**Student Positioning in the Classroom**

Positioning may be broadly defined as how actions and speech are used to assign parts to speakers during interactions (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). More specifically, positioning may be physical or metaphorical, and may include examples such as a teacher’s position at a specific location in the classroom or how people position themselves with regards to others, respectively (DeJarnette & González, 2015). In thinking with the metaphorical form of positioning, scholars have discussed how textbook language may position students in a manner that places them under both the teacher and text’s authority (Herbel-Eisenmann, 2007; Herbel-Eisenmann & Wagner, 2007). Arguing a similar point, Wagner and Herbel-Eisenmann (2014) stated that teachers may perceive texts as authorities when assessing students’ solutions, and although students and teachers can share mathematical authority (see Lampert, 2001), oftentimes students are positioned under the mathematics discipline and teacher authority (Herbel-Eisenmann & Wagner, 2010). And while whole group settings may limit student positioning (DeJarnette & González, 2015), group work offers varied opportunities for student positioning.

Wood and Kalinec (2012) assert that mathematics learning happens during students’ engagement in social practices, it has elements of social and academic talk. With regards to the more academically related form of engagement, intellectual authority Langer-Osuna (2016), students are positioned as credible sources of information for specific tasks (Engle & Conant, 2002), and this intellectual authority may result in their ideas being more readily attended to, positively evaluated, and accepted (Inglis & Mejia-Ramos, 2009; Kurth, Anderson, & Palinscar, 2002; Sengupta-Irving, et al., 2013). Intellectual authority may also be advantageous as students positioned with this type of authority may be granted or given access to the conversational floor without interruptions (Erickson, 2005; Kurth et al., 2002; Sengupta-Irving, 2014), while those who positioned as lacking intellectual authority may have limited opportunities to the conversational floor (Kurth et al., 2002). Additionally, authority may be more socially related. Wood and Kalinec (2012) refer to talk that in which others are told what to do as “action-oriented subjectifying talk”, while Langer-Osuna (2016) utilizes the term “directive authority” when referring to authority which is socially constructed among students. Action-oriented subjectifying talk may affect students’ opportunities to engage productively in mathematics talk, specifically for students being frequently directed or managed (Wood & Kalinec, 2012).

DeJarnette and González (2015) maintain that group work allows for student positioning through interactions with one another. During this interactive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1999), information and action are exchanged and aid students’ positioning respective to one another (DeJarnette & González, 2015). Thus, interactive positioning relies on both parties involved as people position themselves and are positioned, (DeJarnette & González, 2015). And although students may position themselves during interactions, they do not always identify their own positioning explicitly or necessarily intend to position themselves in a specific manner (DeJarnette & González, 2015). In this sense, positioning is not always intentional or explicit, and is also subjective in the way that others perceive of it during interactions.

Positioning also does not exist within a vacuum. Like other forms of speech, actions, and interactions, positioning exists within societal structures and systems of power. Langer-Osuna (2015) contends that actions may be interpreted or positioned based on relations of power, and supports her claim sharing that in gendered and racialized figured worlds within the mathematics classroom, female and male students were positioned as inappropriate and appropriate, respectively, even though their actions and interactions with group members were similar (Langer-Osuna (2011). Langer-Osuna’s example of positioning with regards to power relations demonstrates student positioning in the mathematics classroom at the intersection(s) of their gendered and racialized identities that are carried with them into the classroom.

Students’ positioning may be long-standing or change from moment to moment. Positions such as novice, facilitators, and experts may continue for an extended period of time (Barnes, 2003; Esmonde, 2009). Langer-Osuna (2011) examines a case in which two group leaders, Kofi and Brianna who were both high achieving students, ended up with opposite identity and engagement trajectories across the school year. Kofi was positioned as a strong learner and leader and fully engaged in math talk whereas Brianna was positioned as bossy and engage in very limited math talk. The case of Kofi and Brianna underscores how positional identities are co-constructed among students and that at a macro-level student positioning appears sustained. Holland and Lave (2001) refers to the process of positioning that occurs across several events and becomes a part of the person’s social identity as “thickening”. The emphasis here being on the positioning spanning several events as thickening does not occur after a mere snapshot of interaction among students; rather after a pattern of sorts has been established and the positioning stabilizes. In thinking with positioning that occurs on a moment-to-moment basis, students’ positions may not be perceived as fixed as they tend to shift (DeJarnette & González, 2015) at this more micro level. For instance, students may be positioned with mathematical authority in one moment and lose this positioning in another, thus underscoring an individual’s constant repositioning (DeJarnette & González, 2015). Whether sustained or moment-to-moment, it is evident that positional identities are negotiated, that is verified and taken up or rejected during student interaction, are co-constructed, and intersect with other identity axes, and thus share in complexity as Black students’ mathematics identities.

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