

# In Search of a Profound Answer: Mainstream Scripts and the Marginalization of Advanced-Track Urban Students<sup>☆</sup>

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This is a microethnographic study that examines talk among junior and senior level non-mainstream urban students and their mainstream teachers in two advanced-track classrooms. To investigate students' ability to engage in the dominant linguistic and cultural codes of the classroom, our analysis focuses on the student contributions that were praised by teachers. We show that student contributions which do not follow dominant codes are not rewarded, and that although students ask their teachers for guidance in using these codes appropriately, their requests are not effectively addressed. Consequently, these students struggle at the margins of the classroom because they do not demonstrate facility with discursive practices which would lead to academic success. We advocate that teachers help students to acquire these codes in order to experience success, not for the purpose of acculturation, but rather to give them the tools with which they might critique these dominant codes.

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Over the past three decades, researchers have found that discursive styles of non-mainstream<sup>1</sup> children often differ significantly from those of their mainstream, middle-class teachers. This discursive mismatch has been shown to be the source of a great deal of miscommunication, and consequently, a contributing factor to these students' marginalization in the classroom (e.g., Au, 1980; Cazden, 1988; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983, 1986; Labov, 1972; Michaels, 1981, 1991; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). To address this cultural and linguistic mismatch, researchers such as Delpit (1988, 1995), Gee (1996), Kubota (1999), and Mercer (2000) have promoted the explicit teaching of mainstream ways of talking in the classroom in order to help non-mainstream children participate more effectively. Mercer (2000) suggests that teachers foster meta-awareness of discourse styles through "Talk Lessons" by talking about the lexical and discursive features of "correct answers," and Delpit (1988) asks educators to openly address how to use the codes of the "culture of power" to benefit their non-mainstream students by carrying out contrastive analyses of standard and non-standard language and discourse styles. Meanwhile, she emphasizes the importance of making certain to teach students "about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent" (p. 296).

We agree that it is important to explicitly discuss ways of talking in the classroom that are acceptable to mainstream teachers. It is particularly important to discuss the expected ways of talking with non-mainstream students who may be unfamiliar with these forms of discourse, and who subsequently withdraw from classroom discussions upon finding that their contributions are not valued because they do not match their teachers' expectations. A promising way to encourage non-mainstream students to participate is for teachers to openly talk to their students about the expected *ways of being*, i.e., ways to speak and behave that are considered appropriate, according to conventional teaching practices. These ways of being include both linguistic skills (knowing the appropriate vocabulary, using standard English, and following the appropriate routines for making contributions in class), as well as familiarity with the kinds of knowledge that is valued in mainstream education. These forms of 'knowledge' that need to be made explicit to the students are not 'truths,' but rather, the discourses of subject matter that are valued and considered to be the legitimate forms of knowledge by the school culture and the larger society. In our view, it is important for teachers to guide students who fall outside the bounds of the mainstream linguistic and cultural groups into both the form and content of these discursive practices so that they can participate more fully in an environment that marginalizes contributions which do not conform to mainstream practices.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that a failure to acknowledge the diversity that exists in American culture with regard to interactional styles and non-mainstream forms of knowledge may eclipse the contributions non-mainstream students make, either due to the form of their language, or to the content of their contributions. Such students may feel that the way they speak or the ideas they offer are 'wrong,' a notion which, if not addressed overtly, can easily

lead to withdrawal from participation in classroom activities and the development of a counterproductive form of resistance (Delpit, 1988; Ogbu, 1978; Willis, 1977).

Previous studies examining the linguistic and cultural mismatches between teachers and their non-mainstream students have made strong arguments that these mismatches contribute to academic failure among many of these students. By extension of this logic, one might assume that students from non-mainstream backgrounds who do well in school have mastered the linguistic and cultural codes that enable them to succeed. This article presents conversational data from two advanced-track classrooms which shows that non-mainstream students in such classes have become skilled at using these codes to some extent. However, our study also shows that despite their relative success in using the codes of the mainstream, these students are still marginalized because of the form and content of their contributions. In the study we report below, we will show how these advanced-track students' contributions are valued, marginalized, or otherwise responded to by investigating (1) the degree to which students have acquired 'appropriate' ways of talking, (2) whether the form and content of 'appropriate' contributions are explicitly discussed in the classroom, and (3) whether opportunities to guide non-mainstream students into these ways of talking are taken up by teachers.

### MAINSTREAM DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

In many classrooms in the United States, "appropriate" talk takes the shape of the "dominant linguistic and cultural codes," codes which respectively refer to the form and content of discourses of the dominant culture, i.e., middle-class (typically white) Americans who speak non-stigmatized varieties of English (Kubota, 1999). *Dominant linguistic code* refers to the microlinguistic aspects of communicating that appear to come naturally to members of this dominant culture. In the classroom, this code involves more than the use of standard English in terms of grammar; it also refers to the ability to participate in teacher-student interactions in ways deemed appropriate by mainstream middle-class teachers.

One manifestation of dominant linguistic code is a way of talking that Gutierrez (1994) calls a *recitation script*. She describes this as a way of interacting that socializes students "to getting the correct answer to known-answer questions and to participation structures that reinforced the hierarchical relations generally associated with didactic instruction" (p. 341). This way of interacting has been described as a series of turn taking that follows teacher-led routines of initiation, response, and evaluation, also known as *IRE* (Mehan, 1979), as *IRF* (initiation, response, feedback) (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), or as *triadic dialogue* (Lemke, 1990). Though recent research calls attention to the variety of functions that this discourse style has in the classroom (Mercer, 1995; Nassaji & Wells, 2000), it has drawn a great deal of negative attention for its overwhelming teacher-centeredness and the way it typically limits student participation to filling in the blanks of the R in the IRF template.

Mercer (1995) critiques the conventional IRF-dominated turn taking routine for the way that it does not require students to actually “know” the answer since they are guided by cued elicitation, “the way that teachers draw out from students the information they are seeking, often with strong visual clues and verbal hints as to what answer is required” (p. 26). Similarly, Bloome, Puro, and Theodorou (1989) refer to this way of talking as *procedural display*, arguing that students who are judged positively by teachers may not be students who have demonstrated the mastering of a concept or the analytical thinking, but rather, students who have learned the expected script of the classroom and are rewarded for learning the script rather than the subject matter. Students who participate successfully in discussions are those who can use the codes of the mainstream, the codes of the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1988). However, many non-mainstream students are not fluent in this code, so their efforts to participate are routinely ignored, marginalized, or criticized for their non-standard form.

The second type of discursive practice that is prevalent in mainstream academics is the “dominant cultural code” of the dominant group (Kubota, 1999). In their work on classroom discourse, Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995a) call the manifestation of this code the *transcendent script*. They use this term to refer to “the dominant forms of knowledge generally valued as legitimate by both the local culture and the larger society” (p. 448). They propose that most teachers employ a *monologic script* which tends to follow fairly closely along the lines of the transcendent script, eclipsing student voices from dialogic participation or from co-constructing and negotiating what counts as knowledge in the classroom. The transcendent script emanates for the most part from textbooks, official curricula, or the teachers’ own store of knowledge, and reflects traditional views and taken for granted constructions of what is the truth in any given subject matter.

In classrooms that are dominated by the recitation script, there is little room for teachers or students to engage in critiques of the transcendent script. To allow for more collaborative learning and discussion, Gutierrez (1994) encourages more use of what she calls the *responsive/collaborative script*, a script that is largely comprised of student contributions (instead of teacher talk), and through which students co-construct shared knowledge. In classrooms where Gutierrez observed the use of this script, students were able “to select when they wanted to speak, to build on previous utterances, to engage others in interaction, to negotiate the ongoing subtopics of classroom discussion, and in some instances help define the official activity” (p. 344). Though teachers still frame and guide the responsive/collaborative script, questions do not have specific ‘correct’ answers, and ‘knowledge’ is constructed through talk instead of merely transmitted through the teacher’s monologic script.

To incorporate more student contributions into classroom talk, Gutierrez et al. (1995a) advocate the integration of non-mainstream student contributions in what they call a *third space*, a space where ‘counter-hegemonic activity,’ or contestation of dominant discourses, can occur for both students and teachers, and what counts

as knowledge can be negotiated rather than simply passed on by the teacher (p. 451). They explain that this third space can be created by incorporating students' *counterscripts*, student responses which do not correctly fill in the blank of the dominant discourse, or monologic script, but which may contain within them the power of critique or insight, into the script of the classroom.

Instead of treating counterscripts as off-topic contributions, they argue that teachers can use them to engage and redirect students toward learning the requisite discourses of subject matter while critiquing the transcendent script at the same time. Although we endorse the teaching of dominant linguistic code for the benefit of the students, we emphasize that by taking up discussions of how the students' language and counterscripts differ from mainstream discursive practices, teachers can empower their students with the codes of the culture of power while simultaneously questioning how and why those codes have become the dominant ways of talking and thinking in mainstream society. In the next section, we discuss the implications of students' ability or inability to use the dominant linguistic code, and consequently, their ability to participate in classrooms wherein the transcendent script predominates.

### MAINSTREAM SCRIPTS AND ACHIEVEMENT

In sequences of teacher–student interaction, what counts as knowledge in the form of appropriate contributions can be identified by noting which contributions get praised by the teacher, and by noting which students are constructed as making valuable contributions. Student participation that fits the mainstream versions of knowledge is typically considered 'correct,' and is rewarded by teachers. The rules of the discursive practices of the classroom are mostly unspoken, but because these rules are ultimately based on power relations (Foucault, 1980), they constrain what can be said, and they designate who can speak:

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth. (p. 131)

Taking a Foucaultian perspective, then, the students who follow "the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth" are the students who adopt the types of discourse that adheres to the general politics of mainstream knowledge in the classroom. This type of knowledge grants power to those who can use it in their everyday discourse and does not reward those who cannot because of their non-mainstream socialization.

Classroom talk is the site for potential moments of achievement, or failure, at the microlinguistic level. In most classrooms, teachers reward students who are

able to participate in the monologic script of the classroom. On the other hand, non-mainstream students who have been socialized into different discursive practices either go unrewarded for contributions that come from their counterscripts, are ignored, or are otherwise marginalized. It is important to note that the practice of rewarding students for their contributions is further complicated by the ways that students and teachers construct their *participant social relationships* (Bloome & Katz, 1997). These are the relationships between students and teachers that position certain participants as making valued contributions, while excluding others' remarks as inappropriate or incorrect. For example, "a student recognized as academically talented may be able to offer a creative response to a teacher question and be viewed as having participated appropriately, while a student who is less academically talented or who is known as a troublemaker might have the same response viewed as disruptive or as a ruse for hiding a lack of ability" (Bloome & Katz, 1997, n.p.). Moreover, in the data we report, race and/or ethnicity appear to be contributing factors to the ways participant social relations are constructed.

### THE STUDY

The data for this study comes from one year of observations, field notes, and transcripts of videotapes of two advanced-track classes comprised of juniors and seniors. It should be noted that the larger project under which this smaller study is subsumed is a 4-year longitudinal investigation of socialization into academic discourses, and in particular, the subject matter discourses of science and social studies. However, our study does not compare students' academic language development over time; rather, it is a snapshot of the students' facility with academic discourse during their third year of participation in the study. Because the students were at an advanced stage in their high school careers, and because they were considered the "best and brightest" at the school, we expected that they would have experienced more success in using the requisite ways of speaking/responding. However, as we report below, many of these students still did not have fluency in or full access to the dominant linguistic code or the transcendent script. The data we provide below also reveal how opportunities for teachers to explicitly address mismatches between expected ways of talking and students' contributions are not taken up, despite students' direct appeals for such information.

### Setting

The setting for this study is a public high school in a large urban area in the Midwest. "Jefferson High School" is on the south side of the city in an area that has undergone a major demographic shift in recent years. This area is populated largely by Hispanic, Lao, and Hmong residents. Current enrollment figures for Jefferson High School are as follows: 60 percent Hispanic, 20 percent African American,

10 percent white, 8 percent Asian, and 2 percent Native American. These numbers are quite different from the overall statistics for the district. However, common to both Jefferson High School and the district-wide enrollment is the relatively high number of minorities and the high degree of poverty. Over 75 percent of the students at the school qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. Moreover, between 76 and 99 percent of the students live in single-parent families (Cole & Zuengler, 2000).

### **Participants<sup>2</sup>**

The participants in our study were junior and senior level students enrolled in a college-prep physics class and an Advanced Placement (AP) history class. The history class was comprised of junior only while the student population in the physics class was a combination of juniors and seniors. Several of the same junior-level students were enrolled in both classes. The students in each of the classrooms represent the ethnic diversity of the general population of Jefferson High School. Approximately half of the students were in the National Honor Society, and many were involved in numerous extracurricular activities as well. There were three male students and 15 females in the AP history class, and five females and six males in the physics class. About half of the students in both classes were bilingual in English and languages including Spanish, Lao, Hmong, and Croatian, and some of the students in the two classes had previously been in the school's bilingual (Spanish/English) program.

In contrast to the students in their classrooms, the two white teachers we observed were middle-class. Both had spent over 20 years teaching at Jefferson High School, and at the end of the semester we observed, the history teacher had been promoted by the school district to be a mentor for other teachers needing guidance in the district because of her excellent teaching record. Both teachers lived in suburban neighborhoods, far removed from the low socioeconomic surroundings of Jefferson High School.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Approximately 120 hours of videotape from both classes were used for the present study. Both classes were videotaped twice a week for the entire year; two video cameras were set up in each of the classrooms with one camera trained on the teacher, and the other on the class as a whole. The videotapes were then transcribed by members of the project team following the conventions of microethnography<sup>3</sup> (Erickson, 1996). Field notes were also taken in each of the classrooms on the days when the field team videotaped. At the end of the semester, separate interviews with teachers and student focus groups were carried out to gather ethnographic data regarding language use and achievement. Weekly discussions with fellow project

researchers were also used to help shape and inform impressions. This is not to suggest that the impressions reported herein lay claims to any truths, but it is to say that some attempt was made to triangulate our observations and analysis.

As we pored over transcripts from the AP US history class and the physics class, we started noticing what was praised by the teacher, as well as what kinds of responses were ignored, reformulated, redirected, or interrupted in the sequences of classroom talk. We made every effort to examine the talk inductively, allowing patterns to emerge from the data instead of being shaped *a priori* by theoretical constructs. One pattern which emerged from the data was that there were strict boundaries for what were considered ‘correct’ answers by the teachers. These boundaries tended to follow, rather than challenge, the transcendent script. Another pattern we noticed was that students were aware that their teachers expected certain ways of talking and thinking, but that these forms of expression sometimes mystified the students, sometimes leading them to ask their teachers to be explicit about their expectations.

Though we have framed our study in a literature review with references to several theoretical concepts, we wish to emphasize that this theoretical framing did not guide our analysis; on the contrary, the patterns we noticed in our data prompted us to make connections to existing research on classroom discourse that could help us to theorize the ways that the microlinguistic level of talk related to societal structures. At the same time, because our findings emerged from the data in an inductive manner, we feel that our data illustrates, and hence validates, the theoretical concepts *dominant linguistic code* and *transcendent script*, concepts which demonstrate how societal structures and power relationships shape the ways that dominant language and dominant thinking practices are enacted in the classroom.

## Results

The data presented in the following analysis were chosen as representative of interactional patterns that we observed in these two classrooms for the academic year. First, we show that student contributions which are not in the form of dominant linguistic code or that depart from the transcendent script are not responded to by teachers as “correct,” and we illustrate how the lack of response led to the development of a counterscript. We also examine how these counterscripts are dealt with by the teachers, not as springboards for discussing the arbitrariness of these ways of talking or the content of the expected contributions, but as inappropriate or off-topic contributions. Finally, we show how students ask their teachers for guidance in using these scripts appropriately, and we also demonstrate that these students’ requests for guidance do not get effectively addressed.

In this section, two pairs of dialogues will be presented and briefly analyzed. The first dialogue in each pair is from the physics class, and the second is from the history class.

## Part 1: Stick with the Script

### Physics

The physics class is taught by a veteran math and science teacher. In the excerpt below, several students are attempting to answer a question that the teacher has just presented to the class. The question asks whether a steel bullet or a rubber bullet would be more likely to knock over a block of wood standing on end, if the bullet were fired from a gun. Two students, Adam and Craig, are primarily involved in the dialogue, along with the teacher. Adam is a working class African-American teenager, with a fairly strong African-American English dialect. Craig is of mixed ethnicity and usually identifies himself as Native American. He has attended a private school in the past and appears to have greater financial means than many of his classmates. He also has a better command of dominant linguistic code than Adam.

#### Text 1a: Rubber or Steel

- 1 Teacher: And I fire it into here. And I fire it into here. (2) ((he shows them  
2 A wooden block)) Which one do you think would have a better  
3 chance of (.) tipping that over.
- 4 Adam: The [rubber one.
- 5 Ss: [Steel bullet.
- 6 Craig: They both [would.
- 7 Adam: [The rubber one. (.) Because it'll bounce[off.
- 8 Craig: [They both  
9 Have the same momentum and force. Because-
- 10 Adam: The rubber one would bounce off, so it would [like be able to=  
11 Phan?: [The steel one would=  
12 Adam: = knock it down. The steel one like, probably go through or  
13 whatever.
- 14 Phan: = go through.
- 15 Teacher: See, thi-, this is- This is the question that I'm asking.
- 16 Adam: Aaw.
- 17 (3.0)

- 18 Teacher: [Both have the same size, speed, and mass. Okay? (.) They are fired at a=  
19 ?M: [(xxx)  
20 Teacher =block of wood. Which is most likely to knock the block over.  
21 Craig: I think they both would.  
22 Teacher: They both would. (.) But which one would- would ta- would knock it  
23 over, better.  
24 Craig: Oh, the [rubber one.  
25 Ss: [The rubber one.  
26 Teacher: Rubber one?  
27 Craig: Yeah.  
28 Teacher: Why do you think that?  
29 Craig: Well, because [because as the rubber one hits the block, (.) the um,  
30 Adam: [I been saying it for the last five minutes. (xxx) =  
31 somebody else say it. ((Ss laugh))  
32 Craig: =the [block pushes off-  
33 Herlinda: [(xxx) piece of rubber  
34 Teacher: Shhh.  
35 Craig: [As the rubber-  
36 Teacher: [Control yourself. Yeah?  
37 Craig: Yeah that's right. As the- When the [rubber-  
38 Teacher: [Show a little maturity. Yes, go  
39 ahead.  
40 Craig: When the rubber bullet hits the block, it pushes off. And, the um, the  
41 same forces- I don't know, like pushes off the bullet, too.  
42 Teacher: Show a lot of insight. That's true.

The teacher first poses the question on line 1 when he asks which bullet would have a better chance of knocking the wood block over. Adam gives the correct answer right away on line 4, and he repeats it on line 7. However, since he fails to use terminology that would show that he has mastered the physics concepts in giving the explanation for his answer, the teacher ignores him. The teacher might have used this opportunity to discuss the differences between Adam's answer and "correct" answer using physics terminology, thus giving Adam the tools to remain active in the conversation. Adam tries again on lines 10–13 but again uses no physics terms, and again gets no response. Craig offers the same incorrect response to the question on lines 6, 8 and 9. Even though Craig does use physics terms in his answer—*momentum* and *force* (line 9), his answer is not right since the teacher has asked the students to choose which bullet would be better at knocking the block over; consequently, his answer receives no feedback from the teacher either. The teacher begins to repeat the question on line 15 without having acknowledged any responses thus far. Adam complains on line 16 after having answered the question correctly three times, yet without any acknowledgment from the teacher. After the question has been posed again to the class, Craig answers it, again incorrectly (line 21). The teacher repeats his answer, and urges him to continue trying to answer the question by specifying "which one . . . would knock it over better" (lines 22 and 23). Craig responds on line 24, giving the correct answer which Adam had already given. Once Craig gives the correct answer, the teacher prompts him to give an explanation for his answer, an explanation the teacher could have elicited from Adam. Craig is able to eventually win praise from the teacher by using physics terms (lines 40 and 41).

This exchange illustrates the importance of the students' use of dominant linguistic code in the classroom for the sake of achievement. However, the teacher's lack of response to Adam's (correct) answer is likely more complex than just whether or not the student has followed a prescribed format. Craig and Adam may not be perceived as equally competent students by the teacher to begin with. Here, Bloome and Katz's participant social relationships may be playing an important role in the classroom dynamics. In other words, the classroom identity that has been constructed for each student as either 'good' or 'otherwise' may overshadow any specific contribution made by a given student. Based upon our observations, Adam was one of the few students who was consistently engaged and interested in class discussion. He was also fairly consistently ignored, and the teacher's rejection of him in the dialogue above serves only to alienate him, as seen by his discouraged response in line 16 of Text 1a above.

In an interview in which he discussed this exchange, the teacher said that he felt Adam's answer simply showed that he had not read the book. Adam's answer appears to come from some understanding of the principles of physics even though he did not use the correct terms. However, without feedback from the teacher, Adam does not gain experience using appropriate physics vocabulary. In physics

class, dominant linguistic code is most directly manifested as proper vocabulary, but based on our observations, the students in this class were rarely given an opportunity to explicitly learn and practice the new physics terms they were reading about in the book yet were expected to use when giving answers. It is quite conceivable that the teacher is unaware that any meta-linguistic coaching in “the ways of speaking” is necessary, perhaps due to his own socialization into the academic discourse of physics.

As the data shows, Adam is noticeably affected and complains several times to other students, affording them an opportunity to voice their frustration as well. His comments and their reactions show awareness that feedback from the teacher is crucial for marking achievement. Consequently, a counterscript develops. The teacher does not attend to this frustration, thus missing an opportunity to incorporate the students’ voices into the discussion. Instead, the teacher tells Adam and the students sitting near him to be quiet (line 34), control themselves (line 36), and finally, to “show a little maturity” (line 38), pushing Adam and his cohorts into the margins of the classroom.

The following dialogue occurs a few moments later among several of the students after the teacher has gone through a demonstration of the experiment and has posed the same question yet a third time.

#### **Text 1b**

- 55 Herlinda: We already answered it.
- 56 Adam: I ain’t going to answer it no more because he going to act like he  
57 ignoring me.
- 58 Phan: I know.

This last excerpt shows how the lack of response by the teacher led to the development of a counterscript among the students that resulted in their withdrawal from classroom discussion. Still engaged in their counterscript, the students respond to the question but do not rejoin the larger class discussion. Instead, they focus on the fact that Adam has been marginalized by the teacher, and their counterscript also displays that they do not understand why Adam’s answer was not considered correct.

#### **AP US History**

The next excerpt is from the AP US history class. Like the physics teacher, the history teacher is a seasoned veteran in the district, having taught there for over 25 years. She teaches history classes, as well as the AP English class, and her classes are textbook examples of the recitation script. In Text 2 below, the teacher initiates an exchange by asking the students to, in essence, ‘role play’ an official in the

Mexican government prior to the annexation of Texas by the US in the mid-1800s. The students are asked what the Mexican government would want from its citizens.

**Text 2: Little Soldiers**

- 1 Teacher: The Mexican government said, OK, we probably need to encourage  
2 settlement (.) there, if this is going to be a money making part of our  
3 country. They negotiated an arrangement with some US settlers. (1.0)  
4 The US settlers, looking for an area where cotton (.) would grow? . . .  
5 Mexico looking for settlers to make something grow, had a contract.  
6 You can move into our country as long as you, let's see, if I invite  
7 people into my country, and I'm going to give them land, what will I  
8 expect them to do.
- 9 Miguel: [(Xxx pay taxes to them).  
10 Herlinda: [Work?  
11 Maggie: [Be a citizen?  
12 (2.0)
- 13 Jen: Give (.) the government some (.) money.
- 14 Teacher: After they've been productive, they'll pay taxes. Is that the only  
15 thing our government asks of us as citizens? To pay taxes?
- 16 Miguel: [No.  
17 Maggie: [No (.) to fight (.) in wars, defend the nation, to (.) be part of  
18 the government, la da [da da da.
- 19 Teacher: [That's fine. Anything else?  
20 Maggie: To give them money.
- 21 Teacher: No you're back to the same give the money.  
22 Maggie: Uh, I love money. (I don't know.)  
23 Teacher: What's the [thing the government wants from us most.



“work.” At the same time, Maggie asks, “be a citizen?” This answer is ultimately on the right track, and with a bit of coaxing, the teacher could have prompted her to elaborate. Instead, there is a 2-second pause which suggests to students that none of their answers so far are what she is looking for. More answers are offered which could be considered correct, and which may come from the students’ own experiences. Maggie tries again on line 17 with fighting in wars, defending the nation, being part of the government, and giving money. The teacher offers a perfunctory “that’s fine,” but obviously wants something more, or different.

The teacher then prompts the students by asking how the government wants them to behave (line 27). Her stress of the word “behave” triggers the more critical responses (see lines 29–33) of “like little soldiers,” “good to the nation,” “nationalistic.” The students get on a roll and overlap each other with variations of the theme. Mandy even says “there you go” to another student, thinking they’re onto what she was getting at. The rapidity of the responses, the tagging off each other, and the overlapping was a moment in which the students responded with more enthusiasm than usual. But the teacher’s silence and looks of exasperation are followed by Jennifer’s comment, “We’re all on the wrong track.” As evidenced by the dialogue, what the teacher was looking for is that the government wants us to obey all laws. However, it was difficult for us to see how the students’ various responses did not approach this answer, and we felt that in a sense, all of their responses basically implied obeying laws.

Particularly interesting in this exchange is the response, “like little soldiers.” Amidst all the other answers offered by the students, this phrasing has a decidedly critical edge to it, and is representative of the frequent attempts by students to challenge the dominant cultural codes. Mandy’s cadence and the nasal tone she used were recognizable as sarcasm, and suggested the mocking of a whiny authority figure who demands that people conform to some unreasonable standard of behavior. This response seems more disruptive and challenging than simply ‘obeying laws,’ but this counterscript is not taken up by the teacher. Perhaps she feels there is a certain amount of material to be gotten through, and thus there is no time to entertain the notion that obedient citizens of a country might be behaving as the pejorative “little soldiers.” However, this exchange with multiple attempts at an answer—one that ultimately required only rote memorization from the book—took a full 2 minutes of class time. Alternatively, one might assume that the teacher’s strict adherence to the script is necessitated by the goal of getting the students to pass the AP exam by learning the “correct” answers. However, the teacher told us in an interview that she discourages the students from taking the AP exam because she felt that it set them up for disappointment.

However, this is a potential ‘third space’ where the students are clearly going outside the bounds of the answers provided in the textbook, and offering some insights which may come from their own experiences. Indeed, behaving as “little soldiers” ironically mimics what the students are asked to do in the context of a

constraining monologic script such as this. This third space is where, as Gutierrez suggests, opportunity to challenge transcendent script takes place. History classes seem to be natural contexts for such a dialogue to occur. However, the critical discussion of issues in this AP US history class is not encouraged by the teacher, who for whatever reason seems to feel that answers which reflect the transcendent script—i.e., those provided in the textbook, or received knowledge—are the only possible correct answers. However, it is possible that the students might feel more engaged in the class, and indeed, might learn more if they felt that their insights contributed to the classroom dialogue.

### **Part 2: Help us Learn the Script**

What the above excerpts have in common is the teachers' rigid adherence to the monologic script, and that the teachers do not make explicit why the students' answers are incorrect. In Adam's case, he was on the right track, but because he did not use the correct terminology, the teacher discounted his answer and did not attempt to make the connection to what he was saying and the appropriate physics terms. Similarly, in the second excerpt, the students were interrupted or ignored with little explanation as to why. Thus, it is not surprising that come test time, the students seem baffled by what is being asked of them.

In Texts 3 and 4, we provide examples in which students ask for guidance in producing answers the teachers will find appropriate. These two exchanges illustrate teacher/student interaction while they are discussing upcoming exams.

#### **Physics**

In the first excerpt below, the physics teacher is discussing how to answer essay questions for a test. The student named Craig in the following dialogue is the same student who was praised in Text 1 for his answer about the rubber bullet. Interestingly, this excerpt shows that despite the teacher's appraisal of Craig as a student who experiences success in the discourses of physics, he is not always comfortable using dominant linguistic code to express his mastery of physics. Julia is an African American student who has fairly good command of the dominant linguistic code.

Beginning on line 13 (Text 3), the teacher is clearly modeling dominant linguistic code for the students. He tells them that there are two ways to answer the test questions. One way is like "somebody on the street" (line 6), and the other way is like someone who has taken a physics course (line 8). He then goes on to give examples of what the two possible answers might be to a question about why a can is not moving (lines 13–15 and 17–21). The answer that is acceptable to the teacher uses the technical phrase "unbalanced forces" (line 20). This example is in fact one occasion where the teacher does explicitly teach dominant linguistic code. However, the problem is that the teacher offers this model prior to handing out a test, where he might have given them the opportunity to practice the dominant

**Text 3: Street Physics**

- 1 Teacher: Now please remember when you're answering these- some of  
 2 these questions, where I give you space to fill in?
- 3 Craig: [Aw, man.
- 4 Teacher: [There's two [things, you could do. You could- You could=  
 5 Julia: [(laughs)) (xxx)
- 6 Teacher: =en- You could answer it as if somebody on the street who has  
 7 never taken a physics course. Or you could answer it as (.) you  
 8 would because you have taken a course.
- 9 Julia: Are you going to take points off for the street person version?
- 10 Teacher: Yes. I expect you ah, use physics ideas. Of course.
- 11 Julia: (That sucks.)
- 12 Craig: (xxx) Blank is the blank blank of the blank.(.)What?  
 ((The teacher then goes through the following possible test question,  
 giving both the 'street person' answer and the 'physics ideas' answer))
- 13 Teacher: You know. (.) Why- Why is- Why is this- Why is this can. Why is  
 14 that can not moving. Well, you could say because there's nothing  
 15 pushing it.((Craig laughs)) [That- That'd be one way. That'd be=  
 16 Miguel: [It's in equilibrium.
- 17 Teacher: = off the street. You know I mean any- any fool could say 'Well,  
 18 because nobody's pushing it.' That's true. I don't- You don't have  
 19 to take a course in physics to say that answer. Another answer,  
 20 maybe a better way would be because there's no unbalanced forces  
 21 on that can. [That's why it's [not moving.

- 22 Miguel: [Or it's-
- 23 Miguel: [Isn't it in equilibrium?
- 24 Teacher: It's equilibrium, something like that, yes. It shows that you, have
- 25 learned something about physics.
- 26 Craig: Oh, Mister. I show that every day in class.
- ((This example elicits the following comment from Julia))
- 27 Julia: But, it's like, I know how to word the stuff. I just can't use all the
- 28 terms.
- 29 Teacher: Well, yeah you're sh-the quest- the problem is you had better
- 30 learn, because next year you're going to be in college. And the
- 31 professor is not going to say. Oh, too bad. You can't do it. Well,
- 32 that's the way it goes. ((Teacher begins passing out exams)) You
- 33 know, you've got to learn how to do it. And the only way that you
- 34 can learn how to do it better, is by practice. (1.0) And that's
- 35 why I'm asking you to do some writing.

linguistic code without being under the pressure of a testing situation. Little to no actual class time is devoted to giving the students verbal or written practice in the use of the terms they are expected to have mastered by test time.

On line 16, and again on line 23, Miguel, a Latino student who is adept at using dominant linguistic code, gives the correct term for "no unbalanced forces" (equilibrium), and is rewarded by the teacher. At the same time, Craig and Julia's description of a conceptually correct answer that does not reference physics terminology is deemed insufficient. Craig's comment on line 12 illustrates his frustration with the arbitrariness of fill-in-the-blank exams where rote memorization of vocabulary is tested rather than mastery of physics concepts. The teacher tells them that using the correct terms shows that they have "learned something about physics" (lines 24 and 25). Craig responds on line 26 that he "show[s] that every day in class." This interaction illustrates that for the teacher, achievement only takes place through tests, though clearly, the students view their daily participation as moments of achievement. The discussion continues between Julia and the teacher, and Julia expresses genuine concern about her ability to score well on the test, even though she feels that she has mastered the concepts. She tells him, on

lines 27 and 28, that she knows “how to word the stuff,” she “just can’t use all the terms.” The teacher does not acknowledge her mastery of the “physics ideas,” but chooses to focus on the more technical matter of labeling the concepts correctly.

It is important to acknowledge that the teacher expects his students to go to college (line 30), which is why he believes they need a good command of physics terms. However, he does not scaffold the students into this discourse. His expression that they “had better learn it” reflects the importance of such knowledge for success in college, but fails to concede the potential difficulty involved in learning such forms of talk for these non-mainstream students. He seems unaware of the fact that these students might need more guidance in learning to use these forms of talk than middle-class students who have more cultural and linguistic resources. More importantly, this teaching style does not lend itself to bridging gaps between students’ everyday knowledge about the physical world and the academic discourse they need for naming the concepts that they are learning about.

### AP US History

In the following excerpt, a dialogue occurs which is similar to that in Text 3, in that the students are essentially asking for apprenticeship in the dominant linguistic code. The teacher is giving the students a due date for their DBQs, or Document Based Questions (which are part of the packaged curriculum of AP US history). She tells them that she wants profound answers, which prompts Jennifer, a student of Anglo and Asian descent, to ask what she means by this.

#### Text 4: A Profound Answer

- |    |          |   |
|----|----------|---|
| 1  | Jen:     | Can you give us an example, of what you, what you think is      |
| 2  | Miguel:  | Yeah, could you give us an example, [(Ms.)                      |
| 3  | Teacher: | [Of a profound answer?  |
| 4  | Melissa: | [Could you (read)- [Could you                                   |
| 5  |          | like bring (xxx) from one of your other classes.                |
| 6  | Maggie:  | [Yes,   |
| 7  |          | please.   |
| 8  | Julia:   | Why don’t you just write one, and let us borrow a (piece).      |
| 9  | ?S:      | (That would be ridiculous.)                                     |
| 10 | Miguel:  | We could all take different parts.                              |
| 11 | Julia:   | (xxx) and we’d build from that.                                 |
| 12 | Jen:     | Because like, you know what’s funny to me? Like, you, you could |

- 13 give me a question, and tell me to answer that question in a, an essay,  
 14 and I could answer that question but I, but I, I could be guided  
 15 somewhere else in my own mind, but what you [wa:nt might not be  
 16 what I'm saying.
- 17 Teacher: [S:u:re,  
 18 You start with thi:s, that is your thesis statement. You follow from  
 19 tha:t, to thi:s. (..) Where are you going to be usin:g (.) your quotes.
- 20 ?FS: Uhm, in . . .  
 21 ((SS respond at once; unintelligible [xxxxxxx]))
- 22 Teacher: [In the paragraphs that deal with  
 23 immigration, relations with France, and the development of parties or  
 24 factions.
- 25 Julia: So we have to use quotes?

Jennifer asks an important question, one that shows that again, despite the teachers' exposition on the subject matter during class sessions, the notion of how to succeed on exams is still a mystery. She seems acutely aware that there is a gatekeeping dominant code, and her question on line 1 and her contributions on lines 12–16 show a sincere interest in an answer, indicating that this code seems unattainable to her. While several of the students appear to be joking about Jennifer's question and seem to be trying to get out of doing some difficult preparation, Jennifer is quite serious. It is difficult for her to say this: she appears to choose her words carefully, and she hedges her concern with pauses and fillers. Furthermore, her comment about "being guided somewhere else in [her] own mind" is based on precedent. In our observations, she frequently provided answers which were thoughtful, but did not fit the pattern of a name, date, or other brief response demanded by the kinds of questions asked. She often appeared eager to get beyond the text, to read between the lines—i.e., to engage in a more dialogic discussion about the issues. Her contributions, if recognized by the teacher, could open up a third space where dominant cultural codes could be challenged.

Jennifer feels she has an understanding of the material, but her talk shows an awareness that her perspectives are not considered "profound." In this excerpt, instead of addressing Jennifer's frustration that her insights go unrewarded on exams, the teacher goes on to explain the technical procedure for structuring an answer to a DBQ. Consequently, a profound answer becomes a matter of technical prowess,

not insight. One might argue that there is no room for original insights on the AP history exam, with its emphasis on quoting from historical sources. However, even given the necessity of repeating the narrative of the US as it is conventionally told for the exam, students should have room in class to discuss and to understand disjunctions between their experiences as members of marginalized groups and the story that they must produce on exams. Furthermore, as we observed in this class, the heavily used monologic script not only constrained the discussion, but was also an inefficient way to convey the information. Students consistently guessed the correct answers through the teacher's cued elicitations. Certainly some of that time could have been spent discussing issues, and allowing students to provide insights and challenge the status quo, constructing a responsive–collaborative script.

One last point to note about this transcript is that although the teacher gives the students instruction in the technical aspects of the DBQ exam, she does not explain why that particular format has to be followed. She might have used this moment to explain that are mainstream conventions for writing, and Jennifer's question could have opened up a fruitful dialogue about concerns and criticisms the students had about these conventions. In this way, the students might be apprenticed into the dominant code so that they can then challenge these codes. Critically, the potential for bridging this gap is lost in this exchange.

## DISCUSSION

Our investigation of classroom talk reveals almost exclusive use of monologic scripts by the teachers, scripts which do not allow for discussion of or practice in the dominant linguistic code, or space for critiques of the transcendent script. The two texts in Part 1 demonstrate the teachers' rigid adherence to a monologic script. In Text 1, an opportunity to scaffold the students into the dominant linguistic code of physics arises, but is overlooked. Similarly, in Text 2, an opportunity to interrupt the transcendent script of history occurs, but is not taken up by the teacher, thus eclipsing any opportunity for a more productive third space to develop. The two texts in Part 2 reveal that students explicitly ask for help in learning the dominant linguistic code that will enable them to participate in the teacher's monologic script, showing that they both desire and require more practice in the discursive conventions that will allow them to experience academic success.

Over the course of the year, we observed some of the 'good' students become increasingly adept at conforming to these monologic patterns, as these were the types of interactions most commonly sanctioned by the teachers as acceptable participation. These students were the ones able to engage in the recitation script by deducing the right answer from the intonation of the teacher's voice, managing an educated guess, or simply, being the only ones to offer an answer to the question posed. However, these were not always the students who provided the

most insightful answers, or evinced an ability to think analytically about a question posed by the teacher. We observed that several of the students (such as Adam, Craig, and Jennifer), who initially showed a desire to participate in classroom discussions of subject matter, were eventually discouraged from doing so since their contributions were seldom deemed appropriate by their teachers. Based on our observations, they struggled at the margins of the classroom because they were not scaffolded toward using appropriate discursive practices which would allow them access to the academic success they were seeking.

As our results indicate, many of the advanced-track students' contributions we studied were not judged as successful by their teachers. Perhaps teachers assume these junior and senior level students are already familiar with both the dominant linguistic and cultural codes, particularly because they are in advanced-track classes. Based on this assumption, teachers may refrain from explicitly teaching these dominant codes, unintentionally marginalizing these students further by not allowing them to acquire the requisite forms and knowledge. As our data clearly show, however, non-mainstream students in advanced-track classes would benefit from explicit discussions of dominant codes in classroom discussions, for the purpose of acquiring the mainstream ways of speaking while questioning the arbitrariness of those discourses.

We believe the reasons teachers engage in these sorts of discursive practices are complex and varied. Teachers' actions are part of the institutionalized discourses that perpetuate dominant linguistic and cultural codes, and that such actions are potentially present in every educational institution. Perhaps they teach this way because they are using models from how they themselves learned, or following methods promoted in their teacher training. Furthermore, teachers may stick to their script because of the ostensible efficiency of the recitation script when covering material. We suggest that teachers themselves are unaware of how they adhere to these monologic scripts, and how these scripts reflect the transcendent script into which they themselves have been socialized. However, even if teachers do not intentionally ignore students or foreclose opportunities for dialogue, these acts have important consequences for students' academic success.

### **Transforming the Classroom by Critiquing the Scripts**

We believe that it is possible for teachers and students to make more use of the responsive/collaborative script, thus allowing space for learning the conventional information needed to do well in classes and on AP tests, but also opening up space to critique the "knowledge" that is being transmitted. If this script is employed, students can learn the appropriate discourses needed for success, but even more importantly, can also engage in *critical thinking*. We recognize that this term is difficult to define (e.g., see Atkinson, 1997), but our view of taking a critical stance or using critical thinking aligns with scholars whose work represents crit-

ical pedagogy and critical literacy perspectives such as Delpit (1995), Gutierrez, Larson, and Kreuter (1995a, 1995b), Benesch (1993, 1999), and Kubota (1999). These scholars agree that critical thinking, as it is conceptualized by mainstream academics, is biased towards middle-class native speakers, and they argue that the forms of participation and the body of knowledge which are the basis of most mainstream classroom discussions negatively affect non-mainstream students' participation. By (re)examining conventional knowledge, critical thinking becomes the practice of challenging the transcendent script that pervades American curricula. This view of critical thinking, which has been called *dialogic critical thinking* (Benesch, 1999), encourages debate and allows space for questioning the cultural presuppositions that underlie the subject matter.

Although advanced-track classrooms have been found to be placed wherein critical thinking does occur to a greater degree than in regular track classrooms (Oakes, 1985; McNeil, 2000), our study indicates that monologic scripts dominate these two classrooms, effectively disallowing opportunities to engage in dialogic critical thinking.<sup>4</sup> By virtue of being outside the mainstream in terms of their life experiences, these students are likely to have critical insights that might challenge the mainstream discourses of the subject matter they are studying. This may be particularly true for the history class, a discipline which conventionally reports the dominant groups' version of history, and tends to marginalize perspectives and contributions of minority groups (Cherryholmes, 1983; Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995; King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997). However, it should be noted that physics is also a contestable discourse (e.g., Kuhn, 2000; Nandy, 1990) despite the obduracy of conventional forms of scientific knowledge in education.

On the face of it, mainstream ways of speaking and thinking must be acquired by non-mainstream students if they are to participate fully in the classroom and succeed later in life. Lamont and Lareau (1988) point out that "students must realize that the acquisition or nonacquisition of certain cultural beliefs, values and experiences can lead to their exclusion or inclusion from certain jobs, resources and high status groups" (cited in Kubota, 1999, p. 29). However, we want to emphasize that the notion that these students must simply develop an ability to use dominant linguistic code leaves the ideas of mainstream scripts unchallenged. Instead, we concur with Kubota, who supports teaching these scripts not for the purpose of acculturation, but for the purpose of giving students a voice so that they can use the dominant linguistic code "to advocate cultural and linguistic equality in the wider society" (p. 29).

We suggest that teachers need not adhere to a monologic script in advanced-track classrooms, despite the rigid nature of these curricula. Clearly, one of the purposes of taking an AP history class is to earn college credit, and achieving high marks on the exam requires learning the scripts of AP History. The same is true for college-prep physics, as learning the ways of talking about physics will help students to engage in science classes in college while using the appropriate vocabulary

and language that follows the conventions of scientific talk. We acknowledge the difficulty involved in simultaneously teaching non-mainstream students the dominant linguistic code while asking them to question dominant discourses, but we suggest that open discussion of these issues among teachers and their students can help to resolve the apparent contradiction. Furthermore, there are models for this sort of dialogical classroom discourse (McNeil, 2000; Shor, 1992).

In the framework of dialogic critical thinking, students can become empowered and can work to change the system that constrains their status as legitimate thinkers and students. In this way, classrooms can be sites for social transformation since “any conversation or text . . . has ideological implications and impetus: either imposing, maintaining, or contesting institutional and societal ideologies” (Bloome, 1994, p. 237). To allow for the contestation of dominant institutional and societal ideologies, and consequently, to allow non-mainstream students’ to have more of a voice in the classroom, teachers might adopt the responsive/collaborative script which allows space for dialogic critical thinking. This script offers students more opportunities to take up a critical stance, thus enabling them to contest the transcendent script that permeates American educational institutions.

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## NOTES

1. The term ‘non-mainstream’ refers to students who differ from middle class (typically white) students that comprise the dominant culture in the United States. We realize the problematic use of binary labels such as mainstream and non-mainstream. However, we find these terms useful to encapsulate the broad diversity of the students who are described in the literature review as well as those who participated in our study. Some characteristics of these students are that they speak non-standard dialects of English or are limited in their English proficiency, come from low-income families, and are, by and large, students of color.

2. Pseudonyms were used for the high school and the names of all participants.

3. Transcription conventions are as follows:

[	A left bracket represents an overlap among two speakers.
xxx	Refers to inaudible material.
(text)	Text in parentheses refers to a probable transcription, but indicates uncertainty of what was said.
=	Latched speech. Used to indicate no pause between utterances.

(.)	Micropause.
(2.0)	Timed pause.
((coughs))	Text appearing in double brackets describes action at that point in the talk.
te:xt	Stretching of sound preceding the colon.
text-	A hyphen is used to show when a speaker's utterance is cut off abruptly.
<u>text</u>	Underlining indicates stress or emphasis.

4. 'Critical thinking' has conventionally been defined as higher-order thinking skills such as evaluation, synthesis, analysis, and memorization. These skills have also been called monologic critical thinking (Benesch, 1999) and cognitive skills (Short, 1994). Benesch (1999) uses the term dialogic critical thinking while Gutierrez et al. (1995a) use the term third space to refer to the transformative potential of incorporating the voices of heretofore marginalized groups.

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