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Tracing the emergence of a community of practice: Beyond presupposition in sociolinguistic research

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the language-driven aspects of the formation of a classroom-based community of practice (CoP), placing emphasis on ways in which researchers can verify the status of observed practices. Discourse analysis is reinforced by such an evidence-based understanding of the social milieu of a research site. When determining whether an aggregate of people is functioning as a CoP, however, the nature of the measuring stick is a vital question. When institutional forces have brought a group of participants together, how can an observer verify empirically the dynamic development of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire? In a sample case study, representative features outlined by Wenger (1998:130–31) are identified, and their emergence traced, via analysis of ethnographic fieldnotes and audio recordings. These features provide evidence of the development of localised practices (i.e. ways of doing grounded in this community) as distinct from more widely recognisable practices. Identifying the difference increases the likelihood that results of discourse analysis can be useful to educators. (Community of practice, discourse analysis, nexus of practices, warranting)*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is twofold. The primary aim is to argue that communities of practice theory can provide fruitful constructs for sociolinguistic research, but in some settings at least, the researcher must plausibly demonstrate that the aggregate of people under the researcher's gaze indeed constitutes a community of practice with a localised repertoire of practices, including language. Thus the second aim is to explore how this demonstration might be achieved. Describing social organisation in any research setting is potentially fraught with problems if the describer (i.e. the writer of research) has not paid close attention to how the people there have come to understand one another within a particular setting—what Wenger (1998:79) refers to as their particular response to the conditions in which they find themselves. Thus an ethnographic approach to research provides invaluable

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access to the type of information required if one is to know whether practices have been negotiated by the community members or instead relate to mutually recognizable practices established outside the group.[1]

Identification of the status of discursive practices within any group of people can permit an enriched understanding of a research site to emerge (Eckert & Wenger 2005). Thus it has become common in interactional sociolinguistic investigations to adopt a community of practice framework in order to assist the analyst in locating the production and reproduction of constructs such as gender and sexuality, for example, in localised daily practice. One cannot safely presume, however, that a random group of people constitutes a community of practice (with its own set of highly localised practices) merely because they are participating in an activity together on a regular basis or because they share a social identity (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2007:35). Presumptions such as these can lead to inaccurate analysis because a group of people does not need to be functioning as a community of practice in order to share certain practices. In the classroom context of the study that provides the data for this article, language and sexuality was the focus of investigation, and observations on this subject became far more useful following a clear identification of the array of foundations on which group interaction rested. In other words, seeking out and providing evidence that a community of practice was indeed underway (within this institutional setting) permitted a more accurate and lucid account to emerge. Such an evidence-driven understanding of the social milieu of a classroom enables discourse analysis and also increases the likelihood that results will be useful to educators and other interested parties.

Communities of practice

The community of practice (CoP) construct as it was first developed (see Lave 1988; Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), and as it has been interpreted for use in investigations of language in society (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999; Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999), has proved to be a robust framework for the investigation of language in use. As outlined in the previous section, its usefulness has become common knowledge, prompting Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999:175) to rationalise its appeal:

> The obvious appeal of this approach is that it offers the sociolinguist a framework of definitions within which to examine the ways in which becoming a member of a CoP interacts with the process of gaining control of the discourse appropriate to it.

In other words, the approach is in a strong position to enable insight into the inner workings of a community's discourse-driven formation and maintenance. In this framework, a given community (of practice) gains its distinct character as a product of the sustained interaction through which it has formed, and through the shared practices that concurrently emerge from and shape that sustained interaction.

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It follows that analysts applying this framework cannot presume that a group of people constitutes a community with shared language practices, even if those people call themselves a community. These are distinctions that separate the CoP framework from the speech community of Gumperz (see Creese 2005 for a comparison) and Tajfel's social identity theory as well as social network theory (see Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999) and Scollon's nexus of practices (Scollon 2001). These distinctions are significant, for in discourse analysis a great deal can depend on the notion that people in a group share localised language practices.

As suggested above, aggregates of people need not develop shared practices, nor even interact at all, in order to be considered communities at some level because a variety of "modes of belonging" exists (Wenger 1998). Sometimes we align ourselves with broader enterprises beyond the local, even if we have never met the other people who also see themselves as part of those enterprises. Through communities of the imagination (Anderson 1991; Wenger 1998) individuals imagine themselves to have something in common with other people (often far flung individuals) with whom they share a certain trait or collection of traits (e.g. sexual identity, gender, nationality). Then again, those who imagine themselves to be a community can find sustained interaction challenging once they organise themselves under a banner as a "community of alignment" (Wenger 1998) or begin to engage with one another on an ongoing basis (one of the catalysts of communities of practice). As the experiences of gay men (e.g. Bérubé 2001; King 2008) and women (see Morgan 2004) have demonstrated, that which individuals imagine they have in common can indeed turn out to be largely in their imaginations, and imagined quite differently by various members.

It is of course possible that members of imagined communities or communities of alignment do share some practices as a result of their sense of belonging together, but a key distinction between types of communities lies in how the practices have developed. In a CoP, practices arise from ENGAGEMENT between members in a shared enterprise, and this engagement is "bounded" in time and space (Wenger 1998). Importantly, the boundedness is necessary (although limiting) because it affords mutuality, or INTERACTIVE CO-PRESENCE, which in turn allows members to contribute to the defining of enterprises and identities. Three elements together represent the driving forces of engagement: contribution to the pursuit of a joint enterprise, negotiation of meaning, and the development of shared practice (Wenger 1998:184). In reference to joint enterprise, Wenger writes that even in an institutional setting where many edicts come from upper management, "It is [the members'] response to their conditions, and therefore *their* enterprise…. Their practice responds to institutional conditions with an inventiveness that is all theirs" (Wenger 1998:79). In other words, the joint enterprise belongs to the members in spite of all the things that are beyond their control. This is because it is a response that the members negotiate together, and it is based on their own understanding of their situation, even in certain cases where practice is profoundly shaped by external forces. But an observer cannot take for granted that such a response is already underway.

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Community, place, and institution

Thus practice, then, has often not been locally negotiated. Where, then, has it come from? To explore this question, an example provided by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992:483) is helpful. They put forward a commercial airlines flight as a hypothetical example of a community that might exhibit commonalities of practice even though those present lack a shared history of mutual engagement. Using this example, they argue that the airplane is a very short-lived community, involving "limited and routine practices common to many similar communities" (1992:483). To illustrate this, they compare the social effects of the utterance "How about some more coffee, hon" when spoken by a woman to her husband as opposed to being spoken by a young man to a middle-aged female flight attendant. The authors attribute the self-evident incongruity of these two situations to the notion that a marriage constitutes a CoP, replete with couple-specific practices, whereas people who might share aeroplane-specific practices draw on routines that are not specific to the medley of people on that plane. Here they seem to imply that an airplane is a reiteration of external communities (and by implication perhaps external communities of practice), but it is not an actual CoP. This is because it is ephemeral and routine as opposed to being sustained and grounded in any history that might be shared by the members. In fact, one might question whether this medley of people on a plane comprises a community in any sense mentioned thus far. Perhaps it is not imagined to be a community by those present. Similarly, perhaps these people share nothing in common in terms of their alignments. Rather they are people who find themselves together in a place, and they must interact, their only mode of belonging being the mutual possession of a valid boarding pass. The reiterations alluded to by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet above are ways of making sense of their actions in such surroundings.

It is no great leap, then, to suggest that many communities of practice start out like this hypothetical commercial flight. Before mutual engagement forms community practices, and possibly independently of imagination and alignment, or in conjunction with these modes of belonging, co-present individuals are reliant to a degree upon social understandings of space (i.e. place) as a way to organise their behaviours. Places are also articulation points for individuals who find themselves amongst a collection of other individuals in a given location. Returning to the aeroplane example, institutional commercial flight practices exist. For example, passengers pay attention to the safety presentation "even though they might have seen it before" and defer to the cabin crew to a degree that is marked in service arrangements. These (and other) specific practices are activated by the location of that aggregate of people. Though not everyone is fully versed in those practices, they join in "doing the commercial flight" because they find themselves there. In this way, place and practice are co-constitutive. Scollon (2001) asserts that situations such as this illustrative aeroplane scenario are examples of a NEXUS OF PRACTICES, working at a lower level of social organisation than communities of practice. The

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"nexus" is made up of multiple practices that link in such a way that social actors can recognise these practices in the actions of others (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear 1996, cited in Scollon 2001; Gee 1999). Thus referring to such an aggregate of people as a community is not particularly helpful or productive (see also Gee 2005).

Classrooms: Separating place, institution, and community

People who converge in classrooms can also shed some interesting light on the notion that medleys of people can align to places. Haneda (2006) essentially suggests that some classrooms that have been labelled as communities of practice might actually be medleys of people who rely on cultural routines to "do school" rather than comprising a particularly well-developed CoP. In a sense, this description of a classroom is very similar to the commercial-flight scenario described above, where people find themselves together in a certain kind of space and/or place and begin to align to any cultural scripts or routines that they might associate with it. I would like to suggest, however, that what Haneda calls "doing school" can be more usefully described as PERFORMING THE CLASSROOM as part of a nexus of practice. Grounded in space, the latter description permits the analyst to explain why doing school can vary greatly in performance depending on the spatial surroundings it is "done" in, and our social understandings of those spaces (i.e. place). For example, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1999) focus on the "Asian wall" at a California school, demonstrating that in this particular school space there are specific linguistic practices that have acquired meanings that differ markedly from their meanings in other parts of the school. Thus doing school is seen to be a spatially grounded process, and so it is more productive to say that members of a classroom-based CoP are, on one level, performing the classroom using recognizable practices that predate the current enterprise.

Given the correct conditions, they might simultaneously be developing localised practice through sustained mutual engagement. Bearing in mind the wide variation that exists in classroom structures and behaviours, however, it cannot be presumed that a specific group of students and their teacher are engaged in a joint enterprise at all, let alone negotiating meanings and developing shared practices specific to such an enterprise (see Haneda 2006). In order to illustrate that the participants in the present study indeed comprise a CoP, the next section traces its development. During this analysis, localised practice emerges as a significant element of this group's social dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

The broader study was conceptualised as an investigation into the linguistic performance of sexual agency in a sexuality education classroom in a New Zealand secondary school (see King 2011, 2014). As part of this conceptualisation, an ethnographic approach to research was adopted. The application of the term

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"ethnographic" here refers to a commitment during research to prolonged participant observation with the goal of better understanding insider meanings and interpretations (Swann & Maybin 2008:24). Addressing this notion of insider meanings, Johnstone (2000) frames ethnography as a way to describe how people make sense of their own ways of being, acting, and talking—a commitment that arises from a desire to ground social theory in particular situations rather than assume that everyone's behaviours can be explained in the same terms. In order to accomplish this descriptive goal, a participant observer tries to "uncover and record the unspoken common sense of the group they are studying" (Johnstone 2000:82).

Linguistic analysis is enhanced by its integration with an ethnographic approach. This is because the researcher can look at the mutually constitutive relationship between language and the social world, yet do so in a manner that is culturally and socially sensitive in its analysis of local discursive practices (Swann & Maybin 2008:25). In other words, discourse analysis is enhanced by the insider perspective that the researcher gains on the local setting and the people there. Rather than being a method or a list of methods, ethnography is more aptly viewed as a "theoretical outlook" or a "fundamental methodological position" on research (Blommaert 2007:682). The particular ethnographic perspective adopted for the study in question was LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY, which is a bringing together and cross-fertilisation of a number of established "lines of research" (Rampton 2007:585). Amongst these "lines" or programmes is interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982), a field that combines well with an ethnographic approach (Swann & Maybin 2008:21) because it also draws on the ethnography of communication (see Hymes 1974).

During the decision-making process of designing this research, the communities of practice framework provided an attractive way to conceptualise the students, their teacher, and myself as we interacted in the classroom. Ethnographic observations and classroom recordings provide a record of this group's transition from what was arguably a "community of alignment" at the start of the school year, to becoming a CoP as the year progressed. As outlined below (see FROM ALIGNMENT, TO ENGAGEMENT, TO SHARED PRACTICES), localised practices were closely tied to our participation in a sexuality-education research study. With the progression of the broader health course into which the unit was integrated, the engagement of the students with the research process became part of the joint enterprise. In addition, once the sexuality unit began halfway through the year, frank or direct discussion of sexuality gradually became part of the shared discursive repertoire. I argue that there was no shared nexus of practices for participants to quickly align to when discussing sexuality openly IN A CLASSROOM SETTING, and therefore these practices had to be negotiated locally and developed through interaction. Evidence for this lack of shared practice at the beginning of the unit emerges during the analysis of moments when participants experiment with certain sexualised words and discourses. The responses of other participants attest to the marked status of these language

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experiments, and it is through this testing of boundaries that this aspect of their shared repertoire emerges.

FROM ALIGNMENT, TO ENGAGEMENT, TO SHARED PRACTICES

In examining a group of people and attempting to determine whether they represent a CoP, the nature of the measuring stick is a vital question. How can the researcher verify empirically that the criterial characteristics of a CoP (i.e. mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire) are in fact present? Wenger (1998:130–31) outlines a set of specific features, which, in practice, represent these notional qualities. These are:

- Sustained mutual relationships—harmonious or conflictual
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
- The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
- Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
- Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- Mutually defining identities
- The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
- Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts
- Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
- Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- Certain styles recognized as displaying membership
- A shared discourse that reflects a certain perspective on the world

Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999) point out that these features can be operationalised as a means of identifying a CoP's distinguishing qualities. The logical extension of this point is that these same features can be drawn upon to ascertain whether a given group is indeed a CoP at all. Most of these features can be identified in the CoP in question, and their development traced, via ethnographic fieldnotes and audio recordings. In the interest of efficiency they are not all explicated here. For the purposes of this article, the discourse elements of this process are singled out for analysis in order to provide evidence that the group's discursive practices varied in their status, some being locally emergent, and some pre-existing their enrollment in this class. Of the characteristics listed above, the focus here is on the absence of preambles, the presence of jargon and shortcuts, and the development of shared discourses related to the classroom-based discussion of sexuality.

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Early emergence of localised practice

This research was conducted in a secondary school in New Zealand that I have labelled as “Matangi College” (a pseudonym). This school has about nine hundred pupils, and is a “decile five” school, based on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest socioeconomic indicator.[2] Matangi College offers senior secondary-level students the option of studying health (and thus sexuality) as an academic subject and thus offers a rare opportunity in the New Zealand context.[3] The class whose words form the focus of this study were enrolled in “Level 2 Health,” and were therefore sixteen years old.[4] I joined the class seven weeks after they had first convened, but fieldnotes indicate that even at this early stage, practices had begun to develop that were unique to this group. Fieldnotes were essential to this realisation, for at the time I was a peripheral member and so unable to notice several relevant uses of language that later seemed obvious. I had once been a secondary school teacher in the community where this school is located, but it soon became clear that the passage of a decade had rendered this classroom at once both strange and familiar. The students came across as amicable towards their teacher Mr. J, yet (to my eyes) not very attentive. Reflecting at the end of the first day, I wrote the following in my written reflections:

> The students are mature but not classically studious, with a constant combination of on-task and off-task behaviour. It’s a very student-centred room, and Mr. J leaves a lot to them. He doesn’t wait for silence or anything like that. He just gets on with it, and they all get there in their own time.

At the time I felt as though this classroom atmosphere was unfamiliar to me. Despite my efforts to suspend judgment and view the class from an insider’s perspective, by the end of the second day I confessed in the reflective portion of my fieldnotes that it was causing me some distress:

> Once again, the lesson began very informally with no clear beginning. Mr. J started to teach, and let them come round in their own time. This seems to work, but I have to admit I find it a bit distressing. I think I’m just not accustomed to secondary school classrooms anymore.

With the benefit of hindsight, it became clear that interaction in secondary school classrooms in this neighbourhood had not changed significantly. Rather it was my perspective that had shifted. Furthermore, and what is most relevant here, localised practices had begun to develop, and my peripheral status had often prevented ordered routines from coming to my attention. With time, the jargon and shortcuts of this CoP began to reach my ears as meaningful input, and Mr. J’s lack of preamble at the beginning of lessons, formerly a source of confusion and concern for me, became understandable in light of established routines. In fact, it was this tendency to get set up quickly and informally that provides some of the clearest evidence that

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this community of alignment had indeed already started to become a CoP during the time before I arrived.

Absence of introductory preambles

As outlined in the introduction to this section, Wenger (1998) includes "absence of introductory preambles" as a possible feature of a CoP, in which he means that members seem to treat conversations as though they are picking up where they had previously left off. This feature is well illustrated by the following example (taken from my fieldnotes in week 3), when Mr. J was giving instructions for a learning assessment:

> The instructions for the assessment were delivered quickly because these are all established routines. The students seemed to know what he meant (but I was unable to process it).

Relying on established practice, the students were not confused by Mr. J's instructions, which were too vague for me as a relative newcomer. Similarly, example (1) below is a sample of a typical start to a mid-unit lesson in this CoP. Without preamble, Mr. J put a statement on the screen and told the class to "get started on that," and the students indeed began working, apparently with no need to guess what they should be doing.

(1) Absence of preamble 2 (week 11)[5]

1	Mr. J:	um (2) okay toDAY's lesson there you go↑ ((places statement on screen: "How men and women are portrayed in advertising")) you can get started on that↑ and w- (.) and then this is what we're doing critical examination↑ of sexuality and gender in advertising
2	Olivia:	((reading aloud)) how men and women are portrayed differently in advertising
3	Luana:	isn't it the eighteenth today↑
4	Mr. J:	(1) and (1) how do we reinforce our stereotyp- how does THAT reinforce our stereotypes↑
5	Aroha:	this is ahhh //whenever i get a pen// it always runs OUT
6	Luana:	//mister isn't it the eighteenth today↑//

As observed in the fieldnotes above, I had been "unable to process" some of the teacher's instructions. It was unclear to me how one might follow them, and this was because they contained jargon and verbal shortcuts that were unfamiliar to me. After several weeks of planning the sexuality unit with Mr. J and many hours

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spent talking about the curriculum, it was apparent that my knowledge of broader educational discourse in New Zealand was largely current. Any gaps had soon been filled, and I had also become familiar with the terms commonly used by Mr. J for describing classroom activities. Thus my confusion was not a matter of inability to access institutional schooling discourses. I had failed to understand the jargon in those instructions because it had developed locally through mutual engagement of teacher and students in the intervening weeks, as the following section outlines.

Do nows and whats

Many times during my first weeks there, upon arriving in class the students had been asked to "do the what," "get started on the what," or "do the do now." These phrases appeared unproblematic for them but were difficult for me to respond to. In fact, for a few weeks after my arrival the existence of these terms had escaped my attention entirely. It was not until about week 7 that I first wrote in my fieldnotes about the jargon terms "do now" and "what," used as nouns to describe activities undertaken at the commencement of a class. By the time I wrote about these terms, I had become aware of what they meant.

> Mr. J wrote a "Do now" task on the board for the class to write about while he was taking attendance. The question they were to write about was "Where do we get our ideas about what it means to be male or female?" Bit by bit the students engaged with this task. (week 7)

A "do now" was a question that was to be responded to in writing in preparation for a small group discussion. A "what" was a statement describing the main learning goal of that class (literally "what" we were going to be focusing on). Upon seeing a "What" on the board, the students were obliged to copy it in their books word for word (as can be seen in the fieldnote extracts below) and then look up in the dictionary any words that they did not understand.

> We all entered the room and as the class was getting settled, Mr. J placed a statement on the projector. He said "I've put up a what so get out your pen and start copying it down." (week 8)
> The DO NOW was put up on the screen promptly, "Read your partner's homework in silence." On the screen was also a WHAT, "Analysing how western concepts of gender are socially and biologically constructed in the historical context." The students got straight into what was required. (week 9)

The main point here is that, as a newcomer to this group, at first these locally negotiated terms were not part of my linguistic repertoire. My failure to understand them was an indication of my lack of access to the shared repertoire that had begun to develop, and this provides evidence that even at this relatively early (or nascent) phase, the ability to understand and/or deploy localised practice had begun to separate core members from those who were either marginalised or on the periphery.

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This community of alignment was starting to become a CoP through mutual engagement.

Development of shared discourses

Pushing the boundaries. Negotiating localised practices for sexuality discussion. In addition to these examples, further language-focused practices emerged as the term progressed and the topic of the health class began to turn to sexuality. An ongoing and mutually negotiated evolution of a shared repertoire around the open and frank discussion of sexual acts, sexualised body parts, and sexual identities began to unfold. In writing of the shared repertoire as "ours" I aim to emphasise that as a participatory researcher I had considerable input into that repertoire and influence upon it. Obviously the teacher's influence was considerable via the choice of activities and other curriculum-based decisions (processes in which the students and I also had a voice), but he also greatly influenced the ongoing NEGOTIATION of this repertoire, and from the point of view of tracing the emergence of this CoP, that is the key point. As adults in the room, at times our individual influences were conscious, while at other times far less so and grounded more in our reactions to student contributions (or lack of expected reactions). As the examples below demonstrate, the pushing of classroom interactional boundaries concerning the discussion of sex and sexuality was a collectively achieved effect—one that resulted in localised practice.

"*Getting into*" *gender and sexuality.* It was in week 8 of my time at the school that we began to engage with learning about the sociocultural construction of gender as part of preparation for the unit on sexuality. These challenging ideas had been introduced via the analysis of images of men and women from various cultures around the world. For the next activity, our group (myself, Ben, Caleb, and Matt) was combined with another group nearby so that we added Aroha, Sophie, Olivia, and Kate. We were each given a chart to fill in and then told that we had to explain to an alien from outer space how to identify men and women. Some sheets said "Man" at the top, and some said "Woman." We had ten seconds to write two characteristics the aliens could use for a positive identification and then we had to pass the sheet on.

> I wrote 'penis' on the man one, and when Olivia and Sophie saw it they burst out laughing and then Sophie wrote 'vagina' on the woman paper. Then I wrote 'no penis' on the woman one and the laughter started again. Other things written included facial hair, hairy ass, big boobs, and soft features (amongst other things).

The goal of this activity was to get students to realise that, in fact, giving an authoritative definition of male and female bodies to an alien would be quite challenging because bodies actually vary a great deal. It is difficult to know whether this pedagogical goal was achieved; however, it was during such discussions that I, as

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researcher, began to have direct involvement in the development of a shared repertoire around the free discussion of topics often proscribed in a classroom. The students and Mr. J were of course centrally involved in this ongoing negotiation as well. As the students pushed the boundaries, sometimes encouraged by me, as seen above, and other times acting quite independently, they found that those boundaries had shifted considerably. This process of negotiation took place under the watchful eye of Mr. J, whose responses were likewise watched closely by the students.

An excellent example of his management of the shared repertoire occurred the following week when the alien activity was reviewed. Mr. J had observed some words on the charts that certainly pushed boundaries (e.g. "muff" and "dick", which are slang terms for vagina and penis). He said to the class "I don't know what 'no muff' means, so cross things like that out ((class laughter)). Cross out things that you think shouldn't be there." When the Man group was working, Codey said loudly "Dick! You should write dick because it's on this paper." Mr. J was there, and he said "When it says penis already, you don't need to say dick because it's the same thing." In responding calmly to the use of these words and repeating them aloud, Mr. J made it clear that such words were not taboo in this CoP. There was also an implicit message, however, that their use is unnecessary when other terms are available that represent an appropriate register for academic discussion.

This pushing of boundaries took place step by step, and along the way it became clear that some discourse was familiar (i.e. part of a nexus of classroom practices that participants all seemed to take for granted), while other discourse had to be negotiated anew. The remaining examples focus on the same activity introduced by Mr. J in example (1), a "critical examination of sexuality and gender in advertising." Students had discussed print advertisements in groups, and these audio recordings focus on the final idea-sharing discussion.

In example (2), students and teacher are talking about a lingerie advertisement in which a woman (dressed only in lingerie) looks into the camera intensely, and the caption reads "Wait till you see it hanging off the lampshade." Mr. J encourages further discussion of the woman's facial expression.

(2) "ROWR": Co-navigating the frank discussion of sexual attraction

1	Mr. J:	(.) Daniel YOU commented on her FACE
		what's her face DOing
2	Olivia:	seductive
3	Kate:	ROWR
4	Jay:	she looks ANgry
5	Codey:	she looks::
6	Jay:	like
		wanna fight ↑
7	Luana:	it's like (.) looking real like

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8 Mr. J: you made a sound effect
9 Luana: she's looking as if she WANTS it (.) like
10 Mr. J: she does
(smiling) Kate sort of summed it up with a sound effect i suppose↑
but um
11 Aroha: what WAS it
12 Olivia: ROWR
13 Aroha: rowr (laughing) ((widespread laughter in the room))
14 Mr. J: all right
cause that's what it's saying about what it means to be female
yes
(.) y'know we DO want men to find
(2) they wanna (.) get our clothes off and get us (.) whatever
15 Olivia: in bed (laughing)
16 Mr. J: in bed yeah

In response to Mr. J's prompt "What's her face DOing," there are various contributions from Olivia ("seductive"), Jay ("wanna fight ↑") and Luana ("she's looking as if she WANTS it"). These statements provoke no dissonance. However, Kate deploys a sound effect ("ROWR" in a cat-like voice), a contribution that appears to step outside of norms of classroom discussion in this setting (evidenced by widespread laughter in line 13). Mr. J suggests that her sound effect "sums up" all of the other students' contributions, and his endorsement of what I would argue is a more sexualized (and animalistic) version of "seductive" is a good example of how interaction began to give shape to localised practices for the frank discussion of sexuality. Finally, Mr. J hesitates to refer to a sexual act at the end of turn 14, but Olivia contributes "in bed" as a solution. In this way the shared discourse continued to unfold.

In example (3), attention has turned to an advertisement in which a New Zealand rugby celebrity (and sex symbol) appears in briefs. The caption reads "The Complete Package." Its discussion supports the previous example by demonstrating how Hannah pushes a boundary by frankly addressing the meaning of the term "package."

(3) "The complete package is in the undies": Crossing practice boundaries

1 Hannah: ((matter of fact tone)) we got that the complete PACKage↺ is in the undies↺
2 Olivia: AAAH↑ (laughing)
3 Kate: ((sotto voce)) hannah (laughing)
4 Olivia: ha HAAA↑ ((covers mouth with hand))
5 Hannah: and um:: (room laughter)
6 Kate: yum↺

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7	Olivia:	NICE ((spoken in AAVE/SWVE))[6]
8	Mr. J:	hehe CARRY on (room laughter)
9	Hannah:	what ↓
10	Callum:	mister's laughing
11	Luana:	MISter's like (.) eh↺
12	Hannah:	doesn't know what to say to THAT one
13	Aroha:	he DOES↶ look↶
		he's BULGing
14	Kate:	HE'S bul:::ging ((monotone))
15	Aroha:	i said BULGing
16	Mr. J:	all right
		hehe we //got that//
17	Amber:	//he's// BULGing ↑

The reactions of all in the room demonstrate that this is a conversation not at first recognizable as classroom discourse. Olivia and Kate seem delighted and somewhat shocked at Hannah's frank, straight-faced statement about the suggested sexual meaning of "package" (i.e. a bulge created by a man's genitals when clothed). Perhaps encouraged by Hannah's experiment, Kate says "yum" in response to the image, and Olivia says "nice" in what appears to be a southern-US accent. There is much laughter, even from Mr. J (although his is less enthusiastic) and students pick up on this shared reaction. Aroha asserts in line 13 that he is indeed "bulging" and although Mr. J is clearly a bit hesitant in turn 16 ("all right hehe we got that"), these particular approaches to discussing bodies (bulges and packages) and desire (yum and nice) are allowed to stand. As the sexuality unit progressed, this type of ongoing negotiation continued, and in this way, localised practice evolved into an overall attitude of what I have termed CAREFUL GUILELESSNESS around sex and sexuality, accompanied by a mix of calm analysis and tension-relieving humour.

The advertisement, which is the focus of discussion in example (4) below, was also described in King (2010), and I follow that description closely here. The class is discussing a print advertisement for Dolce and Gabbana in which a woman is lying prone on the ground with a man on one knee beside her, leaning down towards her face. Other men can be seen nearby watching with some enthusiasm, and so the scene is suggestive of sexual violence but not incontrovertibly so. All figures in the picture are fully clothed except for the kneeling man, who is not wearing a shirt. Codey has just said that the scene is rather disturbing, and a disagreement ensues as to whether or not the scene depicts sexual violence (either ongoing or impending). All contributions that were addressed (and audible) to the whole room are more indented. A small group of students simultaneously engages in an on-topic side discussion, which is audible only to their own group; this conversation is more closely indented and appears in italics.

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(4) "Olivia say the WORD": Speaking "sex" into sexuality education

1	Mr. J:	so what's disturbing about it
2	Codey:	um //the GANG//
3	Luana:	//NOTHing//
4	Lito:	NOTHing's disturbing
5	Aroha:	they look like they're gonna have a hot steamy ROOT
6	Luana:	NOTHing it looks normal
7	Olivia:	NO it does NOT↺ ((high rising)) it looks like they're about to (.) between her LEGS↶
8	Lito:	he just needs to get between her legs and then
9	Ata:	yeah he's not
10	*Aroha*:	*//Olivia say the WORD//*
11	Ata:	//he's like on the side//
12	*Aroha*:	*ROOT*
13	*Olivia*:	*SEX↶*
14	Kate:	it's he just wants to kiss her //and she's like NO↶//
15	Ata:	//it's like// he's doing CPR↶
16	*Aroha*:	*they look like they're gonna have a*
17	*Olivia*:	*SEXy time*
18	Mr. J:	okay

What is most relevant here is that, in turn 5, Aroha is the first to throw euphemism aside and state quite baldly what the picture suggests. She says "they look like they're gonna have a hot steamy ROOT." Olivia in turn 7 then says "they're about to (.) between her LEGS↶." Aroha interprets Olivia's micro-pause as avoidance of the word sex and encourages Olivia in an aside (turn 10) to just "say the word." Olivia then says "SEX↶" with some gusto, however, still keeping the volume within her group rather than to the whole class. What is most important here is what is not said; when Aroha uses the term "root" she is censured by neither her peers nor the teacher. The implicit message here is that it is appropriate for students in this CoP, and significantly girls, to speak this way in this context. As time passed, more and more of these terms became part of the shared repertoire as members of the CoP experimented with their usage in a classroom setting.

In contrast, the next example highlights another venture into boundary testing, but in this case the POLICING of boundaries is in evidence rather than their extension. Students are discussing a Remy Martin advertisement in which two (fully clothed) women are linked by a chain draped over them and the caption reads "Things are getting interesting."

(5) "Y'know sex toys": Boundary policing of localised practice

1	Amber:	//cause she's got like a// necklace
2	Ata:	//but it's JUST a CHAIN//

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3	Amber:	and the other //one's BITing it//
4	Ata:	//it's JUST// a CHAIN
5	Codey:	no it's those (.) y'know //sex toys//
6	Luana:	//all sexy ↑ //
		and who is it aimed at ↑
7	Jay:	((through teeth)) COdey↺ (nervous laugh)

It is clear from Jay's reaction to Codey's mention of "sex toys" that his contribution sits outside the classroom discourse norms of this group. In response, Jay says "COdey" through his teeth with a scooped tone (i.e. falling then rising) on the second syllable. He then laughs nervously. Once again Jay does not seem to recognise this as an appropriate element in any NEXUS OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES (a set of specific practices that come together to create a recognizable sequence of events; Scollon 2001). His censuring of Codey is another manifestation of the development of a shared repertoire, but in this case it is related to what will not be included.

Along similar lines, example (6) below (taken from later in the example (4) conversation about the Dolce & Gabbana advertisement) demonstrates that not all MEMBERS of this CoP experience identical access to various elements of the shared repertoire around sexuality discussions. During this lesson, Lito experiments with the frank discussion of sexuality, yet her contribution is interrogated by Jay. Hailing from the same neighbourhood and church community as Lito, Jay reveals to his small group some information about her background to explain why he reacts as he does.

(6) "You go to CHURCH remember": Differential access to localised practice

1	Lito:		maybe they're having like a five- foursome or something
2	Jay:		yeah that's what i'm SAYing (.) GANG bang
3	Luana:		and y'know HE'S just getting it started or something
4	Lito:		it looks naughty but sexy at the same time
5	Ata:		yeah (laughs a bit)
6	Luana:		it doesn't look-
7	Jay:		Lito↺ LIto↺
8	Aroha:		says Lito
9	Jay:		you go to CHURCH remember↺
10	Luana:		it doesn't look disturbing cause like y'know↺
11	Lito:		yeah true (laughing)
12	Luana:		her legs are on this side and his her legs are like (.) on the other side
13	*Codey*:	*she doesn't care about- nah*	
14	*Aroha*:	*church* ↑	
15	Mr. J:		okay interesting
16	Lito:		i was just↑ being HON↷est↺
17	*Jay*:	*minister's daughter*↺	
18	*Aroha*:	*IS she*↺	
19	*Jay*:	*yeah*	

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In turn 1, Lito says that the advertisement appears to be suggestive of group sex, and Jay at first orients to this assertion, presumably because it supports a point he has been making for several minutes (before line 1, and not transcribed here) without engendering a response from anyone; that is, that this advertisement depicts a potential "gang bang." In turn 4, perhaps encouraged by Jay's alignment (and Luana's in turn 3), Lito then says, "it looks naughty but sexy at the same time," and Jay reacts negatively to this in turns 7 and 9, chastising her with his falling/rising tone and the repetition of her name (Lito↶ LIto↶), reminding her that she "goes to church." He reveals to Aroha and Olivia that in fact her father is a minister.

Based on ethnographic observations, I would argue that Lito has managed to achieve a level of core membership by this point in the course. As a Pasifika girl whose father is a minister, however, there are certain discursive expectations placed upon her by Jay (a Pasifika boy). He presumably attends the same church, the evidence being that he speaks to Lito from an insider's position ("you go to CHURCH remember↶"), but his own public use of the shared repertoire around frank sexuality discussion (i.e. gang bang) is not questioned. Certainly one could argue that there is a gendered double standard at work here, but Jay's positioning of Lito in this instance could be more directly related to her status as the child of a local church leader. This example demonstrates that membership in a CoP is a complex affair, and not everyone has equal access to the core, or even legitimacy within it regardless of their mastery of localised practices (cf. Davies 2005; Eckert & Wenger 2005). Furthermore, even from within the bounds of core membership, one might not gain legitimacy in relation to all ASPECTS of the shared repertoire.

Regardless of its source, this disciplining of Lito provides evidence that although a shared repertoire has developed, it is closely tied to what Wenger refers to as "sustained mutual relationships" and to the ongoing negotiation of peripheral and core memberships, a process that cannot be entirely separated from communities (of various definitions) that are external to this CoP, or from broader ideologies of, for example, gender and religion. In the words of Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2007:28):

> Practice, by its very nature, involves a relation to the world: it looks outward. Relations among participants within a community of practice are intricately tied to relations beyond the community of practice, and to the community's joint construction of its place in the wider world.

Thus, having established that the participants of this study had formed a dynamically evolving CoP by the time the sexuality unit began, it is important to keep in mind that those dynamic influences extend beyond the classroom walls.

THE STATUS OF PRACTICES

In this case, the teacher, researcher, and student do share certain key elements of the enterprise at hand despite the possibility that they might have various and contrasting goals

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or investments in mind. Regardless of such differences, all are committed on some level to having serious discussion about sexuality. Interviews before the sexuality unit demonstrated that the students were invested in taking sexuality education more seriously than they had in the past, and their observations about the need to integrate peripheral members also showed that they, like their teacher, were aware of the importance of trust. The previous analyses have demonstrated that certain localised practices concerning the frank discussion of sexuality in a classroom developed through mutual engagement in the tasks at hand. A shared linguistic repertoire also began to emerge as students experimented with language for speaking about bodies and about sexual acts and desires.

The status of these practices as a locally developed shared repertoire became more obvious as the unit continued. In example (7), we see that a guest facilitator who came to work with the students some weeks later told them that their willingness to participate in frank and calm classroom-based discussions while speaking of genitals was a marked tendency in her experience.

(7) "You guys are very very different": Saliency of localized practices

Facilitator: okay
so this y'know- you guys are very very different from:: how it would have been for me
when i was this age at school
because people would NOT (.) talk about genitals at all
in- in fact if anyone had said the word CLIToris or PEnis
everyone would have fallen about LAUGHing↶
not because they thought it funny↶
it'd just be out of pure embarrassment
like how could you even talk about those words

Both ethnographic observations and audio recordings demonstrate that the students' ability to use terms like "clitoris" and "penis" without laughing is a result of their previous experimentation with sexuality discussion. An approach of careful guilelessness arose out of the students' stated desire to behave more maturely in such discussions—the part of the enterprise that was shared jointly by the students, teacher, and researcher.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the broader study, the evidence-based identification of the research participants as a CoP had considerable influence on the interpretation of linguistic data (see King 2014). Shared discourses (and differential access to those resources) continued to accrue around the discussion of sexuality over time. Being mutually negotiated by students, teacher, and researcher, it is probable that the recorded discussions contained some idiosyncrasies. This is in fact the main point, however. This health class and their teacher and researcher became a community

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of practice and therefore created a social dynamic and a shared set of tools, which together influenced discussions of sex and sexuality. Their shared ways of doing and speaking represent their negotiated response to the circumstances. Had a CoP not developed, their discussions might have unfolded quite differently.

More centrally to the point of this article, because the development of these practices was ethnographically investigated rather than presupposed, a more enlightened discourse analysis could emerge. The participants' own responses to their institutional circumstances neither merged with nor eclipsed other forms of practice arising from institutional alignment as well as the "lower order" nexus of practices that were not developed locally within this particular community. Attention in this research to such distinctions in the status of practices increases the likelihood that the findings will be useful to educators working in sexuality education classrooms and to researchers in sociocultural linguistics who choose to investigate the relationship between language and sexuality. Finally, this article has provided one example of how the emergence (or nonemergence) of a community of practice can be traced during research. As other examples begin to come to light, one would hope that the empirical identification of communities of practice as part of research will soon become established best practice.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

// overlapping speech
word- abruptly cut-off speech
(1) elapsed time of silence in seconds
(.) a tiny gap, less than one second
:: prolongation of the immediately prior sound (The length of the row of colons indicates the length of the prolongation.)
WORD especially emphasized sounds compared to surrounding talk (including "I")
( ) prosodic contributions, e.g. (laughter)
(( )) author's descriptions rather than transcriptions
↑ rising intonation in the preceding syllable
⤻ falling and then rising intonation in the preceding syllable
↶ rising and then falling intonation in the preceding syllable

NOTES

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[1]In addressing this topic, I do not intend to imply that communities of practice theory should provide researchers with explicit ways to identify a CoP (see Davies 2005). Rather I am aligning to the notion that the researcher's own identification of the status of practice is an important research process (see Eckert & Wenger 2005).

[2]The decile figure does not indicate the overall socioeconomic mix of a school; rather, a school's decile indicates how many of the school's students live in low socioeconomic communities (New

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Zealand Ministry of Education n.d.). A decile 5 rating effectively means that forty per cent of schools in New Zealand contain higher proportions of students from families of low socio-economic means than Matangi, and fifty per cent of schools contain lower proportions of these students. In actual fact, students from a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds attend Matangi College.

[3]It is rare because in New Zealand the provision (or not) of sexuality education as part of the curriculum at senior level is left to the discretion of schools (see Allen 2005; Jackson & Weatherall 2010). An unfortunate result of this policy is that health as a subject (and therefore sexuality education) is not often provided to senior students because of a lingering perception (despite a robust and challenging curriculum) that it is not an academic subject.

[4]For further information on the class members and their community, please refer to King (2011).

[5]For a guide to the transcription conventions applied in this study, please refer to the appendix.

[6]AAVE = African American Vernacular English; SWVE = Southern White Vernacular English. Olivia says "NICE" with a pronunciation /nas/, which could come from either of these US-based varieties (Bailey 2001; Cukor-Avila 2001).

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