
Seeking, Negotiating, and Generating Common Ground. Microanalyses of Communication Dynamics with a View to Emergent Cooperation

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Abstract: The paper presents a field study that looked at teaching contexts as instances of joint knowledge construction. The study was part of a larger enterprise in the vein of grounded theory, exploring qualitative connections between communication dynamics and evolving cooperation patterns, aiming to provide feedback to theories on the overall relationship between communication and cooperation. This study also involved looking at the joint problem definition and planning in groups of adults with different socio-cultural backgrounds. In the kinds of settings selected, participants are likely to start with diverging strategies and axioms used in articulating knowledge. Comparative analyses of formal and extracurricular teaching situations are presented in the paper, and their implications are explained in the conceptual framework of common ground, private experience, and public knowledge products. The focus is on the communicative context, the role that verbal contributions and interpersonal strategies play in jointly framing a problem: how different dimensions of communication complement or interfere with each other to serve the purposes of local and long-term coordination and knowledge production, and meanwhile shape the community. In the preliminary theoretical considerations governing the study, I aimed to develop a perspective that enables the exploration of the types of situations selected, and this has been refined to give meaningful analysis of such situations. I am presenting strategies that simultaneously shape cooperative potential and construct the means that enable joint action and limit its form, involving the creative mobilization of private worlds.

Keywords: verbal and non-verbal interaction, common ground, communication, teaching, coordination, private and public

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