Boundary Crossing of Discourses in Chat Interaction During Creative Collaborative Writing

Kristiina Kumpulainen & Anna Mikkola

University of Helsinki
Department of Teacher Education
What should 21st century education look like?

• In traditional schooling, space and time are usually controlled and circumscribed (Brown & Renshaw, 2006; Vadeboncouer, 2005).

• Organizationally, schools often minimize the opportunity for long-term intellectual and identity development by dividing the day into periods defined by a clock rather than by the needs of learning (Lemke, 2002, 2004).

• Inflexible curricula, textbooks, and teacher talk dictate the dominant chronotope of schooling, leaving little room for personalized, authentic and creative learning (Engeström, 2008; Säljö, 2012).
Context of the study

- The study is situated in a Finnish elementary school of 240 students and 16 teachers, in the Helsinki district.

- All the students participated in a communal musical production, and during a period of 1 year worked together with their teachers and other experts, and collaboratively produced a number of poems, short movies, audiovisual effects, animations, stories, a school musical script, and a composition of the musical melody using various technological tools.

- To enable the students’ collaborative work in and outside school, they were given small laptops that were set up with a wireless Internet connection. The laptops were equipped with a collaborative writing tool VisciPad, with a chat channel.
A group of students working with their script
The outcome of the students' work, the fantasy school musical "Magic Forest".
Empirical data

• The study focuses on a **three-month phase** in the project during which a group of fifth- and sixth-grade students engaged in technology-mediated collaborative writing of a school musical script.

• 21 elementary aged students’ (11-12 years old) **online chat discussions** that is, “chats” while they collaborated in writing a school musical script both inside and outside school.

• A total of 4744 chat messages.
Research questions

1. How do the students establish and manage boundaries between various discourses during their computer-mediated collaborative work?

2. How do hybrid spaces created by the boundary crossing of discourses mediate the students' online collaboration?

3. Which sociocultural tensions emerge in the boundary crossing of discourses in the students' chat interaction and how are they managed?
Sociocultural approach

- Learning is a complex, reciprocal process dependent on constructive, culturally relevant interactions between learners and their social ecologies that vary across temporal, contextual, and cultural spaces (Barron, 2004).

- Discourses are enacted through the practices of the communities in which people participate (Wenger, 1998). Discourses offer membership in communities that involve ways of being, valuing, and speaking (Gee, 1996).

- Canagarajah (2005) introduced the term “shuttling” to illustrate the ways in which individuals move between social–textual conventions during their participation in various communities and how they make use of semiotic resources to achieve personally relevant goals.
Boundaries, boundary crossing and hybrid spaces

• Boundaries are an essential part of the circulation of knowledge and meaning across the social world (Bowker and Star, 1999; Wenger, 2000).

• In a hybrid space the students’ discourses intersect and merge (Bakhtin, 1981; Gutiérrez et al., 1999).

• According to Gee (2010), a hybrid space is where pupils’ primary discourses, which are used in the home, community, and informal social interactions, and pupils’ secondary discourses, which are endorsed by school and other formal institutions, intersect to form a subsequent, “in-between” space.

• In a hybrid space oppositional categories work together to open up both possibilities and tensions in collaborative activity and meaning making (Bhabha, 1994).
Methodology

- The methodology used in our analysis of the pupils' chat interaction is based on educational linguistics, namely interactional sociolinguistics (Gee, 1996), and ethnography of communication (Gumperz, 1982), which examines language as inseparable from the contexts of its use.

- Language-in-interaction is not a neutral medium appropriated by a speaker because every word holds the cultural meaning of the multiple contexts in which the word has lived its socially tuned life (Bakhtin, 1981; Bloome & Clark, 2006; Cazden, 2002; Macbeth, 2003; Mehan, 1979).
Findings

- Boundary crossing in the students' chat interactions was found to give rise to hybrid spaces where *the discourses of schooling* and *everyday life* intersected.

- Characteristic of these hybrid spaces was the continuous fluctuation of *socio-emotional features* that mediated the boundary crossing of discourses in the pupils' joint online activity.

- In these *hybrid spaces of chat interaction*, the students negotiated a common ground and gained mutual inspiration, trust, and belonging.

- The study also demonstrates *sociocultural tensions* in boundary crossing and how these both facilitated and challenged the students' computer-mediated collaboration.
Example 1: Building a sense of trust and belonging

288 9:36 Sari: We’ve now talked about this place, squirrels and musical (school) and a little bit about traveling and flying
289 9:36 Aida: Nice first we talked about squirrels, the exams and then travels and then flying =)
290 9:37 Aida: Yeep
291 9:37 Sari: We are versatile people
292 9:37 Aida: And have the same thoughts
293 9:37 Sari: Jep
294 9:37 Aida: Hih
295 9:37 Sari: What should we talk about?
296 9:37 Aida: Well dunno
297 9:38 Sari: What’s your hobby, by the way? Dance?
298 9:38 Aida: Yeah and scoutingggg
299 9:38 Sari: Oh yeah. My group member knows you and Lumpa
300 9:38 Aida: Yeah I was just about to write you about this thing
Example 2: Tensions in boundary crossing

728 9:45 Liina: XD
729 9:45 Senja: I wanna sing anyway.
730 9:45 Sofia: Aha! You can't if you don't do it inside your head.
731 9:45 Senja: Butterfly?
732 9:45 Senja: God is a girl?
733 9:45 Liina: Nono
734 9:45 Olga: Senja, shut up!!!!!
735 9:45 Senja: I do I do I do?
736 9:45 Olga: Senja really that is beginning to annoy
737 9:45 Senja: Angel of darkness?
738 9:45 Sofia: Yeah, it is
739 9:45 Senja: Sorry..
740 9:45 Olga: Be QUIET!!!!
741 9:45 Liina: Hhyss
742 9:46 Sofia: How come you're not singing Pippi Longstocking....
743 9:46 Liina: Tidydii
744 9:46 Senja: Everything is vinksin vonksin...
745 9:46 Olga: REALLY!!!
• We examine boundary crossing of discourses in students' chat interaction.

• Boundary crossing of the students' discourses gave rise to hybrid spaces.

• The hybrid spaces of chat interaction supported computer-mediated collaboration.

• The findings reveal sociocultural tensions in boundary crossing of discourses.

• The study unpacks the social, emotional, and cultural dimensions of chat interaction.
Conclusions

- Learning environments open to diverse discourses call for pedagogical transformation that cut across boundaries traditionally separating institutions of education, popular culture, home, and community (Ito et al., 2013; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013).

- If educators are to work towards hybrid spaces, learners need to be given opportunities to elaborate and incorporate their formal and informal scripts and narratives into the discourses of the learning activity and its pedagogical goals (Gutiérrez et al., 1995).

- Contemporary technologies embedded in 21st-century pedagogies can potentially transform social activities and interactions, allowing pupils to co-create hybrid, ubiquitous, multimodal, and multidimensional contexts for their collaborative activity at the intersection of social systems (Kumpulainen et al., 2013).

- The conception of the classroom as a hybrid space includes its potential as a site where no cultural discourses are secondary: It is particularly important to acknowledge the inherent cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural benefits that derive from multiple discourses.