitated to jump in and correct students when their answers started to go astray, often cutting them off mid-sentence to do so. Going a long stretch in one’s response during an interrogazione without being interrupted is implicit praise in itself. The ratified student overhearers observing this interrogazione were expected to participate silently, paying attention to the questions being asked, following along with their peers’ responses, and following along in their textbooks. It was common for these student overhearers to whisper the answers to themselves when a question was asked—as if practicing for their turn—and also to make faces at me to indicate whether they thought the interrogazione was going well or badly, or to indicate that it was particularly difficult. The collective laugh of relief for Damati when she was pardoned from continuing on in the question that gave her difficulty was also commonplace in this class, since tensions around being tested and evaluated often ran high, and the interrogazione was—for many—the epitome of stress. A knowing smirk from the teacher sometimes acted as a pressure-release valve.

5.3.2 Interrogazione in Mechanical Systems class at the technical institute.

The interrogazioni in the 3Meccanica differed significantly from those in the 3BLC, partially due to the difference in subject matter being tested, but also due in part to the rapport between students and teachers in the two schools. While a hush fell over the
3BLC when particular professors appeared in the doorway—or even began coming down the hall—this was never once the case with the 3Meccanica. On their more tiring days, some teachers would stand in the doorway for several seconds and stare incredulously at the students who were out of their seats, milling around the classroom, and talking with each other, presumably in the hope that the students would take it upon themselves to settle down without being told to do so. On other days in the 3Meccanica, teachers would come into the classroom (where students were often, depending on the time of day, either half-sleep on their desks or walking around and chatting with each other) and they would fight, without much success, to get and hold the students’ attention. The interrogazione in the 3Meccanica was therefore a rare moment of sustained teacher-student interaction around school content.

Transcripts 17-23 are taken from a 6-minute segment at the beginning of an interrogazione in Mechanical Systems class in the 3Meccanica. It took place during the sixth period on Thursday, March 2, 2017. The interrogazione continues for about 30 minutes, going back and forth between the two boys who are being tested (Luca Morelli and Lukas Sava). In my fieldnotes I wrote that the class was much calmer than usual, maybe because they all knew that had interrogazioni coming up, possibly on subjects in which they didn’t feel entirely ready. In preparation to begin the oral exam, the professor asks the class to be silent and to listen, since they will all have a turn to be tested. A couple of students who do not typically stay quiet during interrogazioni ask the teacher some clarification questions (whether all of the questions asked today will be asked of the other students as well, and whether they will follow the usual order in being called for
interrogazioni). The teacher then urges students to put their cell phones away and to focus on the *interrogazione* at the front of the class. He calls it to order by calling on Morelli, who is next to Sava. Both are leaning against the radiator under the window, about six feet away from the teacher’s desk and from the board. The teacher sits on the opposite side of his desk.

*Figure 10: Interrogazione* in 3Meccanica

*Transcript 17: Bringing Morelli into the interactional space*

```
1  Prof  Allora. Morelli. Spiega in parole
tue la (4 s)
((gestures ‘wait’ with hand))
2  M      ((nods, as in ‘go on’))
3  Prof  che cosa sono le sollecitazioni
tue meccaniche.
4  M      eh::: le::
5  Prof  ((gestures to Sava to give Morelli the dry erase marker)) Aiutati pure con qualche disegno, se vuoi
6  M      le sollecitazioni...
7  Prof  ((gets up and takes the marker from Morelli)) Allora, mettiamo che abbiamo un pezzo cilindrico ((draws on board) fatto così. Guardandolo dall’alto lo vedi così. ((draws on board)) Vieni qua.
8  Prof  Alright. Morelli. Explain in your own words the (4 s)
((gestures ‘wait’ with hand))
9  M      ((nods, as in ‘go on’))
10 Prof  what the mechanical stresses are.
11  M    uh::: the::
12  Prof  ((gestures to Sava to give Morelli the dry erase marker)) Help yourself with some drawings, if you want.
13  M    the stresses…
14  Prof  ((gets up and takes the marker from Morelli)) Alright, let’s say that we have a cylindrical piece ((draws on board)) made like this. Looking at it from above you see it like this. ((draws on board)) Come here.
```
As the teacher formulates his first task for Morelli, which is to ‘explain in your own words what the mechanical stresses are’ (lines 1-2, 5), Morelli stands immobile at the window. He stays there as he begins to answer (‘uh::: the:::,’ line 7). The teacher, possibly sensing that Morelli was stuck in formulating an appropriate response, tells Sava to give Morelli the dry-erase marker that he’s holding, and tells Morelli to ‘help yourself with some drawings, if you want’ (lines 9-10). Morelli, marker in hand, still leaning against the radiator, tries to restart his answer (‘the stresses…,’ line 11), but apparently doesn’t convince the teacher that he is going anywhere with it. The teacher gets up from his seat on the opposite side of the desk and approaches Morelli, taking the marker from him. He begins to draw some diagrams on the board: a cylinder and a circle (lines 14-16). Seeing Morelli still stationary at the window, the teacher tells him ‘come here’ (line 17). By finally getting Morelli to move closer to the board to engage with the drawings that he has just made on the board, the teacher is pulling Morelli away from the wall and into the physical space of the *interrogazione*. Until this point, Morelli’s hesitant answers and his physical distance from the teacher suggest that he is unwilling or unable to take part.

When Morelli eventually moves in toward the board and toward the professor, the professor begins to tailor his original task, breaking it down and providing scaffolding to Morelli so that he might construct an appropriate response:

*Transcript 18: Scaffolding for Morelli: building the stage*

| 1 | Prof | *Se tu applichi delle forze, no? Che succede?* [inaudible] ((gestures back and forth with his hand)) |
| 2 | M | *Che...* |
| 3 | Prof | If you apply force, no? What happens? [inaudible] ((gestures back and forth with his hand)) |
| 4 | M | That… |
Parliamo della trazione. Come vanno disposte le forze durante la trazione?

7 turns omitted in which Prof continues to guide Morelli toward the point where he wants to begin questioning him; mostly inaudible, Prof uses gestures, drawings, and prompts to have Morelli add to the drawings.

Allora, se il torlino è cilindrico—immagina di affettarlo a metà per guardarlo—che cosa vedi? L’area. Che sezione c’ha? Che forma c’ha?

Circolare.

Allora, disegna da parte ((gestures his pen in a circle next to the drawing))

((draws a circle))

E mettiamoci “S,” che indica l’area.

((draws an “S” inside the circle))

Allora, è questa la sollecitazione di trazione.

((nods))

Qual’è la proprietà meccanica che ti dice come si è composto il materiale rispetto alla trazione?

((looks at the board 4 s))

La proprietà meccanica che riguarda la trazione.

((looks at the board 4 s))

Sava?

Let’s talk about traction. How do the forces get arranged during traction?

7 turns omitted in which Prof continues to guide Morelli toward the point where he wants to begin questioning him; mostly inaudible, Prof uses gestures, drawings, and prompts to have Morelli add to the drawings.

Alright, if the dowel is cylindrical—imagine slicing it in half to look at it—what do you see? The area. What section does it have? What shape does it have?

Circular.

Alright, draw it to the side ((gestures his pen in a circle next to the drawing))

((draws a circle))

And let’s put “S” there, which indicates the area.

((draws an “S” inside the circle))

Alright, this is the tensile stress.

((nods))

What is the mechanical property that tells you how the material is composed with respect to traction?

The?

The mechanical property regarding traction

((looks at the board 4 s))

Sava?

The teacher’s scaffolding framework is met with single syllable or single word answers from Morelli (lines 4, 17, 30), despite his attempt to break down the original task into sub-questions (‘If you apply force, what happens?’, lines 1-2; ‘How do forces get arranged during traction?’, lines 5-6), then into rhetorical or almost rhetorical questions (‘What do you see? The area,’ line 14; ‘What shape does it have?’ line 16), then simply into orders (‘draw,’ line 18; ‘let’s put “S” there,’ line 21), and an explanation of how to find a kind of mechanical stress (‘Alright, this is the tensile stress,’ lines 24-25). After setting up the imagined scenario of a cylinder to which force is being applied, the teacher asks a question based on the diagram that has been drawn and discussed over the
previous several lines: ‘What is the mechanical property that tells you how material is composed with respect to traction?’ (lines 27-29), for which Morelli requests clarification (‘the?,’ line 30). After the teacher repeats part of the question, he is met with four seconds of silence from Morelli, who is staring at the board. Having exhausted this line of questioning with Morelli, the teacher turns to Sava for an answer (line 34). Morelli thus effectively loses his turn in the _interrogazione_ because he was not able to use any of the several prompts given to him by the teacher to launch an explanation of mechanical stresses in his own words, or even to talk around the subject enough to satisfy the teacher.

Sava picks up where Morelli left off, having now had the benefit of a thorough review of the material done before him by Morelli and the teacher.

_Transcript 19: Morelli’s turn goes to Sava_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th></th>
<th>S</th>
<th></th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th></th>
<th>S</th>
<th></th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th></th>
<th>S</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sava?</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>eh [xxx] il comportamento del</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>le proprietà meccaniche in generale,</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>((looks at Prof)) Sigma.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>materiale sottoposto a delle forze se—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ma ((pointing to the board)) riguarda la</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>come si chiama?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>——</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>trazione, come si chiama?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sava?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resistenza a trazione. (.). Resistenza a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>che abbiamo chiamato?</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sollecitazione della trazione come si</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>indica? ((sits down at desk and makes</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>some notes on a piece of paper)) Si</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>indica con una lettera greca</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>che abbiamo chiamato?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sigmas.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(continues taking notes))</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sigma? Sima? Sigma.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sava?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>((to Sava)) Si. Allora</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sava?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>14</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>((to M)) dagli il pennarello.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sava?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>((to S)) Scrivi sigma.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sava?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>((to M)) give him the marker.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sava?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>((to S)) Write sigma.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sava?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sava, perhaps caught off-guard, begins answering a different question, or a different version of the question, than what the teacher has asked (lines 2-3), so the teacher interrupts him to clarify what he actually wants Sava to tell him (lines 4-6). Morelli, turning to the teacher, attempts to get his turn back by responding ‘sigma’ (line 7), but when the teacher does not look at him and keeps his gaze fixed on Sava, Morelli looks at the floor and shakes his head. The teacher continues clarifying for Sava what he wants to hear (lines 9-10), and Sava cuts him off with the answer: ‘tensile strength’ (line 11). The teacher appears satisfied with this answer and confirms by repeating it twice (lines 12-13). He decides to stay with Sava for the next line of questioning, and begins to set him up for the next phase (line 13), meanwhile going over to the other side of the teacher’s desk to make some notes on a piece of paper.

Prof  Alright, Sava. The tensile stress, how do you indicate it? ((sits down at desk and makes some notes on a piece of paper)) You indicate it with a Greek letter that we called?
S    Sigma.
Prof  ((continues taking notes))
Ss   Sigma? Sima? Sigma.
Prof  ((to Sava)) Yes. Alright
      ((to M)) give him the marker.
      ((to S)) Write sigma.

When Sava replies correctly that tensile stress is indicated with the Greek letter, sigma (line 19)—his response is initially met with silence by the teacher who is still taking notes. This silence prompts some classmates observing the interrogazione to ask for clarification on what this Greek letter is called (line 21), and is moments later confirmed by the professor (line 22). This is the same answer that Morelli had offered several lines earlier, albeit as the actual name for a mechanical property regarding traction, and not as the symbol that represents it. Morelli, who still holds the marker, is at
Sava’s turn flows much more smoothly than Morelli’s, undoubtedly due in part to the task at hand being to solve a math problem, rather than to explain concepts. The teacher asks Sava how to calculate sigma, and Sava answers with confidence, writing his answer on the board (lines 4-5). The next question garners a slight hesitation from Sava (lines 9-10), who tests his answer with the teacher before committing it to writing. After
Sava finishes writing the equation requested by the teacher, the teacher takes the opportunity to summarize the meaning of sigma (‘Therefore, signma, what is it? It’s the value of the force for every square millimeter of surface area of the material’). He pauses for four seconds and then sets Sava up for an equation:

Prof: Therefore, sigma, what is it? (3 s) It’s the value that the force has for every square millimeter of surface area of the material (4 s) Alright let’s do a calculation, Sava. Let’s say that the force which is applied to the piece is (.) one thousand kilos

S: ((writes on board F=1000kg))

Prof: is equivalent to one thousand kilos (3 s) and that the diameter is

S: ((writes D= on board))

Prof: ten millimeters

S: ((finishes writing D=10mm on board))

Prof: Now I ask you: calculate the stress acting on the material

S: ((writes an equation on the board))

Prof: ((opens and turns on calculator, replacing it near Sava))

S: ((picks up calculator and works out the answer, writes it on the board))

As he defines the equation’s components Sava writes them in mathematical denotation on the board without saying a word. When the equation is fully expressed on the board, Sava picks up the calculator that the teacher has prepared for him and silently works out the answer before writing it on the board (line 32-33). Satisfied with Sava’s display of knowledge, the teacher returns to Morelli with a question based on the equation that has just been done in front of him.

Transcript 21: Morelli gets another chance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th>Morelli, la forza, no? (points to the F=1000kg on the board) Adesso te lo espressi in chilogrammi di forza. Se lo vuoi convertire in Newton, che operazione devi fare?</th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th>Morelli, the force, no? (points to the F=1000kg on the board) Now you express it in kilograms of force. If you want to convert it into Newtons, what equation do you have to do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F=1000kg</td>
<td>S: ((writes 1000kg = on the board))</td>
<td>S: ((writes 1000kg = on the board))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S: ((writes 1000kg = on the board))</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M: eh... (7 s)</td>
<td>M: eh... (7 s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>S: ((writes 1000kg = on the board))</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prof: Sava?</td>
<td>Prof: Sava?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>S: ((writes 1000kg = on the board))</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>S: Devi molteplicare per 9,8</td>
<td>S: You have to multiply it by 9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S: ((writes 1000kg = on the board))</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prof: ((nods))</td>
<td>Prof: ((nods))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>S: ((writes 1000kg = on the board))</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>S: ((writes on board))</td>
<td>S: ((writes on board))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teacher asks Morelli to provide the formula to convert the value of the force (‘F=1000kg,’ line 1) from kilograms into Newtons. Sava assists by writing ‘1000kg=’ on the board (line 6). Morelli hesitates seven seconds (line 6), and loses his turn to Sava yet again, who has the answer ready to go: ‘You have to multiply it by 9.8’ (line 9). The teacher continues with Sava, having him set up an equation for Morelli to solve (not shown here). Morelli puts the finishing touch on the equation, and the teacher decides to continue questioning Morelli rather than going back to Sava.

*Transcript 22: The class chimes in*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th>((to M))</th>
<th>Allora, cancella. (.) Anzi cancella Sava. Tu nel frattempo mi parli della macchina con la quale si fa la prova di trazione.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>eh [xxx]</td>
<td>((Ss talking)) Shhh! Ragazzi, silenzio per favore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Eh come si muove la macchina.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ss</td>
<td>Che macchina? [xxx]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>La macchina per la prova di trazione.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Che cos’è [xxx]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>((to M)) Alright, erase. (.) Actually Sava erases. You in the meantime talk to me about the machine with which one does the tensile test.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>eh [xxx]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>((to class)) Shhh! Guys, silence please.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>((to M)) Tell him what I asked you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Uh how the:: the machine moves.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ss</td>
<td>What machine? [xxx]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>The machine for the tensile test. ((Ss talking))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>Oh you three have to be quiet! You three. You have to be quiet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Morelli finishes the equation (not shown), he tells him to erase (line 1), and then changes his mind and tells Sava to erase instead so that Morelli can ‘talk to me about the machine with which one does the tensile test’ (lines 2-4). Morelli very quietly begins to answer (line 5) but is overshadowed by his classmates’ side talk, which has begun to
rise and fall at louder levels than it was earlier. His turn is continually disrupted by student side talk and by the teacher’s attempts to silence it. After the teacher shushes a group of chatty students the first time (lines 7-8), Morelli tries his answer again (lines 9-13), but the teacher cuts him off and asks Morelli a follow-up question, ‘what is [xxx]’ (line 14), which Morelli begins to answer when a classmate not being tested requests from the teacher to hear the question again (‘What question did you ask?’, line 16). The teacher tells Morelli to explain the question to this student, and Morelli phrases it as ‘how the machine moves’ (line 18); the students following the _interrogazione_ request more specific information (‘what machine?’, line 19) and the teacher replies (‘the machine for the tensile test,’ line 20). The other group of students continues their side talk in the meantime, leading the teacher to shush them again, more forcefully this time (‘Oh you three have to be quiet!’, line 22). The public nature of this _interrogazione_ is made evident in this stretch of talk, in which the audience is actively engaging with and/or interfering with the “front stage” performance by Morelli. The section of the class that has begun to engage in side talk has created a barrier for a section of the class that is engaged in the front stage performance, either as spectators or as performers. By shushing this group engaging in side talk, the teacher implicitly reminds students of the public nature of the _interrogazione_ and their role in it as spectators, or—at most—nothing more than ratified overhearers who participate silently.

Morelli attempts to restart his answer (line 1) but is again interrupted by the teacher, who appears distracted and is looking out at the class to monitor them:
Transcript 23: Morelli gets the floor again

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Prof</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Funziona tramite—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Allora, che cos’è che la fa sollevare?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>[xxx] tubi—</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>mm. Quindi? Ci va dell’olio. E la pressione.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>eh::</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(to S) Allora Sava. (3 s) ((to M))</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Anzi. Continuavo con te.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Che cosa succede al materiale?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Provoc. Lo metti lì dentro?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>E: si: comincia ad allungare.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Perché la forza viene applicata—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Come viene applicata la forza?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Verso l’alto e::</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>(3 s) No?</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>È una forza (.) che parte da zero (.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Aumenta. Allora [xxx] il pezzo inizialmente si allunga. E poi, arrivato alla fine...</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Si spezza. Si può spezzare.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Si ha la rottura. Allora noi, che—che cosa facciamo con questa prova, cos’è lo scopo?</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Per calcolare la resistenza del pezzo materiale. Perché se tu fai—</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>costruisci—tanti provini di quel materiale, il risultato sarà sempre lo stesso. (4 s) Allora Sava, che grafico viene fuori?</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>It works by—</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Alright, what is it that makes it lift up?</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>[xxx] tubes—</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>mhm. So? Oil goes in. And pressure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>eh::</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>(to S) Alright Sava. (3 s) ((to M))</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Actually. I was continuing with you. What happens to the material? A little test. You put it there inside?</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>And: it starts to lengthen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>It starts to lengthen why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Because force is being applied—</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>How is the force applied?</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Upward and::</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Alright, this force is always a hundred kilos? It’s constant? (2 s) Question.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3 s) No?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s a force (.) that starts from zero (.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And increases</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It increases. Alright [xxx] the piece initially lengthens. And then, at the end…</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It breaks. One can break it.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The breakage occurs. Alright we, what—what do we do with this test, what’s the point?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eh: to see the resistance of the piece</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To calculate the resistance of that material. Because if you do—you construct—many tests of that material, the result will always be the same. (4 s) Alright Sava, what graph comes out?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

He interrupts Morelli’s response with a prompt (‘what is it that makes it lift up?,’ line 2). Morelli responds to this prompt quietly (line 3), and the teacher finishes it for him, still looking out at the class (‘mm. So? Oil goes in. And pressure,’ lines 4-5).

Morelli, perhaps confused by this change of direction, begins to say something (line 6), but the teacher—still monitoring the class—suddenly gives the floor to Sava for a moment before giving it back to Morelli with a new ‘little test’ (lines 8-10, ‘Actually, I was continuing with you. What happens to the material? A little test. You put it there...')
inside?’). Morelli finishes the sentence with ‘and it starts to lengthen’ (line 11), and the teacher, whose attention now appears refocused on the interrogazione rather than classroom management, begins to engage in a series of follow-up questions with Morelli (lines 12, 14, 16-17) on the topic of how the object in the machine reacts to the application of force:

**Prof** Alright, this force is always one hundred kilos? It’s constant? (2 s) Question.

**M** (3 s) No?

**Prof** It’s a force that starts from zero.

**M** And increases

**Prof** It increases. Alright [xxx] the piece initially lengthens. And then, at the end…

**M** It breaks. One can break it.

**Prof** The breakage occurs. Alright we, what—what do we do with this proof, what’s the point?

**M** Eh: to see the resistance of the piece—

**Prof** To calculate the resistance of that material. Because if you do—you construct—many tests of that material, the result will always be the same.

In line 18, when Morelli answers tentatively with ‘no?’ after a long pause, the teacher begins to explain the properties of the force, giving Morelli an opening to finish his sentence (line 18), which Morelli takes up (line 19). Once the properties of the force are established, the teacher gives Morelli another opening to finish his sentence (‘and then, at the end…,’ lines 22-23), which Morelli also takes up (‘it breaks,’ line 24). Wrapping up his turn, the teacher asks Morelli what the point is of this test (lines 26-27), to which Morelli begins responding with ‘to see the resistance of the piece—,’ line 28) before his terminology is recast by the teacher with ‘to calculate the resistance of that material’ (lines 29-30). Satisfied with Morelli’s performance in this section, the teacher then turns back to Sava (lines 33-34) and the interrogazione continues for approximately twenty more minutes.

In these excerpts, performance of knowledge consists in part of demonstrating it orally, and in part in demonstrating it in numerical or graphical denotation. Students do
the *interrogazione* while standing near the board, handing the dry-erase marker back and forth like a baton that signals whose turn it is to speak or participate. Speech is often supplemented by writing and/or drawing on the board. The *interrogazione* is heavily structured by a series of questions asked by the teacher, to which the student is expected to respond rapidly and concisely. Answers that take too long to formulate or too long to develop are interrupted by the teacher and redirected, either in the form of a reframed question or via redirection of the question to another student. In these excerpts, while it is important for the students to know the correct terminology, there is no noticeably different speech register used by students during the *interrogazione*. The teacher is satisfied by—and in fact, seems to prefer—short answers rather than lengthy verbal displays of knowledge.

This is significantly different from Damati’s turn in the excerpts of Latin class, but resembles to a great extent Venturi’s turn, when he is asked to do a translation. The students’ ability to correctly attribute particular meanings to a given set of words, signs, and symbols, and to demonstrate (either implicitly or explicitly) that they understand the connections between these symbols and meanings, is at the center of both the *interrogazione* in Latin class and the *interrogazione* in Mechanical Systems class. However, the teacher in the 3Meccanica plays a much more significant role in the co-construction of the students’ responses than does the teacher in the 3BLC. He asks questions about discrete terminology, functions, equations, and symbols, and then he determines—instead of having the students determine—how these elements connect in order to form the bigger picture. He gradually builds an explanation by interlocking
Sava’s and Morelli’s turns, with Morelli being assigned the task of labeling and finishing sentences and Sava being assigned the task of justifying and explaining. In this sense, Sava’s participation in the *interrogazione* comes across as a summative assessment moreso than that of Morelli, whose turns appear to serve more as a review of recently covered material. The function of the *interrogazione* as review is also made evident by the interventions from other students who are following along with the questions being asked, as if they were carefully taking notes on a lesson. In this class, *interrogazioni* represented some of the only occasions in which students worked one-on-one with teachers and where their difficulties in the material were made evident; and for this reason, they appeared to serve a purpose that went beyond assessment. While this was also true for the 3BLC—in terms of *interrogazioni* being some of the only one-on-one interactions with teachers—students in the 3BLC routinely studied material together before and after it was presented in class, and their performance in the *interrogazione* was typically much more polished and self-driven than were student performances of knowledge in the 3Meccanica.

### 5.3.3 Lab sessions in Fashion Design at the vocational school

While *interrogazioni*, as shown, are heavily co-constructed between teachers and students, but only minimally collaborative between students and their peers, laboratory sessions tend to be the opposite. Teachers oversee student projects, which are often done in informally organized small groups or pairs over several lab sessions, and they intervene when asked or when they deem it necessary. Students are held responsible for ‘working well’ (i.e. working hard, efficiently, productively) as well as producing a well-crafted finished
product. In the 3Moda, where students spend half of their weekly in-school hours in laboratories, hands-on work is much more common—and a more reliable means of understanding what students know how to do—than are interrogazioni.

Transcript 24 is taken from the beginning of the laboratory class known simply as Moda (Fashion) at the vocational school, which took place during third and fourth period on Wednesday, March 29, 2017. This laboratory class taught students how to plan out and execute particular items of clothing or parts of clothing (e.g., raglan sleeves, puffed sleeves, kimono sleeves, etc.). The students typically planned and sketched a miniature version of the item to be sewn, following very precise measurements according to the clothing size they were assigned, then once approved by the professor they would project out the miniature design to a life-size design. This would happen on a large sheet of newsprint that measured about 4 feet by 5 feet. Once this was approved, they would trace their projection onto an equally large sheet of white tracing paper and cut out the different components. Sometimes, the students would be asked to simply sew the tracing paper version of the item and would be graded on that. The reasoning behind using tracing paper rather than fabric appeared to be economic: novice designers often make mistakes in their measurements, in their stitches, and in other steps of the process, and fabric is an expensive resource for a publicly funded school. However, other times, for special events such as school performances, school fashion shows, and the Christmas market, students would work with actual fabric. These projects were higher stakes, longer-term, and typically more heavily surveilled by the professor and the lab tech. In some of these cases, the fabric was donated by a particular benefactor, and needed to be
treated with extreme care since it would not be possible to procure more if mistakes were to happen.

At the time of the recording transcribed below in Transcripts 24 and 25, the 3Moda had been tasked with designing and sewing the costumes for student actors who would be performing in the Robin Hood play at the end of April 2017. The professor and lab tech were both heavily involved in directing the work flow, procuring the materials, and double-checking the quality of the students’ work. In these excerpts, there is a lot of contemporaneous activity happening, but the focus here is on the Maid Marion costume, which the teacher and Shoshi are discussing and working on. About five minutes into the class period, as students continue to file in and get settled, the professor reads from a flyer that states that the Rotary Club generously donated the funds for the fabric used to create the costumes, and that these costumes will be displayed by the Rotary Club after the performance is over. She then announces that if they work well, she’ll mark down this time as counting toward their alternanza scuola-lavoro (a program by which students accumulate professional hours for school credit). She thus establishes this work period as one that she will observe and evaluate.
Figure 11: 3Moda laboratory layout

Transcript 24: Hemming while chatting Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prof</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>&quot;(looks at the dress that Shoshi has brought over and laid on the table; touches the fabric, examines the dress)&quot;</td>
<td><em>I fianchi son venuti bene?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The hips came out well?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sh</td>
<td>Prof</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>((helping Prof turn the dress over; shrugs shoulders))</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ah, dovestamo riprendere col tagliacucì.</td>
<td>Ah, we had to do it over with the serger.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Questo si, guarda.</td>
<td>This one yeah, look.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>((holding fabric up to look at it))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Questo sì, guarda.</td>
<td>This one yeah, look.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>((quietly)) C'è un giorno in cui non abbiamo un problema?</td>
<td>((quietly)) Is there a day when we don’t have a problem?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>[inaudible] se faceva Lei.</td>
<td>[inaudible] if you did it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>heh?</td>
<td>huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Esiste un giorno?</td>
<td>Does such a day exist?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>((sewing fabric on a brown dress))</td>
<td>No, Prof. Se no, non siamo al professionale.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>No, Prof. Se no, non siamo al professionale.</td>
<td>No, Prof. If not, we’re not at the vocational school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>((moving fabric around and lining up the bottom hem))</td>
<td>No, non è un questione del professionale.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>No, it’s not a matter of the vocational school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>((sewing a brown dress))</td>
<td>Allora, non semo noi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Alright then, we’re not us</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>((continuing to line up hem))</td>
<td>Esatto, è la vostra classe che c’ha...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Exactly, it’s your class that has...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this excerpt, Shoshi is having the teacher inspect the work that she did during the previous lab session, which was to complete part of the sewing together of the Maid Marion costume. The professor looks it over carefully and asks if the hips [of the dress] came out well (line 1), and Shoshi replies that they did (line 2) as she and the teacher turn the dress over and over and examine the seams. As they look carefully at it, the teacher is reminded that they needed to go over the hem of the dress with the serger\(^{26}\) to create a finished-looking hem (lines 3-4), and she confirms to herself and to Shoshi by holding up the part of the dress in question and saying ‘this one, yeah, look’ (line 5). Shoshi shifts responsibility from herself to the teacher, suggesting that the teacher do this finishing touch rather than herself (line 6). As the teacher continues examining the dress, she comments on a complaint she hears from the hallway outside her classroom (lines 7-8), and Gaia answers her, also while working on sewing the fabric on a different dress (lines

\(^{26}\) A tool on a sewing machine that creates a finished edge on fabric by sewing a seam and trimming off raw edges.
11-12). This joking small talk continues for four more lines as the teacher and the student continue their work and inspection of the dresses they have in front of them.

A few moments later, a student comes over to ask the professor for a particular tool. A brief discussion ensues, and then the teacher returns to her work with Shoshi on the Maid Marion dress:

*Transcript 25: Hemming while talking Part 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Prof</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sh</strong></th>
<th><strong>Prof</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>((lining up hem))</td>
<td>((goes to get scissors))</td>
<td>((to Shoshi)) <em>Dammi un forbice per favore.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>((lining up hem))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>((returns with scissors in hand, slightly open and pointing toward Prof))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>((taking scissors from Shoshi and putting them on the table))</td>
<td><em>Madonna mia sta ferma</em> Madonna mia be still.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continuing to line up the hem and prepare it for the serger, the professor tells Shoshi (who is standing next to her) to ‘give me a scissor, please’ (lines 1-2), and Shoshi swiftly complies, bringing the scissors back to the professor, holding them with the point about one foot from the teacher’s face, with the blades slightly separated. As Shoshi
holds these scissors toward the teacher like this, she looks at what the teacher is doing, not paying attention to where the scissors are. The teacher senses Shoshi next to her and looks up, grabbing the scissors and putting them on the table, saying ‘Madonna mia be still’ (line 6). She and Shoshi work together on lining up the hem (lines 7-13), with Shoshi mainly holding the fabric in place as directed and smoothing the fabric out after it has been cut, and with the teacher doing the actual cutting. When the cut has been made with the scissors and the hem has been evened out, Shoshi and the teacher look at the fabric carefully, in silence, and then the teacher declares with an ‘ok’ (line 15) that the dress is ready for the serger.

The students all continue working on their respective costumes throughout the remainder of the class while talking for the most part about unrelated things. The students are variously engaged throughout, with some taking every chance that the teacher isn’t looking to check their phones, roll their eyes at each other, joke around, or stare into space, and others continuing to work on their costumes. The teacher and the lab tech come and go from the room and move from table to table to check in with the students. There are no test questions asked of the students, and there are no requests for students to verbally explain what they are doing as they do it. Instead, most of the students are left to their own devices to manage their time and to determine when to ask for help from an adult. This is ultimately a large part of what the teachers are evaluating: the ability to take responsibility and to work effectively. The students seem to know this, as evidenced by the difference between their performance for teachers and their taking of breaks when the teachers’ backs are turned.
A week later, in Design lab, the students are asked to present their final designs to the professor for a grade. Over the previous two weeks, they had been introduced to acrylic paints, how to blend colors, how to do shading on their designs, etc. They were tasked with drawing a mannequin as usual, but then instead of using colored pencils to create the clothing, they had to use acrylic paint. The following transcript is the culmination of these weeks of work, in which they are assigned a numerical grade for their designs on the usual scale of 1-10. On this scale, anything below 6 is considered failing, and anything above 9 is almost unattainable. Plus- and minus-scores, as well as half-points, are also possible (e.g., 7-, 7 ½, 7+). Teachers’ usual range of grades for students did not typically venture lower than 6- or higher than 8 in this class. In the interaction transcribed below, the students bring their portfolios of past and current work up to the teacher’s desk and lay all of their designs to be graded in front of the professor. She opens up the class grade book (*registro elettronico*) online, which contains the grades for all of the students in the class, as well as disciplinary notes, attendance records, assignment deadlines, and other administrative information. The grades that they are assigned in this interaction will be recorded in the grade book and will therefore be factored into their grade for this class.

*Figure 12: Design lab interaction in 3Moda*
As the teacher looks at the gradebook, she refers to ‘the conversation that we were having this morning’ (lines 1-3), which had been about putting in effort as opposed to simply drawing a nice design. She had sought to emphasize that some students have to put in extra effort to reach the same point that others might reach more easily. She calls on Sonia first, who has just started to walk away from the teacher’s desk to put something
away, and as she looks at Sonia’s work, the teacher says, ‘the thing with you is: one, this mannequin you did it yourself’ (lines 12-13).

This brings into focus the drawing of the body itself that lies beneath the dress that has been styled with acrylics. Sonia often traced or copied the mannequins from a book or from her peers, or she asked them to do it for her. This time, however, it appears that Sonia has done it herself (‘that one yes,’ lines 14-15). As the teacher begins to state a caveat (line 16), Roberta jumps in with some teasing (‘you can tell,’ line 17), and Sonia retorts, beginning to explain that ‘it’s the first,’ possibly referring to the first that she has done herself, or to the first one that came out well (line 20). However, she is interrupted by the teacher’s swift evaluation of her work as an impressive—and uncharacteristic for Sonia—eight and a half. Everyone, including Sonia, remain in surprised silence for about 3 seconds, and then Sonia jokingly responds ‘only?’ (line 22). Roberta and Sara let out a shocked reaction, with Roberta leaning back into her chair and laughing, as if to prepare to watch this argument unfold between Sonia and the prof. The professor slowly turns to Sonia and looks over her glasses at her in silence, to which Sonia responds, ‘I’m kidding’ (line 26). Sonia then begins to go through her own portfolio as the teacher inputs her grade into the computer:
Performing humility and then pride, Sonia pulls out one design and says, ‘this is gross ugh,’ and then says of another ‘but this is pretty.’ As she accuses someone of stealing her papers, it turns out that Daniela’s has gone missing from the display on the teacher’s desk. Sonia, smiling, admits in dialect to having taken it (‘ehm ie ho pijà,’ line 35), getting laughs out of her classmates. The teacher then commences on a public evaluation of Daniela’s work, even though Daniela is absent from school that day.

Transcript 27: Eight minus makes her stay put

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>So ((looking through her portfolio)) This is gross ugh. But this is pre::tty. ((yelling)) But Madonna I want to know who it is that takes my papers!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prof ((searching for Daniela’s design)) ((to the group)) Daniela?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>So ☺ Ehm I took it ☺</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ss ((laughing))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Prof You have it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So
((hands Daniela’s design to Prof))

Prof
((looks at design 7 s)) ((looks at computer 21 s))
((tilts head back and forth, looking at Daniela’s drawing)) ((looks back and forth from Daniela’s drawing to the computer, and around at some other drawings 24 s))

Beh graficamente, lei ha fatto un salto in più.

So
Chi?

Prof Tu.

So ☺ Eh hehe ☺

Prof
((looks at screen 7 s)) Però. Vi voglio un po’ [xxx] E’ molto piatto. (5 s)
((clicks, inputting grade))
Incentiviamo. (2 s) Otto meno.

So ((seeing the grade that the Prof marked for Daniela)) Eh no!

R
((slowly turns from the computer screen to Sonia, mouth agape, hand concealing her shocked expression from the prof))

So Eh no!

Prof Perché l’offesa dov’è?

So Io otto e mezzo, ma l’ha visto il mio?!

Sa ((laughing))

Prof A te t’ho detto: t’ho dato un voto

So ((hands Daniela’s design to Prof))

Prof ((looks at design 7 s)) ((looks at computer 21 s))
((tilts head back and forth, looking at Daniela’s drawing)) ((looks back and forth from Daniela’s drawing to the computer, and around at some other drawings 24 s))

Well graphically, she made a bigger jump.

So Who?

Prof You.

So ☻ Yeah hehe ☻

Prof ((looks at screen 7 s)) But. I want to [xxx] you guys. It’s very flat. (5 s)
((clicks, inputting grade)) Let’s incentivize. (2 s) Eight minus.

So ((seeing the grade that the Prof marked for Daniela)) Eh no!

R ((slowly turns from the computer screen to Sonia, mouth agape, hand concealing her shocked expression from the prof))

So Eh no!

Prof Because the offense where is it?

So Me eight and a half, but did you see mine?!

Sa ((laughing))

Prof To you I told you: I gave you a high
The teacher gets Daniela’s design back from Sonia and examines it carefully, followed by a close examination of the gradebook. She looks back and forth between the computer screen and the design, and then at some other drawings on the table in front of her. Daniela is absent, but the evaluation of her design is still done publicly:

| 30 | **So** | *Pensando a ch’ho fatto* ((loud)) |
| 31 | **Prof** | *--per il [xx] che hai fatto sul figurino.* |
| 32 | **So** | *Lei deve un po’ — Con otto meno non l’attiva.* |
| 33 | **R** | *Eh ((nodding))* |
| 34 | **So** | *M’ha detto lei. (1 s) Per me va bene, dai.* |

**Prof** Well graphically, she made a bigger jump.

**So** Who?

**Prof** You.

**So** 😊 Yeah hehe 😊

**Prof** ((looks at screen 7 s)) But. I want to [xxx] you guys.

It’s very flat. (5 s) ((clicks, inputting grade)) Let’s incentivize. (2 s) Eight minus.

After some consideration, the teacher says that Sonia ‘made a bigger jump,’ or did a better job, than Daniela in terms of actual graphics (much to Sonia’s pleasure). She stares at the screen for a few moments before saying ‘but I want to [xxx] you guys’ (lines 14-15). She puts in the grade of eight minus for Daniela, saying ‘let’s incentivize [her]’ (line 17). Sonia immediately protests and Roberta expresses her disbelief with a shocked look hidden from the teacher:

| 35 | **So** | ((seeing the grade that the Prof marked for Daniela)) Eh no! |
| 36 | **R** | ((slowly turns from the computer screen to Sonia, mouth agape, hand concealing her shocked expression from the prof)) |
| 37 | **So** | Eh no! |
| 38 | **Prof** | Because the offense where is it? |
| 39 | **So** | Me eight and a half, but did you see mine?! |
| 40 | **Sa** | ((laughing)) |
| 41 | **Prof** | To you I told you: I gave you a high grade not so much for the color technique— |
| 42 | **So** | Thinking about what I did ((loud)) |
| 43 | **Prof** | --for the [xx] that you did on the mannequin. |
The teacher, confused, asks Sonia what is so offensive about this grade, and Sonia—all performances of humility aside—says to the professor ‘me eight and a half, but did you see mine?!’ (lines 26-27), suggesting that her own drawing was lightyears ahead of Daniela’s, and therefore that her grade should be, too. The teacher seeks to explain to her why Sonia was given the grade of eight and a half, and Sonia finishes her sentence in a loud, frustrated tone (line 32). The teacher restates this supplied ending by adding that she was specifically grading Sonia on the work she did on the mannequin, not on the coloring technique, but Sonia is not satisfied:

| S | To her you have to kind of—With eight minus you don’t activate her. The eight minus makes her stay put. |
| R | Yep ((nodding)) |
| S | She told me herself. (1 s) For me it’s fine, ok. |

She stresses to the teacher her opinion that Daniela will not be incentivized by an eight minus, but will simply rest on her laurels (lines 35-37). This goes counter to what the aim of teacher appears to be: giving the otherwise unmotivated Daniela a high grade (8 minus) in order to reward her for a job well done and to incentivize her to keep up the good work. Roberta expresses agreement with Sonia (i.e. that the generous grade of 8 minus will only function to reassure Daniela that she can keep doing the bare minimum, as usual, and that she’ll pass the class anyway), and Sonia seeks to add weight to her argument by saying that Daniela told her herself (line 39) that she would be absolutely content to rest on her laurels with a grade like that. However, in frustration, more than out of diplomacy, Sonia eventually concedes (temporarily) ‘for me it’s fine, ok’ (lines 31-32).
At this point, a full-fledged public debate about the grades of another (absent) student has begun. The teacher, still unsure of what Sonia is getting at, asks ‘according to you I have to give her more?’ (lines 1-2), thinking perhaps that Daniela would be more motivated if she were rewarded with a higher grade, rather than that she would work harder to pass the class if she got a lower grade. Sonia clarifies impatiently ‘you have to give her less!’ (line 3). The teacher, in Daniela’s defense, points out that she barely has a seven as an average (lines 4-6), suggesting that giving her a lower grade would put her at risk of failing the class; anything less than a six is considered failing. Sonia’s stance here
is that the lower the grade Daniela receives on this project, the more she will be
motivated to work hard in order to pass the class. The teacher’s stance is that Daniela is
not motivated to do work, but giving her recognition of a job well done in the form of a
high grade will give her the motivation she’s lacking. Discussion of these two tactics
ensues among the students:

R ((to Prof)) You have to give her a push—
So ((to Prof)) From the moment in which you—
R ((to So)) But sorry if she gives me a six does it give me a push? ((loud))
So ((to Prof)) From the moment that you give her—
((to Ss)) Will you let me talk?
((to Prof)) From the moment you give her a high grade—

Prof ((to R)) Why do you have to make her angry?
R [xxx]
So From the moment in which you give her a high grade, this [girl] says, ‘Perfect. Now I
won’t move.’

Roberta jumps in and offers that the teacher needs to give Daniela ‘a push,’ but
then—as Sonia is attempting to formulate her argument—modifies what she means by ‘a
push’ and snaps loudly at Sonia with a rhetorical question ‘but sorry if she gives me a six
does it give me a push?’, with the obvious answer to this question being “no.” Roberta,
the highest performing and arguably most motivated student in the class, settled for
nothing less than an eight in any of her core technical courses. She hints here to Sonia,
especially, “you don’t want to know what would happen if the teacher gave me a six.”
However, Sonia continues, over several interrupted turns, to make her argument, which
ends up being ‘from the moment that you give her a high grade, this [girl] says, “Perfect.
Now I won’t move”.’ In response to Sonia’s point, Gaia (the oldest student in the class
and the resident mediator), takes the side of the teacher:

G Excuse me a second. If you guys one day do a shitty design, if she gives you eight it’s
because the Prof knows that you can do more.
So It makes you want it more.
Sonia’s reply to Gaia appears to be a continuation of her own argument, rather than a sudden change of heart and an agreement with Gaia’s, but this kicks off an intense argument between the students which continues on in a similar manner for several turns not transcribed above, and eventually ended in insults being hurled, the support teacher storming out of the classroom after insulting the students for being petty, and the students hurling more insults out the door after her. The teachers of the 3 Moda were constantly challenged with striking a balance between recognizing the difficulties that particular students had (whether they were due to undiagnosed learning disabilities, being stretched thin by their family responsibilities, or other personal issues) and treating the students equally. Arguments like the one above were fairly common, prompting the teachers sometimes to have the students grade each other so that they could see what needed to be taken into consideration (i.e. not just the beauty of the finished product, but also the time, effort, and technique put into completing it, as well as the relative challenges that such work posed to each student in the class). On one such occasion, Roberta was put in charge of assigning grades to her peers—this was done more as an exercise in compassion than as a determination of grades—and admitted, once the spotlight was on her to determine a just grade that encompassed both the quality of each student’s work and the quality of the final product, that it was surprisingly difficult.

Throughout Transcripts 26-28, there are several layers of public performance of schooled knowledge occurring. One is the display of student work for a grade. At face value, and according to many of the students, these works should be graded based on their appearance and their illustration of students’ expertise in drawing a mannequin,
designing a dress, and using acrylics. However, when assigning a grade, the teacher also takes into account the work that she watched the students do over the course of the project, not all of which can be gleaned from a careful examination of the final design. This presents an additional layer of public performance to be evaluated retrospectively and even reframed retrospectively by the students themselves. On the one hand, Sonia’s having drawn her own mannequin for the first time (which does not necessarily contribute to the overall quality of the final design) is treated as a valuable performance in the eyes of the teacher, therefore increasing her final grade. On the other hand, the evaluation of Daniela’s final design in her absence leaves past events up for interpretation by her classmates. The teacher assigns her a high grade for what the students (and she) see as a mediocre design, assuming or remembering that Daniela worked hard on it. This sends the students into a tailspin, in which they realize that the links between hard work, an impressive final product, and a high grade do not necessarily always fall in line.

As one teacher of the 3Moda told me in an interview, the goal of the vocational school is to produce good citizens (Interview 2017.01.30). In this light, the focus on both the quality of final products and the quality of the work put into them makes sense: the teachers are just as interested in students learning how to do good, honest work, and take responsibility for what they create, as they are interested in students learning a trade. The evaluation of these objectives by the teacher in the presence of the students (and in one case, the absence) of students also leads to the emergence of expertise as attributed to students by teachers. Both teachers (in Fashion lab and in Design lab) observe students as they work, taking note of how ‘well’ they do so, which includes working cooperatively,
doing original work, behaving appropriately, applying principles and concepts from previous lessons, and so forth. In the first case, Shoshi’s expertise emerges in her having successfully done what she was tasked with, and in knowing when it was time to hand the project (which included expensive fabrics) over to the teacher. In this case, she behaved as a knowledgable apprentice: doing what she was asked without complaining, but leaving the work that required more finesse to the resident expert. In the second case, in Design lab, we see a disconnect between the meaning attributed to grades by the teacher and that attributed to them by the students. Students interpreted grades as surrogates for their know-how (especially in terms of their drawing and painting technique), while the teacher assigned grades on the basis of the two objectives mentioned above: quality of work and quality of final product. The interaction turns antagonistic when the students see that grades previously thought of as signs of expertise or success (like an eight out of ten) are also given to the students that they do not consider experts (such as Daniela).

5.4 Discussion

Students are socialized in each of these three classes to perform knowledge according to different standards and within different interactional frameworks. The performance of expertise occurs in some cases over the span of several class sessions, as in 3Moda, whereas it occurs over the span of just a few turns in the 3BLC. The way that expertise is performed from class to class differs in the way that specialized terminology and registers are used, how and if students are expected to interact with each other, how
the teacher affords students opportunities to demonstrate expertise, and whether students are asked to show or to explain (or both) their knowledge.

These transcripts have demonstrated the interactional constraints involved in the ways that students perform expertise, as well as the ways that the ethos of the school itself influences what counts as expertise. In the classical lyceum, the teacher demands of the student lexical precision and, at times, a monologic explanation of a topic of the teacher’s choice. Students in this context perform their knowledge not only for their teacher—who expects from them fully-formed ideas, explanations, and justifications—but for a classroom full of attentive peers who actively follow along with the line of questioning. In the technical institute, students’ expertise emerges over the span of several turns that are heavily structured by the teacher, augmenting their brief responses with technical designs and math problems worked out on the board. This interaction is carried out in the case of the 3Meccanica between two students with differing levels of comfort in the material being tested, with one adopting the role of “labeler” and “blank-filler” and the other adopting a more sophisticated role of applying formulae, solving equations, and explaining the reasoning behind them. The students in 3Meccanica also perform this academic knowledge in the presence of their classmates, who are expected to follow along—and some do, in this particular case—in order to review (or perhaps learn for the first time) the material being tested. In the case of the 3BLC, however, the ratified overhearers are silently taking the test along with the *interrogati* and would be expected to be able to answer the questions being asked of their peers, should they be called on. The same did not appear to be true for the 3Meccanica. Finally, the
interactional emergence of expertise in the 3Moda extends far beyond a single interaction to include work done over several class sessions. Both behavior and demonstration of technical skill are taken into consideration for grades, which students treat as transparent signs of their expertise, but which teachers treat as indicative of the quality of students’ work over the course of the project, as well as the finished product itself. In this sense, expertise can be demonstrated by students (and evaluated by teachers) without the student even being present.

The socialization of students to participate in these speech events—and sometimes chains of speech events—differs across schools in accordance with the pedagogy and values associated with each. As seen in Chapter 4, the characterizations of these three school types and the students who attend them are quite distinct, with the lyceum categorized as the most academically rigorous (and the unmarked choice), the vocational school being seen as the least academically rigorous (and the default choice for low-performers), and the technical institute as being something in-between, with programs running the gamut from biotechnology (the so-called lyceum of the technical school) to agriculture (where the students are thought not to even carry backpacks). Along with the lyceum being the unmarked norm comes the treatment of all that occurs within the lyceum as being seen as “normal” or “correct,” which includes the tradition of the interrogazione. However, as has been demonstrated here, expertise is relative to the social and interactional context in which it is performed, and the interrogazione is only one such context. Alternative forms of the interrogazione—such as the heavily scaffolded interrogazione done in the 3Meccanica—as well as alternative forms of assessment such
as laboratories, provide a means of performing, assessing, and attributing expertise in context- and subject-specific ways.
CHAPTER 6: PEER-TO-PEER PERFORMANCES OF EXPERTISE

6.1 Introduction

In the 3BLC, 3 Meccanica, and 3 Moda, there was a constant shifting between the “best friend” repertoire, the “oral exam” repertoire, and the “excuses” repertoire, with multiple concurrent interactions, encompassed in any given moment in a single physical space (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda 1999; Rampton 1995; Rymes 2016). Each class had different ways of interacting among peers and with teachers, and sometimes the boundary between these interactional spaces was more sharply delineated than in other cases. This chapter focuses on the ways that students in each of the three classes took advantage of more peer-oriented interactional spaces that opened up throughout the school day to comment on one another’s academic performance, help each other with schoolwork, or otherwise perform academic expertise for each other.

In the 3Meccanica, students’ ways of interacting with classmates, teachers, and course material varied by student and across lessons. Despite the vibrant “underlife” (Goffman 1961) of the class, students rarely engaged in academic discussion amongst themselves. It seems that the only socially appropriate way of performing academic ability—at least for the majority of students—was by engaging directly or obliquely with the official classroom talk. This engagement might take the form of volunteering an answer to a question posed by the teacher, volunteering to do a math problem on the board, or proactively asking to be given a quiz rather than waiting with bated breath to be
called, or it might take the form of (often sarcastic or ludic) side commentary on teacher talk.

In the 3BLC at the classical lyceum, students’ peer-peer performances of schooled knowledge were much more difficult to identify, considering the much less audible sidetalk that the students engaged in during lessons and the much smaller amount of free time that the students had during the school day. The majority of audible performances of academic knowledge were those performed publicly, for the teacher, although these were sometimes punctuated by silent “celebrations” shared between students, in which they would congratulate each other, do some peacocking after having given a correct answer, or even console or tease each other after having given an incorrect answer. Students in the 3BLC also practiced interrogazione-like monologues with each other when they were expecting to be called for an oral exam, with one student speaking and the other student following along in the textbook and pointing out where the speaker was going astray, where they skipped or misstated an important detail, or similar. Peer-peer performances of expertise were typically cooperative.

The students in the 3Moda had quite the opposite situation from the 3BLC in that they were often left to manage their own time during the day as they worked on time-consuming technical and artistic designs. Peer-peer interaction for them was more the norm than was a teacher-fronted lesson, especially in laboratories, but it often took the form of students showing each other how to do practical things, or doing these things for their peers, rather than explaining abstracted concepts to each other. Some students were always found together, with the less confident ones shadowing the more confident ones,
watching how to sew, press, cut, measure, or sketch. While peer-peer interaction for the 3Moda was more commonplace, the 3Moda also tended to have less defined student-only interactional spaces, since teachers, aides, and lab technicians were often milling around the classroom or the lab and assisting students. Unlike the other two classes, teachers and students tended to share space, and peer-peer interactions often occurred in plain view of the teacher, with the teacher simply choosing not to involve herself.

This chapter focuses not on what teachers considered high-quality student contributions, but on how students demonstrated academic prowess and/or performed schooled knowledge for one another, in the absence of close teacher-monitoring. These peer-peer performances of expertise, while not always immediately recognized as such by teachers, are an important means of understanding how students participate in schooling on their own terms.

In this chapter, I analyze eight instances of classroom discourse collected over the span of the academic year in which students performed expertise in schooled subject content and/or academic discourses for the benefit of their peers. I focus on the the double-voiced (Bakhtin 1981) nature of these performances and on how students demonstrated their knowledge of how to “do school” while nonetheless maintaining their carefully curated social personae. In addition, I examine how students drew on their peer group’s communicative repertoire (Rymes 2010) and/or deployed nonstandard and/or “dialect” features when performing expertise for the benefit of their peers.
6.2 Ventriloquating “school voice” in language play

There were many times when students directly or indirectly demonstrated their expertise to peers while maintaining their carefully curated personae, as in the following example from the 3Meccanica. During a lecture in mechanical systems class, as the teacher lectures about the movement of objects in Cartesian planes, he falls into a predictable pattern of rising and falling intonation, as indicated below.

Transcript 29: “la caccia dura puzza”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Prof:</th>
<th>un oggetto nel piano↑</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>come su questa lavagna↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>ha tre possibilità di movimento↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>o si sposta così↑ ((drawing a vertical line))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>o si sposta così↑ ((drawing a horizontal line))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>per cui ha tre possibilità di movimento↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>perché?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>allora perché ti spiego↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>in effetti↑ –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>no, voglio—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>questa è un’osservazione interessante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>mi dici ‘vabbè, ma si è spostato così!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>è vero↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>però lo spostamento lungo una direzione qualsiasi↑—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>si può ricondurre lo spostamento secondo due assi↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>S1:</td>
<td>ahh bè</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>ok?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>nel senso che—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>per farti capire—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>per arrivare quassù↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>è come se ci fosse spostato così↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>((drawing a horizontal line)) e poi cosi↓ ((drawing a vertical line))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>va bene?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>allora↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>((to S)) no no no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ss:</td>
<td>hahaha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>quest’aspetto qui↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>è importante↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>an object in the plane↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>like on this blackboard↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>has three possibilities of movement↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>either it moves like this↑ ((drawing a vertical line)) or it moves like this↑ ((drawing a horizontal line))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>for which it has three possibilities of movement↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>S1:</td>
<td>why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>well because I’ll explain to you↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td>basically↑ –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td>no, I want—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td>this is an interesting observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td>you say ‘alright, but it moved like this!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>it’s true↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>but the movement along whatever direction↑—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td>one can attribute the movement according to two axes↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y and X↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>S1:</td>
<td>ahh k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>ok?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
<td>in the sense that—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td>to make you understand—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td>to arrive up here↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td>it’s as if it had moved like this↑ ((drawing a horizontal line)) and then like this↓ ((drawing a vertical line))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>ok?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td>so↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td>((to S)) no no no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Ss:</td>
<td>hahaha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>this aspect here↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td>is important↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigi:</td>
<td>(in mock teacher voice) perché↑</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>perché adesso vi dò una</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2:</td>
<td>no aspe’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugg:</td>
<td>questo non ho capito</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan:</td>
<td>heheh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigi:</td>
<td>(to Ruggero))😊 puzza ↓😊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2:</td>
<td>(to Prof) heh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugg:</td>
<td>il vincolo di un elemento che</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limita i gradi di libertà di un</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corpo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Luigi:  | (in mock teacher voice)) because↑ |
| Prof:   | because now I’ll give you (pl.) a |
|         | definition↓                      |
| S2:     | no wait                          |
| Rugg:   | ((not loud enough for Prof to hear)) |
| Ivan:   | heheh                           |
| Luigi:  | (to Ruggero))😊 stinks ↓😊       |
| S2:     | ((to Prof)) huh?                |
| Rugg:   | (to S2)) the bond of an element that |
|         | limits the degrees of freedom of a rigid |
|         | body↓                           |

When the teacher shifts from addressing the whole class to addressing a single student who is having a hard time understanding the concept (lines 12-31), the rest of the class is left “unsupervised” in a sense, or is at least temporarily not held accountable for following along with the explanation. When the teacher reorients the discussion to the class with “so… this aspect here is important” (lines 32-36), Luigi picks up on the now very recognizable intonation pattern and uses a nasally mock-teacher voice to continue the teacher’s explanation with “because” (line 37).

Prof:       | so ↓          |
            | ((to S)) no no no |
Ss:        | hahaha        |
Prof:       | this aspect here↑ |
            | is important↑   |
Luigi:      | ((in mock teacher voice)) because↑ |
Prof:       | because now I’ll give you (pl.) a definition↓ |
S2:         | no wait        |
            | I don’t get this |

While this does not appear to have been said loudly enough for the teacher to hear, the teacher indeed continues his explanation with “because now I’ll give you a
definition” (line 38). When the teacher is again asked for clarification by S2, Ruggero takes the opportunity to pick up on Luigi’s lead and adopts “school voice” or “teacher voice,” using the same intonation pattern that has been established, to talk about a non-school topic:

Rugg: ((not loud enough for Prof to hear)) so↓

the↑

hard↑

poop↑

heheh

Ivan: heheh

((to Ruggero)) 😊 stinks↓ 😊

Luigi: heheh

When he ends “so, the hard poop...” (lines 43-46) with a rising intonation, Ivan, demonstrating his knowledge of this speech genre, turns around and contributes “stinks” (line 49) with the characteristic falling intonation that is recognizable from other moments in the lesson.

Ruggero, who was never informal with teachers in the way that Zied or Ivan sometimes were, was a teacher favorite (based on their comments about him at parent-teacher meetings and at the end-of-year teacher meeting). He sat square in the middle of the classroom, almost always followed along and paid attention, very rarely got off-task, and consistently earned high marks. His peers seemed to respect him and treat him as an expert on technical subjects, but as far as I understood at the time, he never demonstrated his academic prowess by letting others copy his work (which Zied, for example, regularly did), instead preferring to explain to his classmates how he arrived at the answer he got. This potentially established him as a more cautious student than some of his peers who would gladly pass around their work for others to copy, even if it was right under the teacher’s nose. After his brief moment of language play, even after he gets laughter out of
Ivan and Luigi, he returns to the lesson material by providing an expert summary of part of the lesson for S2 (lines 52-54) and abandons his mock lesson introduction about hard poop:

S2: ((to Prof)) huh?
R: ((to S2)) the bond of an element that limits the degrees of freedom of a rigid body ↓

In doing so without a trace of irony in his voice, he demonstrates that he is well versed in the genre of lesson talk and messing around behind the teacher’s back, but they balance each other out in terms of his persona: smart and serious, but not uptight. In helping out S2 rather than continuing on what might have been a promising path to get a few laughs from his desk neighbors and to distract themselves from the lesson at hand, he reorients himself—and therefore those around him—to the lesson.

During my last observation of the 3BLC before Christmas vacation, on a Tuesday afternoon, I gave a recorder to Lucia Palazzi and Melissa Micheli, who were sitting at a double desk in the back of the classroom. Lucia, in her usual style, enthusiastically greeted me into the recorder, but this time with “hello!” instead of the usual “ciao!”, and then proceeded to begin telling me a story in English. She and her deskmate, Melissa (who also lived down the street from each other) tried to put together a story for me about what they would do later that day. However, class eventually gets convened and they don’t quite manage to finish it.

Transcript 30: “will see, will go, will vedremo”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>L:</td>
<td>((into recorder)) hello!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>eh this is (2 s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>eh today, today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>ehhmm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>L:</td>
<td>I, I ((hh)) and my friend eh Melissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>((sharp inhale)) ehhhm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In trying to construct the story, Lucia stalls (lines 6-7) when trying to come up with a verb, and Melissa asks, apparently to a third student, how to construct the future tense in English (line 8). This student responds ‘will’ (line 10) and Lucia confirms that she knew ‘will’ was involved but was trying to conjugate a passive future tense verb (line 11). Melissa begins to offer as suggestions, somewhat jokingly, ‘will see, will go, will vedremo’ (lines 13-15), using in her last suggestion the future tense of the verb ‘to see’ (vedere) in Italian, preceded by ‘will.’ Lucia tries out ‘will go’ in line 18 but opts to rephrase the sentence, starting it over with ‘tonight, I and my friend Melissa eh go’ (lines 20-22). Melissa jumps in and offers the verb ‘come on’ (line 23), which Lucia somewhat sarcastically accepts, launching into a popular English-language song—"Cheap Thrills" by Sia—in lines 24-27.
In this interaction, the type of school voice that is being adopted and played with is not related to the tone and rhythm of speech so much as to the linguistic medium: English. Mastery of English is expected of young people in Italy today, and perhaps especially from lyceum students who often take part in intercultural exchange programs with students from other European countries via various programs sponsored by the European Commission (EC 2013a, 2013b). In these exchanges, in which Italian students host their partners one year in Italy and then go to visit the next year in their partners’ home country, the default mode of communication is English (between students and between their chaperones). Students at the lyceum also study Shakespeare in addition to basic grammar, although both teachers and students lament the sometimes excessive focus on literary study and grammar over the use of spoken English in class. Here, Lucia and Melissa’s English-language storytelling into the recorder serves to indirectly demonstrate to each other and to nearby classmates their English language knowledge, on the one hand, but without coming across as show-offs on the other hand. Lucia begins the story in English in a quite serious tone.

L: ((into recorder)) hello!
  eh this is (2 s)
  eh today, today
  ehm
  I, I ((hh)) and my friend eh Melissa
  ((sharp inhale)) ehhhm
  ((sucks teeth)) bahhhhh

It seems as though she is intent on communicating something to me about what she and Melissa have planned for that day, but then she begins to falter and hesitate as if she can’t find the right word. Melissa—a protagonist in the story that Lucia is telling—then jumps in to help her by asking a nearby student:
M:  how do you do the future in English?
    I don’t remember
S1:  will
L:  ((to M and S1)) will—yeah but it’s a passive

In asking this question, Melissa simultaneously identifies the correct verb tense to use in this sentence and positions herself as inexpert by asking someone else to supply the correct form. However, in asking this question, she also calls attention to the fact that she is using English to speak to their resident Anglophone researcher—a real madrelingua inglese—which perhaps connotes a certain level of English skill on her part. The student she asks then offers ‘will’—positioning themselves as knowledgeable about English grammar—which Lucia then replies to with an assertion of her own expertise in English, framed as a doubt on her part (‘will—yeah but it’s a passive’). These three students all indirectly or directly demonstrate expertise in English grammar while simultaneously—in the case of Lucia and Melissa—acting out (possibly feigning) inexpertise. Melissa continues by beginning to suggest verbs that Lucia could use in the story:

M:  will see
    will go
    will vedremo
    ehhmm
L:  hahaha
    will go—no

She offers two correctly formulated future tense verbs that would also likely make sense in the context of the story Lucia is telling. However, she follows these two initial suggestions with a joking ‘will vedremo,’ using the English ‘will’ in combination with the Italian future tense ‘vedremo’ (‘we will see’). This final suggestion, followed by hearty laughter from Lucia, repositions Melissa—jokingly—as inexpert in English and
opens up the possibility for Lucia to be able to comfortably reject her previous two
suggestions, which she does (‘will go—no’) before restarting her story into the recorder:

L:  (((slightly more silently, into recorder)) tonight, tonight eh
    I and my friend Melissa eh
go
M:  ((to Lucia)) come on
L:  ((to M, sarcastically)) yes come on ((suckteeth))
    ((into recorder, singing)) come on come on turn the radio on
    it's Friday night

Lucia lowers her voice to avoid the teacher being able to hear them as she begins to call
the class to order and restarts the story with ‘tonight, I and my friend Melissa go.’
Melissa jumps in and offers an alternative verb to ‘go’: the phrasal verb ‘come on,’ which
Lucia treats as a silly suggestion, but which she also takes up as an opportunity to get out
of needing to finish this story that she had started telling. It prompts her to launch into a
very popular song on the radio at the time, which features the verb ‘come on.’ This
also—in a playful way—demonstrates her English language knowledge, without coming
across as pretentious to her surrounding peers. The professor’s change in tone, indicating
that the lesson is about to start, brings this language play to a close, and Lucia switches
gears, making a comment in Italian about how the school day ends too late (lines 29-31).
The lesson convenes shortly after this. She never makes another attempt to tell that story
to me in person or in the recorder, either in Italian or in English, which highlights the
playful and performative nature of this ‘extracurricular’ use of English among her peers.
6.3 “Outside voice” for school topics

At other times, students drew on a discourse genre from outside of school and used it in their discussions of school topics, as Luigi from the 3 Meccanica does in the following example (line 10):

Transcript 31: Stadium Chant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Prof:</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Prof:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>allora guarda, Ivan</td>
<td></td>
<td>so look, Ivan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>la prima struttura –</td>
<td></td>
<td>the first structure –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>che tipo di struttura è?</td>
<td></td>
<td>what type of structure is it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>una struttura...?</td>
<td></td>
<td>a...?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>un corpo rigido</td>
<td></td>
<td>a rigid body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>è un corpo rigido però con i gradi di libertà ci sono [xxx] due?</td>
<td></td>
<td>it’s a rigid body but with degrees of freedom there are [xxx] two?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E’ labile</td>
<td></td>
<td>It’s labile!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Luigi: [è labile!]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Luigi: [[it’s labile!]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>((stadium chant style)) la-bi-LE! La seconda è iperstatica e la terza è isostatica ((throws pen down in triumph))</td>
<td></td>
<td>((stadium chant style)) la-bi-LE! The second is hyperstatic and the third is isostatic ((throws pen down in triumph))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Luigi: i gradi di libertà [xxx] sono sempre tre Baldini</td>
<td></td>
<td>Luigi: (to Baldini) the degrees of freedom [xxx] are always three Baldini</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luigi, who had been following the lesson until shortly before this point when he disengaged for a few minutes, swoops back in at line 9 to supply the answer that Ivan was searching for (“è labile!”). Perhaps in celebration, he then goes on to a soccer stadium-style chant of the word (line 10) before going on to volunteer further information about the other two types of structures in the question (lines 11-12). Stadium chants are of course most commonly heard at soccer games—especially during adrenaline-pumping moments of the game when the fans rally around a cause—but they are commonly heard outside of stadiums during other types of celebrations, no matter how big or small. They are characterized by the adoption of a deeper, louder voice, and by the exaggerated separation of syllables (sometimes as simple as the “U-S-A” chant and other times more
rhythmically and melodically complex\textsuperscript{27}) and are often accompanied by the chanter’s arms thrown enthusiastically overhead, repeatedly, keeping time with the beat of the chant. It conjures an image of a rowdy soccer stadium crowd, which is typically a very masculine and sometimes also quite dangerous environment. By drawing on the recognizable style of the stadium chant (“\textit{la-bi-LE!”}) and then throwing his pen down in triumph at the end of his turn, Luigi in a way is able to participate in official classroom talk and demonstrate expertise without entirely adopting the norms of schooled discourse, and he is also also to coopt Ivan’s turn without looking like a \textit{secchione} (nerd). After establishing that he is still cool even though he knows technical vocabulary, he turns to his classmate Baldini to offer clarification on the question that Baldini posed to the teacher in line 14.

\textbf{Luigi:} (to Baldini) the degrees of freedom [xxx] are always three Baldini

Luigi has in a way set himself up for this peer-to-peer teaching moment by establishing himself as a cool but knowledgeable guy, which might, for Baldini, take the sting out of him needing an explanation from a peer.

In the 3BLC, a similar “celebration” moment occurred when Palazzi used a popular dance move at the time—the “dab” (see Figure 13)—to celebrate having provided a satisfactory answer to the question posed by her Italian literature professor. The professor, as a means of reviewing what the students had read for homework about poetry, asked them one by one to state simple facts about what they had read. When it came to Palazzi, she contributed the following:

\textsuperscript{27} The Maradona chant is a particularly well-known chant in Italy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CedAArglsk8
Transcript 32: “ciccia!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P:</th>
<th>&quot;si incrociano sia gli elementi comunque del passato che gli elementi del futuro&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>&quot;mm&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>P:</td>
<td>&quot;e:: praticamente utilizza uno schema metrico—&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>&quot;praticamente...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P:</td>
<td>&quot;eh. eh. in pratica utilizza uno schema metrico molto rigido, e infatti Leopardi porre alla fine questa rigidità inventando appunto uno— una canzone libera&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>&quot;mm ((looks down at her book))&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>P:</td>
<td>&quot;((whispered)) ((dabbing)) ciccia::!&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P:</th>
<th>both elements of the past and elements of the future come into contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>&quot;mm&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>P:</td>
<td>&quot;and:: essentially it uses a metric scheme—&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>&quot;essentially...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P:</td>
<td>&quot;eh yeah. in essence it utilizes a very rigid metric scheme, and actually Leopardi uses this rigidity in the end inventing, precisely, a—a canzone libera&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Prof:</td>
<td>&quot;mm ((looks down at her book))&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>P:</td>
<td>&quot;((whispered)) ((dabbing)) take that!&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Palazzi volunteers, using teacher-oriented school voice to the best of her ability, some initial information about the genre of poetry they are discussing (lines 1-2) and is encouraged to keep going by the professor, who responds with an affirmative ‘mm’ (line 3). She continues with her explanation, starting with ‘essentially’ (line 4), which receives a comment from the professor, who hints that one does not use ‘essentially’ in school voice (line 6). Palazzi corrects herself, changing the initial part of her utterance to ‘in essence’ (line 7), and then carries on with her explanation of how Leopardi used this specific metric scheme to develop a new genre, the canzone libera. When Palazzi gets another affirmative ‘mm’ from the professor as she looks down at her book in line 12, she takes the opportunity to celebrate her successful intervention with a “dab” and a whispered ‘take that!’ (line 13) aimed at the professor, but performed for the benefit of her nearby peers. She gets a couple of silent smiles and giggles before the next person’s turn comes up.
6.4 Using “nonstandard” language features to talk about schoolwork

During a break in Professor Poldo’s class, a group of students slowly started gathering around Ruggero’s desk. When the general volume of the classroom died down enough for me to hear the discussion, it appeared that Ruggero was working on homework for another class. Ilir, Otmane, and Sava were gathered around his desk to see what he was doing and, apparently, to compare some of their work to his and to try and understand how he was doing it. Some work of Sava’s appeared to be at the center of the discussion at times, with him and Ruggero discussing how they approached different problems. The audibility of the discussion that follows is interrupted at several points by the volume of surrounding talk, but the students gathered around Ruggero’s desk seemed undisturbed by it for the most part. Throughout this discussion, occurring around one or two documents, Ruggero and Sava draw on features that might be identified as dialetto (“dialect”), or otherwise as non-standard, to discuss the materials in front of them. These features are identified in bold typeface.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rugg: (referring to the paper) Tipo questa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Il cinque.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sava: Eh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rugg: Calcolà [xxx]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sava: Eh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>(several inaudible turns as students play music in the background)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Rugg: (to Sava and Otmane) Ma scusame!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Otmane: E’ la stessa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sava: E’ la stessa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Rugg: Nn’è la stessa ma è tutto—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>il diametro iniziale e quello finale eh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Otmane: Devi solo fare lo stesso esercizio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sava: [xxx] pi greco e basta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Rugg: Pi greco su—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>per calcolà la S zero, fi il</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>diametro di-di zero e per calcolà la S, fai—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Otmane: Ma questo da dove l’hai preso questo?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>... (three inaudible turns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sava: Ah capito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Otmane: Nn’è facile nn’è facile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Ilir: heheh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Sava: ce l’ho dietro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>ah beh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>eccolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>42 lines omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Rugg: (to Sava) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>allora R P zero 2 uguale a [xxx]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>((writes something down))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>((consulting a paper with instructions on it))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>((writes something down))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>per la seconda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>calcolare quanti elementi—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>l’allungamento totale—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>((writes something down))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Sava: co’è?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>l’allungamento?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Rugg: (nods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Sava: [inaudible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Rugg: sarebbe sarebbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>((looks up at prof who’s trying to get the lesson restarted))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>sarebbe sarebbe...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>((scratches brow and taps pen quickly on desktop))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Sava: diviso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Rugg: ((sucks teeth to say “no”))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Sava: (looks at Ruggero)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Rugg: diviso 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Rugg: (referring to the paper) Like this. Number five.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Sava: Yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Rugg: Calculate [xxx]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Sava: Huh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>((several inaudible turns as students play music in the background))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Rugg: (to Sava and Otmane) But excuse me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Otmane: It’s the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Sava: It’s the same?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Rugg: It’s not the same but it’s all—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>the starting diameter and final one eh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Otmane: You just have to do the same exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Sava: [xxx] pi and that’s it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Rugg: Pi for—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>to calculate S zero, you do the diameter of-of zero and to calculate S, you do—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Otmane: But this where did you get this from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>... (three inaudible turns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>Sava: Oh got it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>Otmane: It’s not easy it’s not easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Ilir: heheh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Sava: I have it on the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>Ah well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Here it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 lines omitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>42 lines omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Rugg: (to Sava) no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>so R P zero 2 equals [xxx]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>((writes something down))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>((consults a paper with instructions on it))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>for the second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>calculate how many elements—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>the total lengthening—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>((writes something down))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Sava: what is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>the lengthening?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Rugg: (nods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Sava: [inaudible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Rugg: it would be it would be</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>((looks up at prof who’s trying to get the lesson restarted))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>it would be it would be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>((scratches brow and taps pen quickly on desktop))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Sava: divided by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Rugg: ((sucks teeth to say “no”))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Sava: (looks at Ruggero)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 93   | divided by 25
While our interest in the propositional content of this transcript is limited, the fact that students occasionally draw on nonstandard linguistic elements in their discussions of school materials is a point of interest. The dialectal features in this transcript are ones that were commonly heard every day in school and around town and are not what residents of Cittadina would likely call *dialetto stretto* (strict dialect). In fact, the term *dialetto* is a “shifter” (Silverstein 1976) in the sense that its referent shifts according to the speech situation. In the case of the 3Meccanica students—who come from Cittadina and surrounding towns—*dialetto* was used to refer to the way they spoke amongst themselves. That is, while the neighboring towns that students came from did indeed boast linguistic features that differentiated them from Cittadina, the students did not deploy these in class; they did not use *cittadinese, perugino*, or other named varieties. Instead, they used a youthy register that was influenced partially by dialectal elements of Cittadina and surrounding towns – they simply referred to it as *dialetto*. Thus, the use of *dialetto* in this interaction that is mainly between Sava and Ruggero is a contextualization cue that keys the interaction as a non-threatening, collaborative, and between-friends kind of interaction, rather than one where the students are performing a full-blown “studious person” or “teacher” persona. The latter would likely be marked as socially unacceptable.
in the context of the 3Meccanica, but when *dialetto* is incorporated, the tone of the interaction remains informal and non-threatening.

In fact, Ruggero, who initially drives the interaction, uses features of *dialetto* five times at the beginning of this interaction (lines 12-24) when he is attempting to explain to his peers how to solve the problem on the paper he’s working on.

Rugg:  ((to Sava and Otmane)) *Ma scusame!*

Otmane: *E’ la stessa.*

Sava:  *E’ la stessa?*

Rugg:  *Nn’è la stessa ma è tutto—*

        *il diametro iniziale e quello finale eh*

Otmane: *Devi solo fare lo stesso esercizio*

Sava:  *[xxx] pi greco e basta*

Rugg:  *Pi greco su—*

        *per calcola la S zero, fi il diametro di-di zero*

        *E per calcola la S, fai—*

Otmane also uses features of *dialetto* in line 28 as a ‘softener’ when he expresses empathy to Ruggero (*nn’è facile*). And finally, Sava uses features of *dialetto* once the tables turn and he seems to take on more the role of the guide in the interaction with Ruggero around the worksheet (in lines 83, 97, 98).

Sava:  *co’è?*

        *l’allungamento?*

Rugg:  ((nods))

Sava:  *[inaudible]*

Rugg:  *sarebbe sarebbe*

        *((looks up at prof who’s trying to get the lesson restarted))*

        *sarebbe sarebbe…*

        *((scratches brow and taps pen quickly on desktop))*

Sava:  *diviso*

Rugg:  *((sucks teeth to say “no”))*

Sava:  *((looks at Ruggero))*

        *diviso 25*

        *po’ esse?*

        *(che dice che te de’ trova’?)*

It is possible that the use of *dialetto* in this case “cushions” the potentially devastating impact of having a peer demonstrate superior academic ability or understanding. This hypothesis is in line with what students and teachers often told me
about *dialetto* being a way to understand that people are *in confidenza* (when they know each other well and trust each other); that is, they can be frank with one another and can let their guard down. In this sense, using *dialetto* in peer-peer interactions around school work achieves both an informal keying that lowers the stakes of the interaction and a trusting interactional space in which nobody is judging anyone else.

In the 3BLC, during the second period of the day, the students had an ‘*ora buca*’ (literally ‘hole hour,’ or free period) because their math teacher was absent. I took advantage of the time to ask students to tell me a little bit about the grade-keeping system and about the electronic register more generally while I did a screencast of the activity on-screen. One student logged in and offered to walk me through it – showing me where they can access the calendar, where teachers post homework assignments, where teachers leave disciplinary notes, and where grades are posted. At a certain point, the students who were gathered around my computer suggested I look at Irene’s grades, and they call her over to log in. She did so willingly: Irene was a very serious student, seldom getting caught talking to her peers during lessons, hyper-prepared for every *interrogazione* I ever saw her take, and participating in scholastic extracurricular activities in both math/science and Italian/humanities. Figure 14 is a screenshot of her grades (out of 10) as of May 5, 2017. Once it appeared on the screen, the following comments by her classmates ensued (Transcript 34).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>1° Quadrimestre</th>
<th>2° Quadrimestre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scritto/Grafico</td>
<td>Orale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| filosofia                                    | 8               | 24/11 9/10 8 | a b 19 | 20/12 8       | 8 | 8  
| fisica                                       | 9 8            | 26/12 10/12 8 | 9 9 9 | 8 8+ 7        | 8 | 9  
| lingua e cultura greca                       | 9 8 9 9+       | 16/11 10/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| lingua e cultura latina                      | 9 9 9 9+       | 15/11 10/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| lingua e cultura straniera (inglese)         | 9 9 9 9+       | 14/11 10/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| lingua e letteratura italiana                | 9 9 9 9+       | 13/11 10/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| matematica                                   | 9 9 9 9+       | 12/11 10/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| religione cattolica o attività alternative  | 8 9 9 9+       | 11/11 10/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| scienze motorie e sportive                  | 8 9 9 9+       | 10/11 9/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| scienze naturali (el.sc. terra, biologia, chimica) | 9 9 9 9+ | 9/10 8/12 7 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| storia                                       | 8 9 9 9+       | 8/11 7/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  
| storia dell’arte                            | 8 9 9 9+       | 7/11 6/12 8 | 8 8 7 | 8 7+ 8+       | 8 | 9  

*Figure 14: Irene’s grades*
Ilenia, a student who was not particularly high achieving in the context of the 3BLC, starts off this commentary on Irene’s grades by marveling at her lowest grade:

Il: il voto più basso è sette?

Chris. ONE seven, she has. She has one sv--

Lu: non è vero però 'petta?

Il: ce l’ha Meli ma --

Sofia and Gianna, however, take a different focus, marveling at Irene’s highest grade—a perfect ten, which is a nearly mythical achievement in the classical lyceum.

Me: il dieci non – cioè è rarissimo no?

Ss: si

Gi: mai visto haha

Lu: manc’io haha

Il: ecco

Me: where's the ten?

Lu: here it is

Gi: never seen before haha

Lu: me neither haha

Il: not even in middle school

So: yeah in middle school I mean but even

Il: she only has a seven, a seven plus, and that’s it

Irene's register is amazing! It's a pleasure for the eyes.

Sofia: isn’t the ten – I mean it’s very rare no?

Ss: yes

Gi: oh god look at what a register this is!

Il: ((joking tone)) from last time I saw a register but of course I mean never seen before

Gi: never seen before haha

Lu: me neither haha

Il: not even in middle school

So: yeah in middle school I mean but even

Il: she only has a seven, a seven plus, and that’s it

Irene’s highest grade—a perfect ten—has been calledrarissimo

Il: ((joking tone)) da quando non vedo un registro ma sì…

Gi: never seen before haha

Lu: me neither haha

Il: not even in middle school

So: yeah in middle school I mean but even

Il: she only has a seven, a seven plus, and that’s it

Sofia and Gianna, however, take a different focus, marveling at Irene’s highest grade—a perfect ten, which is a nearly mythical achievement in the classical lyceum.

Me: isn’t the ten – I mean it’s very rare no?

Ss: yes
Gi: oh god look at what a register this is!
Il: where’s the ten? (do’è il dieci?)
Lu: here it is
So: how beautiful, the ten. how long since I’ve seen a ten??

Sofia’s comment (‘how long has it been since I’ve seen a ten?’) positions her as someone who has actually gotten a ten in her lifetime, whereas Ilenia’s fascination with the lack of low scores positions her as someone who tends to orient toward the lower end of the grading scale. Her use of dialect in line 16 (do’è il dieci?) perhaps serves to further position herself—in the context of the classical lyceum—as a non-academic or non-expert. She then jumps in with a joke in response to Sofia’s rhetorical question (‘how long since I’ve seen a ten?’), sarcastically implying that she sees a ten everytime she checks her own grades:

Il: ((joking tone)) from last time I saw a register but of course. I mean never seen before
Gi: never seen before haha
Lu: me neither haha
Il: not even in middle school
So: yeah in middle school I mean but even further back
Il: she only has a seven, a seven plus, and that’s it

She then clarifies that she is just joking about seeing a ten everytime she checks her own grades by adding ‘I mean never seen before,’ which Gianna and Lucia can apparently relate to. Ilenia then goes on to add that she never even got a ten in middle school, going out of her way to position herself as academically inferior to Irene and perhaps to the others in the conversation. Sofia, however, takes the opportunity to reclaim her position as the type of person who has gotten tens in the past by saying ‘yeah in middle school I mean but even longer.’ Before the recording cuts off, Ilenia returns to her fixation on the low end of Irene’s grades, not acknowledging Sofia’s comment.
Differently from the use of dialect by the 3Meccanica to talk about school topics and to show empathy, Ilenia’s use of dialect here appears to be a means of positioning herself as far outside the realm of the types of students who get perfect grades. By drawing on dialect here, she separates herself from the conversation happening around her (which is taking place in what more closely resembles standard Italian) and occupies the role of “non-expert” among her high-achieving peers. While the students in the 3BLC did use dialect among themselves fairly frequently, the students almost always made a point to speak in Standard Italian when they were around me and their teachers. In Ilenia’s case, the use of dialect in this interaction appears to be an intentional or strategic move on her part insofar as it is the only token of dialect used in the entire interaction. The unmarked choice in this case would have been Standard Italian, as informed by the interactional context, and in using dialect she agentively switches the tone of her own intervention by asserting the identity affiliated with those who use dialect in Italian-dominant contexts: in the context of the evaluation of Irene’s grades, this is particularly interesting in that it indexes a persona type that is not typically associated with academic spaces or endeavors.

6.5 Peer commentary on the surprise performance of ‘good student’ persona

About two months before their third-year certification exam, the students of the 3Moda were given the task of creating a flat sketch (un plat) of a garment (see Figure 15 for an example). They had been working on this flat sketch for one or two weeks in Design Lab, and some students were having more success than others.
Federico, who was chronically an hour late for school, and who was often absent due to either singing auditions or his mother needing his help, showed up about five minutes into the second hour of the two-hour Design Lab. After the bell had rung, he knocked on the door, was greeted with the expected *avanti* (‘come in’) from the teacher and his classmates, and walked into the room with food in his hands and in his mouth. After some words from the teacher, who was not happy about him showing up late *and* having the audacity to eat in the classroom, she began to try and get him focused on his
schoolwork. It turned out that he did not have a flat sketch started, nor had he been there when she taught the class how to do it. The following conversation ensued:

Transcript 35: “He has a pencilcase?!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Prof: e tu non hai nemmeno un plat, vero?</th>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Prof: and you don’t even have a flat sketch, right?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fed: ((whispering to Sonia &amp; Roberta)) aiutatemi!</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fed: ((whispering to Sonia &amp; Roberta)) help me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fed: ((Ss laugh quietly))</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fed: ((to Prof)) huh? ehhh no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fed: ((to Prof)) huh? ehhh no</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fed: ((Ss laugh quietly))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gaia: Madonna Federico però…</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gaia: Madonna Federico though…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Son: ((laughing)) Andrea ti prego</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Son: ((laughing)) Andrea I beg you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Prof: Federico. Io i voti non me li posso inventare, l’ho detto eh? L’ho detto anche a tua mamma. Quindi vedi che vuoi fare.</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Prof: Federico. I can’t invent the grades myself I said it, eh? I said it to your mom, too. So you see that you want to do [something].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Rob: É facilissimo Federico. È un disegno al piatto.</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Rob: It’s super easy Federico. It’s a flat design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>…[30 s inaudible talk]</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>…[30 s inaudible talk]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Prof: ((to Federico)) Allora. Viene qua vicino a me.</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Prof: ((to Federico)) Alright. Come here near me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Fed: ((starts approaching, mumbling))</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Fed: ((starts approaching and mumbling))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Prof: Matita? (.) Prendi la matita e una gomma.</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Prof: Pencil? (.) Take a pencil and an eraser.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Fed: ((takes his pencil))</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Fed: ((takes his pencil))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Rob: C’ha la matita?!</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Rob: He has a pencil?!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Feed: ((takes his pencil case))</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Feed: ((takes his pencil case))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Rob: C’ha l’astuccio? (1 s) C’HA L’ASTUCCIO?!</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Rob: He has a pencilcase?! (1 s) HE HAS A PENCILCASE?!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>((all laugh))</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>((all laugh))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Fed: ((turns to retort with a smile on his face)) [inaudible]</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Fed: ((turns to retort with a smile on his face)) [inaudible]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Federico is put on the spot by the teacher, who has already laid into him about being late, eating his breakfast in class, and forgetting to turn in an assignment, ending with ‘and you don’t even have a flat sketch, right?’
He realizes that he is going to get in trouble no matter what, and he turns to Sonia and Roberta behind him and whispers loudly ‘help me!’ before turning back to the teacher and admitting that he did not have a flat sketch ready. The other students, who had been working on the flat sketch for over a week by this point, react incredulously: Gaia with a tired-sounding ‘Madonna,’ and Sonia by telling me to pay attention to this (‘Andrea I beg you’) — as if it were particularly worth documenting. By this point, everyone’s attention is on Federico, and the teacher tells him that she needs him to give her something that she can grade – that she ‘can’t invent the grade herself.’

   Prof: Federico. I can’t invent the grades myself  
   I said it, eh? I said it to your mom, too.  
   So you see that you want to do [something].  
   Rob: It’s super easy Federico. It’s a flat design.

The teacher, wielding not only the threat of grades but also a conversation with Federico’s mother, urges him to make a move to finish the flat sketch. Roberta chimes in by offering that ‘it’s super easy,’ which may have served both as a means of offering Federico support and asserting her top student identity in the class. Several of the students actually struggled with this assignment, so her assertion that the work was ‘super easy’ may have come as a blow to the other students, who all remained silent. After some time, the teacher calls Federico up to her desk so that she can help him (and mainly supervise him) with the assignment:

   Prof: ((to Federico)) Alright. Come here near me.  
   Fed: ((starts approaching and mumbling))  
   Prof: Pencil? (. ) Take a pencil and an eraser.  
   Fed: ((takes his pencil))  
   Rob: He has a pencil??  
   Feed: ((takes his pencil case))  
   Rob: He has a pencil case? (1 s) HE HAS A PENCILCASE?!!
Federico begins walking up to her desk empty-handed and seemingly irritated about needing to sit with her while he does the work. As he approaches, she reminds him to bring a pencil and eraser, and he turns to grab his pencil. Roberta comments on this in astonishment, saying ‘He has a pencil?!’ as if unable to believe her eyes as she announces this incredible news to the rest of the class. He then stops and turns around again—perhaps for the eraser, or perhaps to shock his classmates even more—and pulls an entire pencilcase out of his bag. Again, Roberta is amazed: ‘He has a pencilcase? HE HAS A PENCILCASE?!’ The other students in the class laugh, perhaps recognizing that this was indeed unusual for Federico, who often showed up to class with nothing but cigarettes and his wallet in a brightly colored and bedazzled mini-backpack.

The remarks of Sonia, Gaia, and Roberta, as well as Federico’s response (a smile and a snarky retort), frame his use of these school accessories as something out of the ordinary for his ‘bad student’ persona. The stark change from his usual lack of preparedness to his having brought school supplies to class also frames it as a possibly intentional choice on his part—indeed the unremarkable situation would have been for him to come to school without being prepared. Having been noticed by Roberta—the star of the class—Federico stepped momentarily into the role of ‘prepared student,’ however tongue-in-cheek the performance may have been. This ‘good student’ role emerged in stark relief to his not having done the flat sketch, as well as Gaia and Sonia’s commentary about this fact. Commentary from his peers on this shift in his student identity—however sarcastic both the commentary and the performance may have been—highlighted both his peers’ roles, and especially Roberta’s role, as resident ‘good
students’ who are familiar with the accoutrements of other good students (e.g. keeping up with schoolwork, being prepared for class, showing up on time, etc.). While a minor performance, this was the most prepared Federico had been all year—and to begin to adopt the trappings of a good student so close to the end of the school year came across as quite significant.

6.6 Refusing to accept expert positioning

A few weeks after the interaction described in Section 6.5, the students in 3Moda were still working on their flat sketches; but this time, of a garment that the teacher had projected a photograph of onto the whiteboard. As described above, they had been working on flat sketches for at least two months at this point in the year, but many of them were still having trouble with them. Unlike the fashion sketches they had been learning to master since their first year, flat sketches are technical designs and must be extremely precise. Over the course of the two-hour lab, the teacher circulated around the classroom to observe students’ work, reprimand and correct them when they made silly mistakes, and provide mini-tutorials when they had no idea what to do. Toward the end of the second hour of the class, the teacher had placed herself alongside two students in the back of the classroom who were having the most difficulty—Federico being one of them—and was walking them through the process step-by-step, showing them how to measure and calculate the dimensions of the garment.

At the front of the classroom, a couple of meters away from where the teacher was standing, sat Alice and Gaia. Alice, who had been visited several times by the teacher and who had been reprimanded at almost every visit for making silly mistakes,
not listening to the teacher’s suggestions, and guessing instead of reasoning about the measurements, had turned around to ask Gaia for help again, after already doing so several times:

*Transcript 36: “Why don’t you go over there?”*

| 1 | Gaia: *ma infatti* |
| 2 | ((turning toward Alice and gesturing with her outstretched arm toward the teacher behind her)) |
| 3 | *ma perché non vai là?* |
| 4 | Alice: ((looking at Gaia, raising her eyebrows, and opening her mouth as if to protest)) |
| 5 | Gaia: **[xxx]** *è lo stesso per tutti* |
| 6 | Alice: *ma...* ((putting the paper in her hand back down on her desk, turning her eyes away from Gaia, and scratching the back of her head)) |
| 7 | Gaia: ((lowering outstretched arm, shrugging shoulders, and gesturing between Alice and the teacher with her other hand)) *comunque sei allo stesso punto di loro, scusa* |
| 8 | Alice: ((dropping her hands into her lap, looking toward the teacher, pursing lips)) ((picks up paper and gets up, walks over to the teacher)) |
| 9 | Gaia: ((gets up and walks toward a group of students who haven’t needed much help from the teacher during the class)) |

---

Gaia, the oldest student in the class, and by far the most patient with Alice (an L2 Italian speaker who struggled socially and academically, was often bullied by her classmates, and who was assigned a support teacher who was not entirely reliable and was often absent from class), was at this point in time particularly set on preparing for the certification exam. Due in part to serious family issues, Gaia had already been held back a year, and (due to her semi-homelessness) she had also been absent almost half of the present school year. For her, the certification exam could serve as a way to walk away
from school with a credential in hand as she approached the age of 18. Usually extremely
tolerant and supportive of Alice, Gaia’s reaction here is not entirely characteristic of their
dynamic, but it does illustrate some of the stakes involved in (a) setting aside time to help
a peer—in Gaia’s case—and (b) building relationships with peers that are centered
around needing help—in Alice’s case. Distancing herself from Alice and aligning Alice
with the group of students who needed help from the teacher, Gaia implicitly embraces
her role as the more knowledgeable one in this interaction and takes it upon herself to tell
Alice what she needs. Alice, accepting her position as the less knowledgable one, then
takes Gaia’s advice and makes her way over to the group of students being assisted by the
teacher.

6.7 Discussion: Underlife, communicative repertoire, and double-voicing in peer-
peer performances of expertise

As shown in the above three examples (*la cacca dura puzza*, stadium chant, and
*po’ esse?*) the students of the 3Meccanica—a class that was branded as disciplinarily
problematic and not serious about studying—was indeed aware of schooled discourse
genres and did indeed engage in school-related side talk amongst themselves on occasion.
The vibrancy of the class’s underlife (Goffman 1961) was due in part to the many
distractions that occurred during lessons, leading to several opportunities for sidetalk and
parallel activities that were both oriented to the official classroom talk and not. Many
facets of students’ communicative repertoires (Rymes 2010) were on display in these
unofficial classroom spaces, in which they would demonstrate their skill in mimicking
their teachers, performing brief musical numbers (mainly beatboxing and stadium chants), telling *barzellette* (Italian joke stories), as well as using *dialetto* to accomplish many of these tasks.

In the underlife of the 3Meccanica, especially the times in which students were demonstrating expertise for one another (directly or indirectly), they drew on double-voicing; they needed to speak to multiple audiences at the same time—usually the teacher, the recorder (and/or me), and their peers. By chanting “*la-bi-LE!*” in the style of a stadium chant, Luigi both demonstrated to the teacher that he knew the word and demonstrated to his classmates that he wasn’t really taking it seriously—that the fact that he knew the word was no big deal. By beginning a mock lecture about hard poop seconds before flawlessly reciting the definition of a key term to a classmate, Ruggero was able to ward off being ascribed a “smarty pants” identity. And, by drawing on *dialetto* during a discussion of school work, the students were able to seriously orient to their homework without either coming across to each other as patronizing or coming across to their fellow classmates as a nerdy study group.

In the 3BLC, where teacher-directed talk almost always took place in a school voice register—similar to that described in *interrogazioni* in Chapter 5—performances of expertise for peers, or commentary to peers about expertise performed to teachers, typically occurred as side-talk (Lemke 1990) rather than as multidirectional talk for both teachers and peers as was sometimes the case in the 3Meccanica. In the transcripts from the 3BLC shown above (will see, will go, will *vedremo; ciccia!; do’è il dieci*?), peer-directed demonstrations of and commentary on expertise occurred when teachers were not
physically present, or when students were not being actively surveilled by their teachers. Underlife in the 3BLC was not as overt a competitor with teacher talk as it was in the 3Meccanica—in this sense, the students in the classical lyceum typically appeared more oriented to primary adjustments, or the apparent acceptance of their role as prescribed to them by the institution (Goffman 1961). Their secondary adjustments—the students’ means by which they dodged the identity prescribed to them by the lyceum as institution and by their teachers as keepers of that institution—were kept well hidden from their teachers. Thus, while all of the students in the 3BLC identified to a certain degree with the classical lyceum (e.g. being students who care about studying), they also made efforts on occasion to distance themselves from the ideals espoused by it (e.g. studying and that’s it), as shown in Transcript 32 (do’è il dieci?) and in Chapter 4. They also did this by sneaking aspects of their communicative repertoires (e.g. dabbing, knowledge of English language pop songs) into school spaces as a means of performing “cool expert” or “casually smart,” as was the case in Transcript 28 (will see, will go, will vedremo) and in Transcript 30 (ciccia!). In a potentially highly competitive environment, the careful demonstration of expertise and inexpertise serves to establish a sense of community and a “safe space” among peers, which is often in an implicitly antagonistic relationship to the teacher, as shown in “ciccia!” and in the unattainability of a perfect 10 in “do’è il dieci?”.

The 3 Moda had a much less defined line between the students and the teachers in both a physical and interactional sense. The students occasionally used nicknames or first names with teachers and lab technicians, sometimes used the informal tu with them, they shared their personal problem with them, and they also regularly occupied the same
spaces (teachers sat behind the teachers’ desks, teachers milled about among students as they worked). Because of this, the line between expert identity as performed for teachers and as performed for peers was also much less defined. The size of the class (with only nine students) and the nature of the work (long-term, hands-on projects) further contributed to interpersonal collaboration between both teachers and students, and often around a physical product such as a dress or a drawing. The students-against-teachers dynamic was not nearly as present in the 3Moda as it was in the 3BLC, at least in regards to schoolwork. Further, since the students’ grades in the 3Moda were also based partially on how hard they worked, on how cooperative they were, and on their ability to “learn how to learn” (as explained further in Chapter 7), the precision of their final products was not as high stakes as it was in the 3BLC, for example.

Abundant commentary and explicit evaluations circulated among students and teachers about their own and others’ academic performances, which were often up for public consumption rather than directed at specific individuals in private contexts. Thus, similar to the evaluation of designs in Design Lab in Chapter 5, Federico’s incomplete work in Transcript 33 (“He has a pencilcase?”) and Alice’s confusion in Transcript 34 (“Why don’t you go over there?”) are public matters. Federico—the least motivated student in the class—stepped into, or perhaps simply wanted to try on, the ‘good student’ identity by publicly displaying not only his very own pencil, but an entire pencilcase full of writing and drawing supplies. Alice—a student who routinely encountered difficulty in understanding directions and carrying out work on her own—attempts to maintain her ‘capable student’ façade by doing what the other more ‘expert’ students are doing: sitting
together and helping each other out with the flat sketch. However, she is pushed out of this position by Gaia, who essentially blows Alice’s cover by telling her to go and sit with the other students who don’t know how to do the work, and to leave her to work on her own.

Studying the ways that students simultaneously engage in and distance themselves from academic discourses and schooled practices—both frontstage and backstage—has the potential to uncover important interactional moves that often go overlooked in classroom settings because they do not fit neatly into official classroom discourse or institutional expectations. Such research allows us to consider how students draw on their full communicative repertoires to establish trust with each other, to approach difficult topics, and to find in-roads into fuller class participation. Understanding the social weight of particular student interactions, and how these differ (or not) across different classes and schools, may also contribute to the way that students are ultimately evaluated (as discussed further in Chapter 7) and therefore which doors will open for them, and which doors will remain closed.
CHAPTER 7: EVERYDAY DEFINITIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF
‘THE GOOD STUDENT’ ACROSS THE THREE SCHOOLS

7.1. Introduction

The evaluation of student performance occurs throughout the school year, both synchronically and diachronically, as shown in the case of the interrogazioni in the 3BLC and 3Meccanica on the one hand, and in the evaluation of Daniela’s work in Design lab in 3Moda on the other hand. In this sense, evaluation goes hand-in-hand with the performances of academic expertise that we saw in Chapters 5 and 6. As we have seen in these chapters, students demonstrate their academic expertise throughout the school day by being able to answer teachers’ questions about school content (e.g., Ancient Greek, mechanical systems) and by being able to create physical products (e.g., clothing, designs), but the demonstration of expertise also relies on knowing how and when it is appropriate to do so, and which repertoire elements to deploy in doing so. Blurtling out the right answers at the wrong moment or in the wrong way, confidently stating the wrong answers in the right moment or the right way, or missing a chance to speak up, for example, suggest that a student is still developing the communicative competence needing to participate “successfully”—and to be evaluated as such—in a school setting.

The secondary school classroom is an especially complex and challenging interactional context, in which students are treated as relative novices in the content areas they study (e.g., Ancient Greek, mechanical systems, English, fashion design), and where they are regularly evaluated by resident content experts: their teachers. In this sense,
students are simultaneously socialized into the discourse practices of, for instance, Classics scholars, mechanical engineers, and fashion designers, as well as into the discourse practices associated with the ideals of their school, specialization, or specific class (see Chapter 4). As described in further detail below, the ways in which students at the classical lyceum are expected to demonstrate both content area knowledge and their general belonging in that school often differ significantly from those associated with the vocational school, for instance. Thus, a student’s performance of expertise is judged against the explicit or implicit criteria for success in the academic discourse communities in which they are members: that of their school (e.g., classical lyceum, technical institute, vocational school) and that of the subjects in which they seek to perform expertise (e.g., Ancient Greek, mechanical systems, or technical design). Where these two academic discourse communities overlap is where a student’s overall “classroom competence” is evaluated (Gutiérrez 1995).

This chapter focuses on the ways in which casual, ongoing evaluations of students illuminate the inextricable interconnectedness of ‘behavior’ and academics—or discourse competence and academic competence—in the evaluation of students. It also focuses on the constructs that teachers draw on to determine what it means to be a good, or successful, student (i.e., demonstrate overall classroom competence) in these contexts. The focus of this chapter is on how evaluative terms (especially “bravo” and “scolarizzato”) are used by teachers and students in classroom contexts. I begin by proposing candidate meanings for these somewhat overdetermined terms, which I use in the original Italian throughout this chapter, before going on to analyze how they function.
in academic discourse socialization. I then go on to analyze more nuanced descriptions of student behavior and academic performance that do not draw on these terms. This chapter concludes by suggesting that the evaluative language used in schools on a casual, everyday basis is what ultimately socializes students into academic discourse communities.

### 7.2 Defining evaluative terms: “bravo” and “scolarizzato”

The adjective *bravo* encompasses being good (at something), capable, kind, well-behaved, and talented, much like the qualities that can be intended with the word ‘good’ in English. However, the Italian term *buono*\(^28\) (which also translates to ‘good’ in English) complicates simply translating *bravo* into ‘good’ for the sake of this chapter or treating the two as synonymous in my analysis. As the definitions of *bravo* and *buono* from Treccani Encyclopedia\(^29\) indicate (Figure 16), the semantic field of *bravo* is almost entirely encompassed by that of *buono*.

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\(^{28}\) *buono* = masc. singular; *buona* = fem. singular; *buoni* = masc. or mixed plural; *buone* = fem. plural; *bontà* = noun  
\(^{29}\) The Oxford English Dictionary of Italian
The terms can both be used to describe someone who is trustworthy, capable, or skillful at something. In fact, *bravo* is entirely encompassed by the definition of *buono*, save for the element of success: *bravo* is used to describe someone who has *success* at something, whereas someone who is *buono* may have good intentions and go through all of the right motions, but without necessarily distinguishing him/herself in any particular way. While this is arguably a small difference, it is one that is important in an analysis of how students are evaluated in class: it is the difference between barely passing a class with a grade of 6 (the lowest grade one can earn without failing) and excelling at a class with a grade of 8, 9, or even the coveted 10 (scores reserved for exceptional work).

To provide an example from outside of a school context: while one would like their doctor or their lawyer to be both *bravo* and *buono*, one would likely prefer a doctor
or lawyer that is a *brava persona* over one who is a *buon uomo* or a *buona donna*. That is, *buono* as a descriptor of one’s character connotes a certain sweet, docile, rule-following nature, while the connotation of *bravo* as a character trait leans more toward an image of someone who is quick-witted and knowledgeable, and also has many of the traits connoted by *buono*. Further, in colloquial speech and in many regional dialects in Italy, the use of ‘*buono*’ in a description of a person can connote simplemindedness, as in Veronese *bon butel*, and Piedmontese *bon om*. Based on teachers’ common laments that they would like students to develop better critical thinking skills, one would deduce that being *bravo* is a trait that schools want to cultivate in students, rather than being *buono*.

However, *scolarizzato* overlaps significantly with the moral valences of the term *buono* but applied to the context of school (see Figure 17). Providing the common definition of *scolarizzato* is a less straightforward task than defining *bravo*, since the term took on a distinctly local meaning in Cittadina that is not reflected in dictionaries or encyclopedias. While the definition in Treccani Encyclopedia overlaps with the English term ‘schooled,’ in the sense of ‘educated,’ this translation and definition do not get at the core of the term *scolarizzato* as it was used by teachers. In fact, teachers seemed more comfortable defining what it was *not*, rather than what it was, as in the examples to come; however, *scolarizzato* could be explained as the quality of knowing when and how to play the role of ‘good student’ by doing homework, studying, and participating appropriately in classroom interaction. In this sense, it is about being morally “good” (or *buono*) in the context of school.
Following this logic, a student who is both *bravo* and *scolarizzato* is a student who demonstrates academic expertise within the behavioral parameters of the classroom. Being one, however, does not necessarily presuppose being the other: one can, in theory, be *scolarizzato* without being *bravo* (perhaps being well liked by teachers for behavioral reasons, but without any particularly outstanding academic achievements) and one can be *bravo* without being *scolarizzato* (demonstrating facility in the subject material, but without necessarily respecting the interactional norms of the classroom or meeting the teacher’s behavioral expectations). The following section analyzes the use of these two
terms via an analysis of fieldnotes and interview data from the 2016-2017 school year in Cittadina.

7.3 Uses of the terms across the three schools

As described briefly above, the term *scolarizzato*—which I had never heard prior to arriving at my fieldsites—was often used by teachers at the technical institute to describe student behavior, but typically in the negative, as in *non sono per niente scolarizzati* ‘they’re not *scolarizzati* at all,’ and was typically used to talk about the students rather than to them. The term *bravo*, on the other hand, was used across all schools, and was more often used as an evaluative comment by teachers during in-class interaction with students, as well as between students to comment on their own or others’ work, both sincerely and sarcastically. The use of *bravo* is reflected in recordings and fieldnotes from almost every class session, used either by students or by teachers, but *scolarizzato* was typically only used by teachers in one-on-one interactions with me either immediately after class in off-the-record conversations or in interview settings. That is, students would often be told that they were *bravi*, but almost never *scolarizzati*.

The use of *bravo* as used in school contexts was familiar to me due to its use across other realms of social life (including friendships, family life, and work contexts), but it took on another layer of meaning in its use as an evaluative comment (by both students and teachers) in the context of the classroom’s IRE sequences and students’ performances of schooled knowledge, as shown in the examples below. A versatile word,

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30 *scolarizzato* = masc. singular; *scolarizzata* = fem. singular; *scolarizzati* = masc. or mixed plural; *scolarizzate* = fem. plural; *scolarizzazione* = noun
31 *bravo* = masc. singular; *brava* = fem. singular; *bravi* = masc. or mixed plural; *brave* = fem. plural; *bravura* = noun
*bravo* was used by teachers to reward students, to encourage them, to motivate them, and even to tease them. Students used *bravo* with their peers, and sometimes toward teachers, for the same reasons. Some examples (from my fieldnotes) of the use of *bravo* by teachers include the following:

Prof starts lecturing on Greek philosopher Anaximenes, and all the students whip out notebooks and start sharpening pencils. As the teacher opens the textbook, she comments to the students that they were “*bravissimi*” during the review of Anaximander and Thales that they had just done. (Classical lyceum)

Prof has a student come up to the board to draw a mind map while her classmates brainstorm about words related to the theme of “ethics.” As she adds words around the outside of the mind map, the prof tells students “*bravo*” and “*brava*”. (Classical lyceum)

When a student is invited to the board to draw elastic connective tissue, she gets up and draws some wavy lines that are kind of discontinuous, and the prof says “*ok bravissima.*” (Technical institute – Biotechnology strand)

By the end of fashion lab, the students have finished the work they were supposed to do with the lab technician. When the professor comes back into the classroom, she tells them in a pleased tone, “*brave, brave, brave!*” (Vocational school – Fashion strand)

I see Roberta show her sketch to the prof and the prof says “*brava, brava.*” Roberta nods, seeming satisfied, and then stands up and puts her sketch in her portfolio. (Vocational school – Fashion strand)

Students also used *bravo* to comment (either sincerely or sarcastically) on their classmates’ and their own contributions in class:

Prof calls on students to read and answer different questions from a multiple choice worksheet. One girl gives the correct answer and her classmate sitting behind her tells her “*bravaaaa,*” to which she responds “grazie” (‘thank you’) with a big smile. (Human Sciences Lyceum)

The students ask for some clarification as the prof draws a small diagram on the board. They continue asking for concrete examples of the concept the prof is attempting to explain. One boy brings up a point that gets an “*esatto*” (‘exactly’) from the prof, and the boy sitting behind him slaps him on the back and says “*bravo.*” (Technical institute – IT strand)

The prof asks the class how photovoltaic cells work. He explains that they capture photons and transform them into energy. He cites a point that a student had previously made, saying “as Marco said before,” and a couple of boys say, loudly and possibly sarcastically “*BRAVO MARCO!*” (Vocational school – Electrical Maintenance Strand)

During a review session, the prof asks an example question from the test they’re about to take, asking whether the narrator was internal or external to the story. Antonio whispers with his neighbor and then says really loudly, “*INTERNO*” (‘internal’). The prof confirms that this is right
and Antonio says loudly, “VEDI QUANTO SON BRAVO?” (‘see how bravo I am?’) (Technical institute – Mechanical Strand)

After an intense review session in anatomy and physiology, the prof tells the students “bravi,” and one girl claps enthusiastically and says to her desk neighbor “bravissimi!” (Technical institute – Biotechnology strand)

Students would even occasionally comment on their teachers’ bravura, as in the following example:

The prof draws something on the board and some of the students look up and say, impressed, “ma quanto e’ bravo?” (‘but how bravo is he?’) (Technical institute – Mechanical strand)

A striking example of how bravo could be used to socialize students into their role as emergent experts in their professional community is shown in this vignette from Professor Giannetti’s class. During the first week of school, I visited Professor Giannetti’s lesson with the third-year electrical maintenance class at the vocational school, where he had been teaching for years. An excerpt of my fieldnotes from that session is shown below:

1 I enter the classroom to find a big loud class of all boys! I go to a desk at the back of the room and the boy who’s sitting in front of me is wearing a shirt whose back reads “Fuckin’ Fuckin’ Party House.”
2 There’s a stick figure of a woman with devil horns above this phrase.
3 Giannetti starts the lesson about the scala lineare (a tool which he has in his hand) and they go over the terminology related to using it. He reminds them, Ok ragazzi ricordiamoci sempre di usare il linguaggio (Ok guys, let’s remember to always use the [technical] language). They start getting distracted while he’s explaining how to read the scala lineare and he says, Ok ragazzi ascoltate. Questo non lo spiegherò più volte, e poi dovete andare nel laboratorio con Rossi ed utilizzare queste capacità, e se non sapete come fare, avrete dei problemi (Ok guys, listen. I won’t explain this anymore, and then you have to go to the laboratory with Rossi and use these skills, and if you don’t know how to do it, you’ll have some problems). And then they quiet down and appear to listen.
4 As he goes on with his explanation, he starts an instruction with, Visto che siete dei bravi tecnici…(Considering that you (pl.) are bravo technicians…). A student reacts to this with a scoff, looking around at
his classmates and at Giannetti. But Giannetti doesn’t smile. He’s being serious about them being bravi. Again, he says Se vedete questo numero, voi che siete bravi, direte ...(If you (pl.) see this number, you (pl.) bravo technicians will say…) Nobody laughs this time. Later, he asks them to solve a problem and a boy in the class who clearly gets it, says the answer. Giannetti asks him how he arrived at that answer, and when the boy offers his explanation, Giannetti says Bravo, ok, però questa è una logica tua. Ma vediamo come si fa. (Bravo, ok, but this is your logic. But let’s see how it’s done [the technical way].) After explaining it he says Ok, voi avete già fatto questa con la logica, ma adesso ripassiamo questo formula. (Ok, you already did this with logic, but now let’s review this formula.) He goes over some things again, saying Ok e questo cos’è? (Ok and what’s this?). A boy in the back starts answering and the professor cuts him off, points at him, and says Bravo! The use of bravo in this class creates a nice atmosphere.

Throughout this fast-paced, high-energy lesson with the third-year electrical maintenance students, Professor Giannetti uses bravo to legitimize students’ participation in his class and to socialize them into the academic discourse used in his electrical maintenance class. In lines 17-18 and 21-22, his use of bravo positions the students not only as technicians, but as technicians who are highly capable in their jobs. His use of bravo in lines 26 and 34, however, serves the purpose of evaluating student performance. Recognizing that these students are fairly new to the world of electrical maintenance, since they have just entered the third year and are therefore just beginning an increasingly specialized focus on this material, he seeks opportunities to build up the students as legitimate participants in this community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991): as the resident expert, he is including these novices as capable members of the community of electrical maintenance technicians via a scaffolded introduction to the field.

As the year went on, the term bravo was used in all of the classrooms I observed. In an interview with Professor Corso, an English teacher who taught the 3Meccanica, I
asked what, in her opinion, it meant to be a bravo student. She seemed to have thought about this question before, and gave me the following concise answer:

Transcript 37: “Bravo cittadino”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>A:</th>
<th>Che cosa significa, per Lei, essere un bravo studente?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>Allora, quello che significa per me bravo studente. Prima di tutto significa bravo cittadino.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>Ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>Prima di tutto, per me, personalmente, vengono... viene l’educazione, la correttezza, le buone maniere, e non ci può essere cultura secondo me se non c’è alla base un’educazione sociale di saper vivere nella collettività rispettando le regole. Rispetto a noialtri. Eh...quindi per me prima di tutto viene il comportamento, poi vengono le nozioni, le nozioni linguistiche, l’acquisizione di conoscenze. E per me un bravo studente è uno studente che prima di tutto, torno a ripetere, è una brava persona, un bravo cittadino, che poi è anche competente e che quindi sa, conosce poi, che ha le conoscenze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>Ok. (.) Ok. (writing notes))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>Questo per me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>What does being a bravo student mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>Ok then, what bravo student means to me. First of all it means bravo citizen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>Ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>First of all, for me, personally, come...comes upbringing, decency, good manners, and there can’t be culture in my opinion if there isn’t at the foundation a social upbringing of knowing how to live in a collectivity following the rules. Regarding us. Eh...so for me first of all comes the behavior, then come the notions, the linguistic notions, the acquisition of knowledge. And for me a bravo student is a student who first of all, I repeat, is a brava person, a bravo citizen, who then is also competent and who therefore knows, knows then, who has the knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>Ok. (.) Ok. (writing notes))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>C:</td>
<td>This is in my opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Corso’s definition of what it means to be a bravo student is clear: first of all being a bravo citizen (lines 4-5, 16-18) and a brava person (line 18), and second of all being competent and having the knowledge [of the school subject matter] (lines 18-20). She mentions in her summary of a bravo citizen the factors of a person’s upbringing, their decency, and good manners (lines 8-9), including in this formulation the concept of cultura, ‘culture’ (line 9). When ‘culture’ is invoked in discussions about social life and person type in Italy, it typically denotes what is often referred to more specifically as “high culture,” i.e., involving intellectual and aesthetic ideals, different from popular culture and from the masses. In this teacher’s formulation of culture, she includes the
importance of having a sense of civic duty, of behaving in a civil manner (lines 9-12).

Interestingly, she implicates not the parents of the child, but society more generally when she says that a ‘social upbringing’ is necessary for developing ‘culture’ (line 11), suggesting that this in some way is the job of the school, and therefore her own job as a teacher. Knowing how to use English, in the case of her students, or learning the subject material in general, is seen as secondary to being a *bravo* citizen. In this sense, it seems that Professor Corso aligns being a *bravo* student with being *scolarizzato* first, and proficient in subject material second.

I also sought to understand the student perspective on what it takes to be *bravo* via an interview with some students from the 3BLC at the classical lyceum. Similar in some ways to Professor Corso’s description of *bravura* in students, these students (Melissa, Lucia, Natalia, and Alessia) also frame being a *bravo* student as being linked to ‘doing being’ a good student. However, in their case, it seems as though they frame *bravo* as being a more objective and measurable criterion at the lyceum than it might be at the technical institute.

*Transcript 38: “How does one come to be *bravo* at the lyceum?” (Int 3BLC 2017.05.08)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALP:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>ALP:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Questa è forse una domanda più astratta, ma come si fa ad essere un bravo studente al liceo?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This is maybe a more abstract question, but how does one come to be a bravo student at the lyceum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>mh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nat:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>forse...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luc:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>è la costanza...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mel:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ah. ok. ok.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ALP:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>anche sta’ attenta in classe perché comunque posso studia’ 10 mila giorni però se non sto attenta in classe quando c’è ‘na spiegazione... è difficile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luc:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>la maggior parte delle materie si. Soprattutto filosofia ((some laughs and groans indicating agreement))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nat:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luc:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nat:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luc:</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Mel:</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ALP:</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luc:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nat:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Most of all philosophy ((some laughs and groans indicating agreement))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ale: Piu che altro cioe lo fai per te stesso. Questa e una cosa che pensi che e giusto per te lo fai. Se no, e inutile che lo fai insomma.

ALP: Si. Perche se io guardo il lavoro che fate voi, cioe la quantita di, cioe, anche le pagine che fate durante le lezioni qualche volta e un po impressionante.

Ss: Si

ALP: Perche se io guardo il lavoro che fate voi, cioe la quantita di, cioe, anche le pagine che fate durante le lezioni qualche volta e un po impressionante.

NG: ma pensa che appassionati della materia... insomma ((laughing))

MM: Secondo me [xxx] cioe un po' come ha detto lei cioe magari capi' che e una cosa per te, e quindi, che poi ti dà appunto la costanza dello studio ogni giorno. Se non capisci che è una cosa per te, magari oggi c'ho da fa', questo che è piu interessante, poi diventa ogni cosa piu interessante..."ok, studio."

ALP: Certo.

NG: Se lo faccio, lo faccio perchè lo devo fare, cioe, non perchè magari "oddio che bello studiare greco"..."((laughing))...latino.¨ "((laughing))

MM: Penso che em pochi "O che bello devo studia' greco.¨

My question is met with some initial hemming and hawing by the group, until Melissa offers that the way to being bravo at the lyceum is ‘perseverance’ (line 6). Lucia adds to that, suggesting that it is not enough to simply study for ‘ten thousand days’ (lines 9-11) but that paying attention in class is also a crucial part of bravura. Natalia notes that philosophy is particularly difficult, suggesting that paying attention in that class is extremely important (lines 10-12). However, Alessia, a very high-achieving student, asserts that being bravo is something ‘you do for yourself,’ and that doing it for any other reason would be ‘useless’ (line 24). I begin to hint that I agree that being passionate about
the material would help them do all of the studying they need to do, and Natalia picks up on this opportunity to make a sarcastic comment about how passionate they all are about their studies (lines 32-33), in essence refuting both my and Alessia’s stance. Melissa, walking the line between Natalia and Lucia on the one hand, and Alessia and me on the other, suggests that it’s easy to find more interesting things to do than study, but in the end you need to do it for yourself (lines 34-43), rather than for the teacher. Natalia, also a high-achieving student, sticks to her guns and offers another sarcastic comment that she studies only because she has to and not because she is overcome with her love of Ancient Greek and Latin, and Melissa agrees that there probably aren’t many people who adore studying Greek (lines 49-50).

The conversation here is somewhat tense, and I sense that we are talking past each other: while I had attempted to ask how bravura is defined at the lyceum, the students (understandably) understood that I was referring to some objective measure of bravura (such as getting good grades) and how they achieve that specific objective. Thus, they begin to explain to me how it is that one gets good grades: by studying, paying attention in class, and persevering. Only one student—Alessia—mentions “doing it for yourself,” orienting to some intrinsic measure of bravura, like “passion.” Overall, the students’ definition of bravo doesn’t quite emerge from this conversation, but their descriptions of how one becomes bravo line up quite firmly with actions that would also label them scolarizzati (only Alessia offers an example of ‘bravo student’ that does not involve ways to visibly act out the part of the ‘good student’). In this sense, similar to Professor Corso’s account of what it takes to be a bravo student, scolarizzazione is largely
subsumed under the umbrella of *bravura*. However, in the context of the 3BLC, the students frame *bravura* as being for the most part impossible without also ‘doing being’ a good student (i.e., being *scolarizzato*), which renders redundant the use of *scolarizzazione* as a separate category.

Perhaps for this reason, the topic of *scolarizzazione* was much more present in the technical and vocational schools (where the students were said to be *non scolarizzati*) than in the lyceum where students were presumably more *scolarizzati* than their peers at other schools. As discussed throughout previous chapters, the students in the 3Meccanica (often deemed to *not* be *scolarizzati*) were seen by their teachers as disruptive, not academically inclined, and too energetic. The students in the 3Moda (also deemed to *not* be *scolarizzati*) were considered by their teachers to be academically ill-prepared, in need of guidance, and as not being ‘afraid of grades’ (i.e., unafraid of, and not motivated by the prospect of, failing). While the 3BLC was also considered a lively class by many teachers, and they were sometimes described by their teachers as *poco concentrati*, literally ‘little concentrated,’ or unfocused, they were never described as *non scolarizzati*. Instead, a common lament about the 3BLC was that they were *attaccati al voto*, ‘attached to the grade,’ meaning that they were always checking with teachers to see what their grades were, and were therefore perceived to be motivated to study only by the prospect of getting a good grade (Interview 2016.12.13). If anything, this was the opposite problem from the one encountered by teachers in the 3Meccanica and 3Moda.

The concept of *scolarizzazione* was so rarely mentioned at the lyceum that it does not emerge as a salient construct at that school, and does not appear in my fieldnotes,
interviews, or classroom discourse data from the lyceum or the 3BLC. It was mentioned often enough at the technical and vocational schools, however, that I incorporated it into the interviews I conducted with those teachers at these two schools, which are analyzed below. In an interview with a colleague of Professor Corso’s, Professor Aurelio, I again brought up the question of what it means to be a bravo student. Specifically, I asked Professor Aurelio (denoted as A below) what the difference was between being bravo and being scolarizzato. Many of my hours in the 3Meccanica classroom were spent observing his mechanical systems class, and he drew on these shared experiences to illustrate his point.

Transcript 39: “non scolarizzati”

| 1 | ALP: Che cosa sono le differenze tra uno studente scolarizzato e un bravo studente? […] Ho sentito dire del 3M eccanica che ci sono gli studenti molto capaci ma “non sono per niente scolarizzati”? |
| 2 | A: =Si |
| 3 | ALP: E quindi capire com’è che si identifica uno scolarizzato—cioè è possibile essere bravo ma non scolarizzato e vice versa? |
| 4 | A: =Si. Purtroppo sì. È il caso di certi alunni di questa classe, no? |
| 5 | Del 3M dove c’è un gruppetto di alunni che sono intellettualmente, secondo me, brillanti perché le cose le capiscono velocemente, e le sanno spiegare anche bene. |
| 6 | Il problema è che non stanno in silenzio mentre si spiega. Parlano dei fatti loro e eh…magari loro riescono a capire lo stesso perché appunto, son svegli, pero’ danno fastidio ad altri che magari avrebbero più bisogno del silenzio, e…ecc. Poi magari, questi studenti qua potrebbero essere penalizzati nel eh—questi bravi ma |
| 7 | ALP: What are the differences between a scolarizzato student and a bravo student? […] I’ve heard it said of the 3Meccanica that there are very capable students but “they’re not scolarizzati at all”? |
| 8 | A: =Yes |
| 9 | ALP: And so understanding how it is that one identifies someone as scolarizzato—like is it possible to be bravo but not scolarizzato and vice versa? |
| 10 | A: Yes. Unfortunately yes. It’s the case of certain students in this class, no? From the 3M where there’s a little group of students who are intellectually, in my opinion, brilliant because they understand things quickly, and they even know how to explain them well. The problem is that they don’t stay quiet while someone is lecturing. They talk about their own things and eh…maybe they manage to understand anyway because, indeed, they’re bright, but they bother the others who maybe would need more silence, and…there you go. Then maybe these students could be penalized in uh—these ones who are bravi but not scolarizzati—in the class conduct grade |
because if [elsewhere] they get an 8 or a 9, they should get a 7 in class conduct. Or 6 if they have some disciplinary notes in the class register.

ALP: Ah ok. I understand. Ehm...so the definition of scolarizzazione would be like one who stays quiet during lectures...

A: Well, as an extreme negative example there’s the student who can’t even manage to stay seated during lectures. And who gets up, goes around, keeps asking to go to the bathroom, or rather leaves without asking, or who maybe makes sounds during lectures or keeps looking at his cellphone, chats with a classmate … Mh like a proper definition doesn’t exist, but these are the negative behaviors.

In this interview with Professor Aurelio at the end of January 2017, about a week before the official end of the term and after several days of school closure due to an earthquake followed by snow, he likely had both grading and student behavior on his mind a bit more than usual. Hurrying to wrap up the last units and the last assignments before the end of the term, he had been spending a few days wrangling students for oral exams and making sure he was caught up in his class. I orient my question about bravura and scolarizzazione by bringing up a quote I had heard from several teachers at the technical institute, saying of the students in the 3Meccanica that they are very capable, but not at all scolarizzati (lines 3-6).

ALP: What are the differences between a scolarizzato student and a bravo student? […] I’ve heard it said of the 3Meccanica that there are very capable students but “they’re not scolarizzati at all”=

A: =Yes

ALP: And so understanding how it is that one identifies someone as scolarizzato—like is it possible to be bravo but not scolarizzato and vice versa?

A: Yes. Unfortunately yes. It’s the case of certain students in this class, no?
Before I can fully finish the sentence, Professor Aurelio jumps in and confirms. When I ask if it’s possible to be *bravo* but not *scolarizzato* and vice versa (lines 10-11), he responds with ‘unfortunately, yes’ (line 12), and draws on the 3Meccanica as an example of this unfortunate case, citing specifically a particular group of students.

**A:** Yes. Unfortunately yes. It’s the case of certain students in this class, no? From the 3M where there’s a little group of students who are intellectually, in my opinion, brilliant because they understand things quickly, and they even know how to explain them well. The problem is that they don’t stay quiet while someone is lecturing. They talk about their own things and eh…maybe they manage to understand anyway because, indeed, they’re bright, but they bother the others who maybe would need more silence, and…there you go.

He provides as an example a small group of boys in the all-male 3Meccanica who are, in his opinion, ‘intellectually brilliant because they understand things quickly’ (lines 15-16) and who also know how to explain course concepts well—perhaps referring to their performance in *interrogazioni* or on other types of exams (line 18) but who are disruptive in class, talking when the teacher is talking (lines 19-21). He does not state that this talking bothers him while he’s lecturing, as much as he worries that it bothers other students who ‘would need more silence’ (lines 24-26). This example brings to mind Professor Corso’s definition of *bravo cittadino* (‘good citizen’)—a fundamental component of what it takes to be a *bravo studente* (‘good student’) in her opinion—in Transcript 37 (lines 11-12), that is: ‘knowing how to live in a collectivity, following the rules.’ Aurelio then suggests that this disruptive behavior could be punished if it is frequent enough, even if the students who display it are academically successful:

**A:** Then maybe these students could be penalized in uh—these ones who are *bravi* but not *scolarizzati*—in the class conduct grade because if [elsewhere] they get an 8 or a 9, they should get a 7 in class conduct. Or 6 if they have some disciplinary notes in the class register.
Unlike Professor Corso, who treats the definition of a bravo student as someone who is first a good citizen (‘bravo cittadino’) or a good person (‘brava persona’) and then is also a competent student in the sense of learning given study materials, Professor Aurelio keeps behavior and academic success in separate categories. Corso characterizes a bravo student as, first of all, someone who is a bravo citizen who knows how to respect others, who is then also a capable student. Aurelio’s argument, however, might permit a student to get 8 or 9 in the subject material because he/she understands it and ‘can explain it well,’ while nonetheless getting a 6 or a 7 as their class conduct grade if they are disruptive (lines 29-32). When I offer a definition of scolarizzazione based on what I have deduced from his explanation (lines 34-37), he stops me to give me ‘an extreme negative example’ (line 38) of what it is not.

\textbf{ALP:} Ah ok. I understand. Ehm…so the definition of scolarizzazione would be like one who stays quiet during lectures…

\textbf{A:} Well, as an extreme negative example there’s the student who can’t even manage to stay seated during lectures. And who gets up, goes around, keeps asking to go to the bathroom, or rather leaves without asking, or who maybe makes sounds during lectures or keeps looking at his cellphone, chats with a classmate… Mh like a proper definition doesn’t exist, but these are the negative behaviors.

Students who cannot stay in their seats, who keep making attempts to escape the classroom (by ‘asking to go to the bathroom’ or ‘leaving without asking’), and who create and seek diversions (by ‘making sounds,’ ‘looking at his cellphone,’ or ‘chatting with a classmate’) are students who are, according to Aurelio, not scolarizzati. In fact, the term ‘scolarizzato’—nearly always used in the negative—seems to bring to mind these ‘extreme negative examples’ rather than examples of how a student who is scolarizzato would behave. He concedes in lines 47-49 that ‘a proper definition [of scolarizzazione] doesn’t exist,’ and reiterates the idea of negative behavior that he has just explained. In
this sense, discourses about the vaguely defined *scolarizzazione* resemble those about “academic language”: seemingly something that the students are always lacking (Valdés, 2004). Corso and Aurelio’s definitions of *bravo* highlight the question of whether academic performance *and* behavior are ultimately both part of its formulation. Corso frames conduct and academic performance as both being part of *bravura*, while Aurelio frames *bravura* as including academic performance alone.

These uses of “*bravo*” hint at this word’s overdetermination, in the sense that its meaning(s) are constituted by its social histories of use (Rymes 2016, Althusser 1971) across diverse contexts. “*Scolarizzato*” seems to have emerged as a means of disambiguating the use of “*bravo*” in school contexts, but it now seems that almost everything that students do in school points to one (or both) of these words, or to their inverses. Clearly, however, the students in a given school are included in a variety of social and interactional activity that cannot simply be summed up as either (not) *bravo* or (not) *scolarizzato*. Relying on these two words—especially *bravo*, which has taken on so many valences of meaning (as shown in the above transcripts) that it essentially means whatever teachers want it to mean—severely limits the ways in which student life is understood by teachers.

**7.4 Other ways of describing students and student performance**

When I began to circulate at the classical lyceum, I was told that the 3BLC was the slightly more problematic of the two third-year classical classes. With this in mind, I scheduled an interview at the classical lyceum with the Greek and Latin teacher for the 3BLC, Professor Galetti. This was about halfway through the year, in February, and I
asked her to think back to what she knew about the class before she started working with them in the 2016-2017 school year. In her response, she does not use the terms *bravo* or *scolarizzato*, and instead describes a more nuanced perspective on the 3BLC; specifically, her initial surprise and relief at being able to establish a positive rapport with them despite their reputation. She frames this rapport in terms of their willing attitude, mentioning in spite of their bad grades that she is having a good experience with them.

Transcript 40: “*disposti a mettersi in gioco*” (willing to challenge themselves)

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<th>G:</th>
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<th>ALP:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>G:</td>
<td>Allora diciamo che la percezione che</td>
<td>ok</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>ho avuto all'inizio era un pochino</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>pregiudicata dalle voci che</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>avevo. Nel senso di una</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>classe particolarmente vivace, anche</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>dal punto di vista quindi della</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>disciplina, un po' difficile da tenere.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>E anche nei comportamenti non</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>particolarmente positiva.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ALP:</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>G:</td>
<td>Quindi inizialmente entrando avevo</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>queste voci che erano un po'</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>allarmanti. Nella realtà, invece, le</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>cose sono andate in maniera</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>completamente diversa.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>ALP:</td>
<td>ok</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>G:</td>
<td>Nel senso che nella classe si è</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>stabilito un rapporto molto positivo</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ALP: si] dove anche le valutazioni</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>che spesso sono estremamente</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>negative non hanno minimamente</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>inficiato il rapporto di fiducia e anche</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>di-- diciamo, e anche positivo</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>che io sento che loro hanno con</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>ALP:</td>
<td>Sì. Anche visto da fuori devo</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>dire che avete veramente un rapporto</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>molto buono</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>G:</td>
<td>Cioè sono molto ben disposti così</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>come io sono molto ben disposta nei</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>loro confronti, cioè non:.; diciamo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>che sono state tolte tutte quelle</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>ombre che inizialmente avevano fatto</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>entrare me con diciamo qualche</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td>paura, qualche timore.</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>ALP:</td>
<td>ok</td>
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Here, Galetti walks me through her initial fears and worries about working with the 3BLC, saying that she had heard from ‘voices’ around her (lines 3-4, 12-13) that this would be a difficult class in terms of discipline and behavior. However, upon meeting the class and beginning her work with them, she did not find this to be the case, and instead established a good rapport with them (lines 17-18). Importantly, throughout this excerpt, she mentions the students’ bad grades several times (lines 19-20, 38-40, 47-48), and thereby makes clear that having a good rapport with students does not either equate to or rely on the students getting good grades. That is, these students have a stable enough rapport with their teacher that a low grade does not incite anger, rather it incites the desire to improve their grades. While Galetti does not label the students ‘bravi,’ she concedes that they are ‘willing to challenge themselves and acknowledge their shortcomings’ (lines 42-45), and she generally seems to give them credit for keeping their chins up and acting mature even though they get bad grades. As I observed throughout the year, and as other teachers mentioned to me, the students in the 3BLC were very motivated by grades and by the prospect of being evaluated in general. The climate of the classical lyceum, in which interrogazioni are inevitable and only somewhat predictable, promotes this
evaluation-centered mode of teaching and learning. Many students (including Lucia and Ilenia) consistently got very low grades in Galetti’s classes, particularly on written work in Ancient Greek, where it was so common to get a grade of 4 out of 10 on translations that students would often laugh it off, sometimes showing their papers to me with a sarcastic comment about how bravo they were.

Here, if we draw on Aurelio’s separation of conduct and academic performance, we have the other side of the coin that he described in Transcript 39: while in the 3Meccanica, he specified a group of students that was bravo but not scolarizzato, Galetti describes here the students in the 3BLC who are scolarizzati but not bravi. Toward the end of the year, students in the 3BLC who were at risk of having a failing final grade often studied a little extra and asked to be given a planned interrogazione so that they could improve their grades, thus demonstrating their willingness to study and undergo extra evaluations (acting the part of diligent students who might be considered scolarizzati). Surely, they did not make up for their very low grades by doing this type of extra credit work, but in looking at the students’ final grades, where the final class average in Greek is 6.7 and over half the class had a final grade of 6 (the minimum passing grade), it appears that this willingness to demonstrate their scolarizzazione contributed to this good rapport Galetti tells me about in the interview above. In fact, it may have been worth an extra point in some cases where students were borderline failing (i.e., not being bravi). The abundance of barely-passing grades in this class are evidence of both the students’ willingness to persevere despite previous failures, and the teacher’s willingness to value—to an extent—students’ efforts to conform to her expectations of
both *scolarizzazione* (acting the part of the ‘good student’) and *bravura* (successfully performing academic expertise).

In my interview with Professor Fiori, the English teacher of 3Moda at the vocational school, she is frank about the variety of factors that must be taken into consideration by her and her vocational school colleagues to evaluate their students. She doesn’t mention *bravura* or *scolarizzazione* either, instead describing student conduct (and the evaluation of it) with more nuance.

*Transcript 41: riconoscimento dell’impegno (recognition of effort)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALP: Al professionale, la paura del voto non c’è tanto, no?</th>
<th>ALP: At the vocational school, there isn’t much fear of the grade, no?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F: No ((laughing))</td>
<td>F: No ((laughing))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ALP: Il modo di valutare qui, come funziona?</td>
<td>ALP: The way of evaluating here, how does it work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F: In teoria abbiamo gli stessi schemi che ha tutto l’istituto tecnico… ma nella realtà, siccome noi dobbiamo mettere insieme le loro competenze - ma per molti soggetti anche il fatto di mantenerli in un ambito d’istruzione scolastica, perché il rischio del abbandono è sempre molto alto -- è ovvio che nella valutazione si insiscano tanti altri elementi. E c’è una valutazione e non è…diciamo così: non è uguale per tutti, e perché prova a reggere anche le situazioni diverse che hanno. Quindi è una valutazione complicata da mettere in atto. E’ anche difficile far capire ai ragazzi, che valutano un 6 come un 6, allo stesso modo. In realtà, partendo da condizioni diverse, da situazioni diverse, molto spesso ti trovi a valutare come sufficienti delle prove che non lo sono in realtà. Però implicano comunque un riconoscimento di un impegno, di un tentativo di rimanere dentro un ambito, di sforzarsi di fare delle cose, perché qui non è scontato. Cioè tu</td>
<td>F: In theory we have the same guidelines that the whole technical institute has… but in reality, since we have to put together their competencies – but for many individuals also the fact of keeping them in an environment of school instruction, because the drop-out risk is always very high – it’s obvious that many other elements are inserted in the evaluation. And there’s an evaluation and it’s not…let’s say it like this: it’s not equal for everyone, and because it also tries to hold up the different situations they have. So it’s a complicated evaluation to put into practice. It’s also difficult to make the kids understand, who treat a 6 as a 6 -- at the same time. In reality, starting from different conditions, from different situations, very often you find yourself evaluating as sufficient some tests that really aren’t, in reality. But anyway they entail a recognition of an effort, of an attempt to remain within an environment, of forcing themselves to do some things, because here it’s not to be taken for granted. Like you find yourself, maybe, like colleagues</td>
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ti trovi magari, come raccontano dei
colleghe, dentro una classe dove c’hai
i ragazzi che appena tu entra si
mettono a dormire sul banco. Allora tu
prova a fare di tutto, fai le
presentazioni, usi internet, eh, provi
qualunque genere di cosa e loro
continuano a dormire sul banco. Il
giorno in cui si svegliano
((laughing)) e seguono magari per due
ore una lezione e producono
qualcosa... è ovvio che
non è in assoluto una prova che salva,
no, un quadriennio. Però è qualcosa
che va comunque valorizzata perché
eh...potrebbe essere la fiammella che
mantiene acceso un focolare. E quindi
le valutazioni vengono fatte spesso su
percorsi paralleli che però poi alla
fine devono portarli alla possibilità nel
quinto anno di superare con le loro
forze una prova d’esame che è
statale. E quindi la valutazione che fai
a tappe intermedie e durante il
semestre è molto spesso un
allestimento su un ragazzo che
magari più tardi e più lentamente
ricomincia a camminare, e ha bisogno
di veder riconosciuto il suo sforzo. E
questo succede spesso. Questa è un’
cosa che al liceo... non esiste. Se fai
sotto il minimo sindacale al liceo,
nessuno parla con te,
nessuno cerca... qui invece, no. Se qui
si facesse in quella maniera,
probabilmente non lo so, dopo un
quadriennio ti troveresti con
metà degli iscritti quant’altro.

talk about, in a class where you have
kids that as soon as you enter,
they go to sleep on the desk. So you try
to do everything, you do
presentations, you use Internet, uh, you
try whatever kind of thing and they
keep sleeping on the desk. The
day they wake up
((laughing)) and follow a lesson for
maybe even two hours and they
produce something...it’s obvious that
this isn’t a test, right, that saves a whole
term in absolute. But it’s something
that anyway should be valued because
uh...it could be the little flame that
keeps the fire burning. And so
the evaluations are often done on
parallel paths that, then, at the end,
have to lead them to the possibility in
the fifth year of passing with their own
efforts an exam that is given by the
state. And so the evaluation that you do
at intermediate points and during the
semester is very often
preparation for a kid that
maybe later and more slowly
will start to walk again, and needs to
see his efforts recognized. And
this happens often. This is a thing
that at the lyceum...it doesn’t exist. If
you do less that the bare minimum at
the lyceum, nobody speaks with you,
nobody tries...here instead no. If we
did it that way here, probably,
I don’t know, after a
term you would find yourself
with half of the students for sure.

I open the discussion by bringing up a phrase that had been used by teachers at all
three schools on multiple occasions, ‘fear of the grade’ (lines 1-2), and Fiori responds
with an amused ‘no,’ the students at the vocational school are not afraid of the grade. I
ask her, in that case, how evaluations (grading) work at the vocational school, and she
begins to unpack all the factors that must be taken into consideration before generating a
number grade.
ALP: The way of evaluating here, how does it work?
F: In theory we have the same guidelines that the whole technical institute has…but in reality, since we have to put together their competencies – but for many individuals also the fact of keeping them in an environment of school instruction, because the drop-out risk is always very high – it’s obvious that many other elements are inserted in the evaluation.

While noting that the vocational school is technically meant to follow the grading guidelines that the technical institute uses, Fiori admits that ‘many other elements are inserted’ into the process (lines 14-15). These elements include the students’ ‘competencies’ (line 9), or what the students know how to do, as well as the need to do whatever necessary to keep them coming to school. The 3Moda, a class of nine, had already lost two of their former classmates to family obligations and/or personal issues since their first year at the school, and by the end of this academic year, two of the current students had been absent for just under half of the year, with two others having been absent for just under one third of the year. At the vocational school, and in the 3Moda, students dealt with everything from extreme poverty, to learning disability, to generally very premature adulthood. As Fiori says in lines 10-13, keeping students in school is therefore a priority at the vocational school. Elaborating on what else is taken into consideration when grading students at the vocational school, Fiori continues:

F: And there’s an evaluation and it’s not…let’s say it like this: it’s not equal for everyone, and because it also tries to hold up the different situations they have. So it’s a complicated evaluation to put into practice. It’s also difficult to make the kids understand – who treat a 6 as a 6 – at the same time.

In addition to taking into account more than just a student’s performances of academic knowledge, Fiori explains that grades—however objective they should be—are ‘not equal for everyone’ (line 17) because everyone comes from ‘different situations’ (line 19), and the teachers try to recognize these different situations when they are assigning grades. In
an environment where grades are usually public information, however, this approach to assigning grades can cause tension between students, ‘who treat a 6 as a 6’ (lines 22-24), as seen in Chapter 6 where Sonia was furious that Daniela received almost the same grade as her, even though their end products (clothing designs) varied immensely, in her opinion. The teacher’s defense was that Daniela needed to be incentivized to work harder, and that since she was almost failing the class, an 8 would give her confidence to keep up the good work. Sonia and other students, however, disagreed. Fiori goes on to explain her own experience with attempting equitable grading:

F: In reality, starting from different conditions, from different situations, very often you find yourself evaluating as sufficient some tests that really aren’t, in reality. But anyway they entail a recognition of an effort, of an attempt to remain within an environment, of forcing themselves to do some things, because here it’s not to be taken for granted.

Taking into consideration the different points that students start from, as well as factors in their personal and home life, seems to have led Fiori to redefine what counts as sufficient work (lines 21-27), including in her overall evaluations a ‘recognition of effort’ (line 29). In the 3Moda, students were not evaluated based only on their final products, even if they seemed to believe that to be the case, but also on showing up, being motivated, and working well (as in the evaluation during fashion lab in Chapter 6). As Fiori notes here, such factors are ‘not to be taken for granted’ at the vocational school (lines 32-33) and therefore emerge as signs of a good student even though they might be entirely overlooked and taken for granted at other schools. She goes on to give an example based on stories she has heard from her colleagues:

F: Like you find yourself, maybe, like colleagues talk about, in a class where you have kids that as soon as you enter, they go to sleep on the desk. So you try to do everything, you do presentations, you use Internet, uh, you try whatever kind of thing and they keep sleeping on the desk. The day they wake up (laughing) and follow a lesson for
maybe even two hours and they produce something...it’s obvious that this isn’t a test, right, that saves a whole term in absolute. But it’s something that anyway should be valued because uh...it could be the little flame that keeps the fire burning.

Fiori paints a picture of an example class at the vocational school, based on what her colleagues have talked about (lines 36-41), which includes students who routinely sleep on their desks. Rather than antagonizing these students or writing them off as ‘badly behaved’ or ‘non scolarizzati,’ Fiori describes ‘doing everything’ (lines 37-38) to get their attention to motivate them to engage. When the student who was asleep on the desk for all of the preceding classes finally ‘wakes up and follows a lesson…and produces something’ (lines 43-45), Fiori argues that this effort should be recognized and valued. It might not—and as she hints, usually does not—make up for all of the days that this student did not engage in the lesson (lines 45-47), but it might be ‘the little flame that keeps the fire burning’ (lines 49-50): it could be—like Daniela’s 8—a spark to inspire future engagement and to keep the student interested and invested in school. In this context, it seems that the baseline for expectations is set at zero, and that student efforts (no matter how small they may be) \textit{add value} to their overall evaluations, rather than what appears to happen at the lyceum where the expectations are set extremely high, and where any deviation from the expected norm results in the student being knocked down the grading scale. In fact, according to Fiori’s explanation of how students are evaluated, there doesn’t seem to be a singular normative expectation for students – and therefore no singular definition of what \textit{scolarizzazione} or \textit{bravura} would look like in these contexts.

Except, that is, for the leaving exam at the end of the fifth year:

F: And so the evaluations are often done on parallel paths that, then, at the end, have to lead them to the possibility in the fifth year of passing with their own efforts an exam that is given by the state. And so the evaluation that you do at intermediate points and during the
semester is very often preparation for a kid that maybe later and more slowly will start to walk again, and needs to see his efforts recognized. And this happens often.

Fiori recognizes that students, regardless of their personal situations, their familial conditions, and any other factors, will need to be able to pass the state exam at the end of their fifth year. However, the approach is one of ‘parallel paths’ that lead to the same destination (lines 52-53). During this metaphorical journey toward the graduation exam, Fiori maintains that the role of evaluation along this path is one of ‘preparation’ (line 58). That is, it is a means of ‘recognizing the efforts’ (line 62) of students who may need more time and support to get to the destination. In this sense, evaluation is not seen as potentially punitive, but as potentially motivating and encouraging. Fiori is quick to draw a distinction with the lyceum where she says this is certainly not the case:

F: This is a thing that at the lyceum…it doesn’t exist. If you do less that the bare minimum at the lyceum, nobody speaks with you, nobody tries…here instead no. If we did it that way here, probably, I don’t know, after a term you would find yourself with half of the students for sure.

Fiori compares the approach taken at the lyceum (perhaps drawing on her experience as a former lyceum student herself) to the approach taken at the vocational school, emphasizing the role of teachers (or lack thereof) in promoting student progress on an individual basis. She states that ‘nobody speaks to’ and ‘nobody tries with’ students who are failing to meet expectations (lines 65-67) at the lyceum, and compares this to the vocational school, where the same approach would surely lead to a higher drop-out rate (lines 70-71). With this concern about dropping out at the forefront of instruction, evaluations are not based on proficiency, but on growth: they become almost entirely linked to each student’s individual progress, hence Fiori’s admission that grading is ‘not
the same for everyone,’ that it is done on ‘parallel paths,’ and that it is a ‘complicated evaluation to put into action.’

Important to note here is that Fiori is not talking about the conduct grade in this interview, but about the actual grades for subject areas. She does not attempt to separate out the way a student behaves (scolarizzazione) from the way a student performs schooled knowledge (bravura), instead identifying them as part and parcel of the same object: developing well-rounded people rather than good students.

7.5 When casual evaluations become formal grades

These ongoing evaluations of students that occur day in and day out, throughout the school year, culminate in the voto di condotta, or the behavior grade. The voto di condotta theoretically focuses on the extent to which a student has integrated into the academic discourse community of his/her school and its ideals and values (scolarizzazione), without taking into consideration the extent to which a student has mastered the academic discourse associated with his/her belonging in a particular field (bravura). However, in the same way that these two academic discourse communities overlap, what is considered ‘behavioral’ and what is considered ‘academic’ also overlap.

This grade is at once highly subjective and highly consequential: the voto di condotta must be at least 6 (out of 10) in order for the student to pass the year, regardless of what his/her grades in the school subject areas are. It is decided at the end of the school year at the scrutinio finale: a meeting of the faculty (the consiglio di classe, or the class counsel) working with a given group of students. This meeting occurs after the last day of school, and after grades have been calculated and entered into the electronic
course register by the individual subject teachers. The *consiglio di classe*, led by the coordinator—one of the teachers—gathers to discuss what the final grade(s) will be for each student, and therefore who will be promoted to the next grade, who will fail the year, and who will be assigned make-up work to do over the summer. In some cases, it is clear that the student will pass the year and be promoted to the next grade, and in other cases, it is more ambiguous, particularly when a student appears to have failed not for lack of trying but for circumstances that are seen as beyond his/her control (e.g., family problems, illness, an undiagnosed learning disability). This leads to discussions and sometimes arguments among colleagues who have had different experiences with a given student, in which case one teacher may strongly object to this student’s promotion to the next grade while another adamantly supports this student’s promotion.

As a means of examining what informs high-stakes evaluations of students, such as the *voto di condotta*, this chapter has drawn on interviews, classroom discourse, and fieldnotes in which teachers describe students’ social and academic success, and in which student behavior and performance are explicitly discussed. The words that teachers use to describe students—while they may be substituted with number grades when entered into the course register—are a powerful means by which students come to be evaluated and thereby socialized to participate in schooling. They also play a potentially highly significant role in the way that students are attributed particular social personae, and perhaps even how they are officially documented as ‘problematic’ as opposed to ‘gifted.’
7.6 Conclusions and implications of using overdetermined language in student evaluations

The moral valences of the term *bravo* have been of great interest in this analysis, particularly in the ways that *bravura* overlaps with or appears to be entirely conflated with the concept of *scolarizzazione*. In schools, *bravura* is co-constructed in the interactional space between the student and the teacher, but often requires proficiency in academic discourses and their associated interactional norms in order to be performed according to expectations; that is, demonstrating *bravura* requires—in some contexts—*scolarizzazione* (as in the lyceum). Demonstrating *bravura* and *scolarizzazione* is about learning to deploy the right signs at the right time; becoming aware of one’s communicative repertoire elements (Rymes 2010) and deploying them strategically in the appropriate context. Teacher metacommentary (Rymes 2014) in the form of evaluative language explicitly and implicitly directs students to adopt certain behaviors and not others in their classroom communities, but the expectations vary from school to school and often from teacher to teacher within the same school. With this in mind, “*bravo*” and “*scolarizzato*” likely (1) oversimplify what students are being asked to accomplish and (2) end up being so overdetermined by their social histories of use that they cease to function as productive constructs in the evaluation of students or in the socialization of students into academic discourse communities. By reducing signs of student success to *bravura* and *scolarizzazione*—which are measures of students’ conformity to their local classroom norms—teachers are potentially missing out on a wealth of resources that students’ communicative repertoires, unique interactional styles, and diversity of learning.
styles afford their school community. As is done in the vocational school, the means by which students are taught and evaluated should emerge from the context in which they are learning, rather than from circulating stereotypes about students and the types of schools that they attend. If teachers can identify when they are using “bravo” and/or “scolarizzato” to describe students, and instead make the agentive decision to resist applying these words to their classroom in a categorical way, they might find that their evaluative criteria follow suit, becoming more nuanced and less black-and-white.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction: Revisiting the Research Questions

This research has ultimately sought to understand how a student learns to emerge as successful in the context of a particular school, and how both social expectations and interactional realities shape this endeavor. It is motivated by three questions about the tripartite Italian secondary school system and its various interactional norms, expectations, and outcomes: (a) How are the student bodies of these three school types constructed via narrative and metacommentary? (b) How do students perform knowledge for peers and teachers? and (c) What does “success” look and sound like within and across the three school types? In answering these questions, this research has begun to illuminate the power of metadiscourse in constructing and deconstructing taken-for-granted realities, to better understand the ways that students learn to participate in differential forms of schooling in this divided system, and to consider the implications of a divided secondary school system on defining the social histories and trajectories of students. This research has also suggested methodologies for looking at issues around school choice, for understanding de facto and de jure language and education policies in schools, and for better understanding the multifaceted nature of school communities in general.
8.2 Question 1: How are the student bodies of these three school types constructed via narrative and metacommentary?

The first research question (How are the student bodies of these three school types constructed via narrative and metacommentary?) is intended to highlight the deep-seated and widely circulating beliefs about secondary schooling in Italy, which has been divided since its inception. This system has always been designed as a means of sorting students into different (some might even argue “tiered”) academic, and therefore also career-related, trajectories. While the division of students does not occur until the age of 13, and the first two years of secondary school (*il biennio*) are largely the same in terms of their offerings across school types, the social implications of dividing students into separate physical spaces are undeniable. As seen in Chapter 4 (“Social personae and school choice in the Italian school system”), already in middle school, if not earlier, students’ classroom competence (i.e., both behavior and academics) is being assessed by their teachers and their parents as more or less adapted for particular secondary school pursuits. In its purest form, this might entail recognizing that a child has a propensity for and love of science, and therefore pointing him/her toward a scientific field of study in secondary school. However, one’s choice of school is rarely so simple. Due to the long-time division of secondary schools, each school has developed a reputation: difficult, easy, full of “good” or “bad” people, and so forth. Therefore, one’s choice of school is an important index for the type of person one is. Regardless of whether the circulating ideologies about these indexical connections are accurate, 13-year-olds, their parents, and their teachers, seem to orient to them.
As discussed in Chapter 4, the scientific and classical lyceums are often framed as the only “real” lyceums (with the artistic, linguistic, and athletic strands of the lyceum being second-tier). These two strands are believed to provide top-tier education and yield a top-tier diploma, thereby attracting highly motivated individuals who are well versed in the academic discourses of their middle schools, and who are prepared to work with teachers who have lofty expectations. While this is framed in a positive light by many teachers and parents, the flip side of this coin is that the lyceum is seen by young people as boring, as being a place where all one does is study, as full of “nerds,” and so forth. However, both of these orientations (whether given a positive or a negative spin) point to studying and investment in schoolwork as a necessity for success in this environment. Thus, often, the students who struggled academically in middle school are steered toward vocational or technical schools, while those who shine academically are steered toward classical and scientific lyceums (see, e.g., Bontempi, 2013).

Enrollment in the vocational school, in its purest form, would come from a child genuinely being interested in studying fashion design, for instance, but it typically involves more factors. While students at the vocational school in Cittadina retrospectively claim to have had an affinity for fashion design prior to enrolling, they also tell of their enrollment there being based on “not doing well in middle school” (Chapter 4). With a “way out” offered at the end of the third year in the form of a professional certificate, the vocational school is both designed for and attractive to those who—either by choice or by force of circumstance—will leave school at the minimum required age of 16 and will enter the workforce. This translates in practice to the vocational school being the
recommended destination of students who are seen as unmotivated, as not oriented to studying, and who have minimal support for academic pursuits from their families. And, as seen in Roberta’s narrative and in the memes in Chapter 4, one’s attendance at the vocational school says much to the public about what type of person one is, even to the point of being laughed at by her peers.

Insofar as particular types of schools and fields of study are associated not only with particular career possibilities, but also with different lifestyles, different ways of being a student, and different values, they are also associated with different figures of personhood (Agha, 2011). For instance, the studious, well-spoken females from bourgeoisie families are more likely associated with the lyceum than with the vocational school; and the rowdy, mischievous, dialect-speaking, and academically unmotivated males from working class families are more likely associated with vocational schools than with lyceums. In doing this research about which secondary school to attend, prospective students must do identity work: they must come to understand what type of person one is, what type of person one would like to be, and find a school (i.e., a community) that seems likely to help realize these aspirations.

8.3 Question 2: How do students perform knowledge for peers and teachers?

The second research question (How do students perform knowledge for peers and teachers?) is answered in Chapters 5 and 6 by examining how students perform their expertise publicly for teachers and (semi-)privately for their peers. In answering this question, I analyzed classroom discourse—sometimes entire speech events and other times a few sequences within them—through the lens of performance (Bauman & Briggs
1990), which affords critical reflection on a single moment of talk, what it indexes, and what this says about the social persona a student is taking up.

As we have seen in the public performances of expertise in Chapter 5, each school socializes students to perform academic knowledge in different ways, using school-specific interactional frameworks and discipline-specific registers. Students must develop facility in both communicating their proficiency in the subject matter on which they are being evaluated, as well as in the communicative repertoire elements they must deploy in doing so (Rymes 2014). The nature of the interactional framework in which they are being tested, which is typically structured by the teacher in some way, restricts students in their interactional moves. That is, the criteria for evaluating the student determine, in large part, what the teacher will expect from the student during the interaction. This requires students to be extremely strategic in the way they respond to the teacher’s requests, ensuring that they will be able to find an opening to share relevant expertise. At times, a skilled student might identify a way to wiggle themselves into a more comfortable position in a stressful interaction (as with Damati in the 3BLC and Shoshi in 3Moda) and other times the interactional format will hold them to a strict agenda (as with Venturi in the 3BLC and Morelli in 3Meccanica).

Along these lines, the parameters of the interaction are largely what determine how and if expertise can emerge (Carr 2010, Cicourel 1997). While the performance of expertise for teachers is often framed by students as a solo performance or as a monologue performed for teachers, it is often co-constructed by teachers and peers. The interrogazione in 3Meccanica is a coordinated effort at producing knowledge, involving
the professor, Sava, and Morelli, where the professor determines exactly who will answer specific questions, and how those questions will lead into further questioning for the other participant. He scaffolds the interaction in such a way that both Sava and Morelli are able to demonstrate expertise, despite Sava seemingly being more proficient in the material than his classmate. The role of fellow students in co-constructing expertise is also evident in the 3Moda, where Daniela’s grade on her design (which she was awarded based on her having worked hard in the past and on the possibility of her being motivated to work in the future) is publicly disputed based on a re-creation of her past performances of “bad student.”

What counts as expertise—and what counts as a performance of it—also varies across these three school contexts. For instance, “working well” is treated as an element to be evaluated in and of itself in the context of the 3Moda’s labs, but this same element is taken for granted in the 3BLC and is not factored in as part of the evaluation. What counts as expertise in the 3BLC’s interrogazioni is only what is performed during that speech event; anything that precedes or succeeds it is, in theory, not taken into consideration as evidence of a student’s expertise or inexpertise. However, performances of expertise in the 3Moda sometimes last several weeks as the students work on putting together a design. In that class, where very little is taken for granted in terms of shared academic discourses, students perform expertise by showing up, being civil with each other, “working well,” and/or producing a technically correct design (with the latter being weighted almost equally to the other criteria). And finally, in a class where lengthy displays of linguistic prowess are less valued than mathematical precision, such as the
3Meccanica, the several silent exchanges between Sava and the professor (e.g., handing over the calculator, working out an equation, making notes on the board) serve to demonstrate Sava’s facility in the subject matter, whereas the more verbal exchanges between the teacher and Morelli only serve to establish Morelli’s relative inexpertise.

Performances of expertise for peers are more flexible in some ways that public performances for a grade, but they are no less skillful. The students in the examples in Chapter 6 (“Peer-to-peer performances of expertise”) engage in sophisticated double-voicing (Bakhtin 1981) in which they simultaneously deploy their in-school and out-of-school repertoire so as to address multiple audiences at once. These performances are still highly reliant on a student’s ability to recognize and work within the boundaries set by the teacher—since they occur when class is in session—and those criteria vary from one classroom context to the next. While doing a stadium chant version of the answer to a teacher’s question falls within the boundaries of acceptability in the context of the 3Meccanica, this would not be the case in the 3BLC. Likewise, deciding not to rebel when faced with a long and boring question-and-answer routine would be less likely to happen in the 3BLC than in the 3Meccanica or 3Moda.

Students’ secondary adjustments (Goffman 1961) and displays of expertise to their peers have to simultaneously fit within the norms of their classrooms and flout the expectations of the teacher in some way in order to be effective. In an environment where social relations with peers are of immense importance, it is no surprise that students are unwilling to abandon their characteristic qualities in order to play the part of the good student. Instead, they must find a way to do both. Students may demonstrate to their peers
that they are well aware of how one should speak during a lecture, but they might choose a topic that would likely not be discussed in class (as with Ruggero and Ivan doing a mock lecture about ‘la cacca dura’). Or they may act out the part of the good student when face-to-face with the teacher, only to recontextualize their correct answer with a sarcastic comment directed quietly at the teacher after the fact (as with Lucia saying ‘take that!’). Importantly, however, these displays of knowledge for the benefit of one’s peers are often the most enthusiastic, which is why they might possibly come across as disruptive, or possibly contribute to the image of a student as, for example, “bravo ma non scolarizzato” (e.g. smart, but not well behaved in class).

8.4 Question 3: What does “success” look and sound like within and across the three school types?

As discussed above, the ways one “does being” a student varies from school to school. Therefore, the ways that a student’s proficiency, expertise, or “success” are evaluated will also vary from school to school. In everyday interactions in the classroom, often during formal and informal, public and private performances of expertise, evaluative language abounds, solidifying students over time as “successful” or “unsuccessful.” However, the criteria by which success is judged—even within the same school—can be difficult to pin down. As discussed in Chapter 7 (“Everyday definitions and evaluations of ‘the good student’ across the three schools”), words that are used to describe students, such as bravo and scolarizzato, have taken on an overdetermined quality (Althusser 1971) and elicit strong reactions when they are used, but their meanings are difficult to pin down. In cases where teachers use more nuanced language
to describe their students’ academic orientations, a more complex and complete picture emerges of what students are capable of.

Part of “doing well” in school is, of course, about successfully navigating academic discourses and practices. However, as has long been established, a child’s familiarity with and dexterity in the language of schooling begins well before he/she steps foot in school (e.g., Heath 1983). This suggests that a factor in students’ enrollment in and success at one school over another is partially a question of social class, and that the depth and scope of the curricula at these schools is built with this factor in mind. However, as the types of futures students can imagine for themselves—regardless of class background—continue to broaden thanks to technology and globalization, the percentage of students who are not satisfied with the prospect of learning a trade or a single specialized skill set, and/or forgoing a university education, continues to rise. This hints at the possibility of parents and children orienting toward a diploma from the lyceum as a “sign of success” that can be carried forward in a student’s life as currency in future pursuits.

**8.5 Implications and Future Directions**

In this research, I have sought to take into consideration the way that the history of school division in Italy has contributed to the *de facto* policies that have formed around the separation of school curricula. I have also sought to highlight the potential implications of this separation for young people’s academic trajectories, as well as for equality and access in education more broadly.
While on the one hand, the division of schools could be framed as entirely logical and natural (the world needs a workforce with a variety of capabilities, and people are differently inclined to be artists, designers, teachers, doctors, bureaucrats, factory workers, or scientists), the division of secondary schooling itself perpetuates the idea that an individual’s myriad experiences and desires should be—maybe even must be, for the benefit of society—directed toward the pursuit of a singular career. Even the most well-intentioned policies to provide a holistic educational foundation for all students in the Italian secondary school system, the separation of schools necessarily means that they provide unequal education.

The existence of divided secondary education by subject content creates, *de facto*, division by so-called ability levels. Academic ability, as may others have argued and as I have attempted to demonstrate in this dissertation, emerges in interaction. When deciding how to advise a child’s family about which secondary school would be most appropriate for him/her, a teacher may interpret a student’s repertoire of skills and communicative resources in middle school through the frame of the separation of schooling that the student will encounter in high school. This separation leads to not only the differential socialization of young people into particular ways of learning, but also to questionable equity of access to education. In this sense, stereotypes about schools are self-perpetuating, where discourses about academic ability are tied to particular forms of schooling, which are tied to particular figures of personhood. And ultimately, these widely recognized connections between types of people and types of schools return to inform decisions about school choice.
By taking the data presented herein into consideration as both the personal and pre-professional journeys of these participants and as a means of identifying commonalities across student experiences, I have sought to demonstrate how larger social forces (like social class prejudice) find their way into micro-interactions in the classroom. I have also aimed to illustrate the ways that implicit societal expectations interact with macro (i.e., national, regional, school-level) policies regarding academics and career options for these students. That is, I find that official policies (e.g., of open enrollment schools and of equal opportunity after graduation) are filtered through gendered, sociolinguistic, and socioeconomic aspects of personal experience and societal expectations. Further, as Mehan (1996), Varenne and McDermott (1995), and Wortham (2004, 2005) have demonstrated, there are power dynamics at play in schools which have an important impact on the ways that students come to be defined (e.g., as learning disabled, as gifted, or as “difficult”). The way that individuals are categorized or labeled within their school communities often involves complex, multiparty social interaction in which the individual being labeled plays only a small role.

Ultimately, the objective of this research has been to understand how Italian education policies and practices might be challenged so as to disrupt discriminatory pedagogies and policies in these three schools and, indeed, to make a case for whether these three schools need to be divided at all.
Appendix

Criteri di attribuzione del voto di comportamento

Il voto di comportamento è attribuito tenendo in considerazione i livelli di competenza raggiunti dall’allievo/a in riferimento alle competenze chiave Imparare ad imparare, Competenze sociali e civiche e Senso di iniziativa e imprenditorialità e di seguito descritti.

Il voto viene assegnato considerando i Punteggi corrispondenti ad ogni competenza in base al livello raggiunto.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>livello</th>
<th>Indicatori esplicativi</th>
<th>Punteggio /10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imparare ad imparare</td>
<td><strong>Avanzato</strong> L’alunno/a mostra curiosità e interesse nelle attività proposte, organizza il proprio tempo in funzione degli impegni di studio. Ha consapevolezza delle proprie potenzialità e dei propri limiti. Orienta le proprie scelte in modo consapevole. Sa interagire con gli altri per migliorare il proprio apprendimento. È capace di ricercare e di procurarsi velocemente nuove informazioni ed impegnarsi in nuovi apprendimenti anche in modo autonomo rispetto all’età.</td>
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<td><strong>Intermedio</strong> L’alunno/a mostra interesse nelle attività proposte, organizza il proprio tempo in modo da far fronte ai propri impegni di studio. Ha discreta consapevolezza delle proprie conoscenze, abilità e capacità e sa scegliere in modo consapevole. Sa interagire e chiedere aiuto in caso di difficoltà. È capace di ricercare nuove informazioni ed impegnarsi in nuovi apprendimenti con buona autonomia rispetto all’età.</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Base</strong> L’alunno/a partecipa alle attività proposte, organizza il proprio tempo in modo da far fronte a buona parte degli impegni di studio. Non sempre interagisce con gli altri in caso di difficoltà. È capace di ricercare nuove informazioni ed impegnarsi in nuovi apprendimenti con sufficiente autonomia rispetto all’età.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Iniziale</strong> L’alunno/a partecipa alle attività proposte con impegno non costante, ha difficoltà ad organizzare il proprio tempo in modo da far fronte agli impegni di studio. Non...</td>
<td>0,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sempre interagisce con gli altri quando non riesce a risolvere i problemi da solo. Ha difficoltà a ricercare nuove informazioni ed impegnarsi in nuovi apprendimenti in modo autonomo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competenze sociali e civiche</th>
<th>Avanzato</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ha cura e rispetto di sé, come presupposto di un sano e corretto stile di vita. Assimila il senso e la necessità del rispetto della convivenza civile. Ha attenzione per le attività finalizzate al bene della comunità, alle quali partecipa nelle diverse forme in cui questo può avvenire, come momenti educativi informali e non formali, azioni di solidarietà e volontariato. Rispetta le regole condivise, frequenta in modo assiduo le lezioni, collabora con gli altri esprimendo in maniera adeguata alla situazione le proprie personali opinioni e sensibilità.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Intermedio                  | Ha rispetto di sé, come presupposto di un sano e corretto stile di vita. Si comporta nel rispetto della convivenza civile. Ha nel complesso attenzione per le attività finalizzate al bene della comunità, alle quali partecipa nelle diverse forme in cui questo può avvenire, come momenti educativi informali e non formali, azioni di solidarietà e volontariato. Rispetta le regole condivise, positiva è la frequenza alle lezioni, ha un comportamento accettabile per responsabilità e collaborazione. | 6 |

| Base                        | Ha nel complesso rispetto di sé, come presupposto di un sano e corretto stile di vita. Si comporta non sempre nel rispetto della convivenza civile. Non sempre rispetta le regole condivise, la frequenza è talvolta irregolare, ha un comportamento non sempre accettabile per responsabilità e collaborazione. | 5 |

| Non raggiunto/Iniziale      | Ha un comportamento non accettabile, essendo stato sanzionato per aver compiuto gravi violazioni dei doveri degli studenti definiti dallo Statuto delle studentesse e degli studenti, che rientrano in situazioni descritte nel DPR n.122/2009, art. 7, c. 2 (valutazione del comportamento insufficiente). | 4 |

| Senso di iniziativa e di imprenditorialità | Ha un ruolo propositivo all’interno della classe avendo mostrato anche originalità e spirito di iniziativa. | 0,5/0 |
References


Gruppo di Intervento e Studio nel Campo dell’Educazione Linguistica (GISCEL). (2017, August 3). Dieci tesi per l’educazione linguistica democratica | GISCEL.


