Riding the concrete wave:  
Urban skateboarders’ argumentation

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Talk overview

• Review past work on young people’s argumentation and the analytic insights gleaned from that work

• Discuss relationships between argumentation, identity work, and learning

• Discuss ideas about future work
Definition of Argumentation

- Argumentation is a claim-making practice involving interaction between people. People make claims in a variety of ways (e.g., verbally, textually) for a variety of purposes (e.g., persuasion, consensus-building).

Argumentation in science & everyday life

- Argumentation in the science curriculum (e.g., Bell, 2004; Driver, Leach, Millar, & Scott, 1996; Kelly and Bazerman, 2003; Kuhn, 1992, 1993; Newton, Driver, & Osborne, 1999; Osborne, Erduran, & Simon, 2004; Sandoval, 2003)

- Core epistemic practice in science (Bell, 2004; Duschl and Grandy, 2004; Kelly and Bazerman, 2003; Toulmin, Rieke, and Janik, 1984)

- Young people use argumentation to:
  - explore and hone their language capabilities (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987)
  - practice theory building (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, and Smith, 1992)
  - signify status within and allegiance to their peer groups (Corsaro, 2003)
  - construct identities, create friendships, and create, maintain, and modify the social workings of their groups (Corsaro and Maynard, 1996)
**Argumentation at the skateboard park**

**Initial Questions:**

1. Why are arguments created, where, how, by whom, and what work do they do for those creating and engaging with them?

2. Is argumentation influenced by contexts in which it is taking place and if so, how?

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Data collected from observations and recorded in field notes

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**Urban skateboard park**

- Pacific Northwest, USA
- **concrete**, square space – flat, landing areas in 4 corners & ramps, dips, and walls in center
- 15 **teen boys** on average
- little **verbal communication**
- Two boys begin playing a **game of SKAT**
Argumentation analysis tools

- Formal logic perspective (e.g., all P are M, and no M are S, so no S are P)

- Structural perspective (e.g., Toulmin, 1958/2003)

Applying Toulmin’s framework to skateboarder argumentation

Data “Lead with the Tail" attempt

Warrant

The skateboarder employs the relevant strategies

Backing

The strategies are fairly and accurately done

So (probably)

Conclusion

The skateboarder successfully lands “Lead with the Tail”

since

unless

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Analytic insights

Solely utilizing a formal logic perspective and/or a structural perspective to analyze everyday argumentation:

– could lead to the creation of a **deficit account** of everyday argumentation (cf., Driver, Newton, and Osborne, 2000; Simosi, 2003)

– does not address **what work arguments do** for those creating them

– does not allow for a socio-cultural-historical perspective of argumentation - “**Dehumanizes**” and **de-contextualizes**

Kenneth Burke’s method of dramatism

• Analyzing human motive through the use of a five part theater metaphor called ‘the pentad’ (Burke, 1969)

  – **Act** \(\rightarrow\) what took place, in thought or deed
  – **Scene** \(\rightarrow\) the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred
  – **Agent** \(\rightarrow\) person or kind of person who performed the act
  – **Agency** \(\rightarrow\) means or instruments used
  – **Purpose** \(\rightarrow\) why the person performed the act, performed it in the way he/she did, etc.
Skateboard park – embodied argumentation

**Act:** Game of SKAT – “I am the better skateboarder.”

**Scene:** Skateboard park

**Agents:** Teen boys

**Agency:** Embodied argumentation
  – Skateboarder’s tricks (e.g., “Lead with the Tail”)

**Purpose:** e.g., construct identities, signify status and allegiance

Dogtown and Z-Boys

**Zephyr Skate Team**
- 1970s surf/skateboard team
- Dogtown (Southern Santa Monica, Venice, and Ocean Park – California, USA)
- 11 boys and 1 girl

“Two hundred years of American technology has unwittingly created a massive cement playground of unlimited potential. But it was the minds of 11 year olds that could see that potential.” - Craig Stecyk, 1975

[Sony Pictures Classics]
Video clip – Dogtown and Z-Boys

Argumentation and identity work

- **Argumentation to build identity** – individual & group
  - “pushed and praised…that’s how the stuff evolved”
  - “…a daily competition between all of us to see who could pull off the hottest shit…”
  - “…you’re pushing each other – no one else is around – it’s just the original crew”

- **Argumentation to establish insider/outsider boundaries**
  - On the deck watching, getting ready to take a run, “actual player”
  - Had to have a meeting before bringing someone outside the group…otherwise, group member couldn’t skate the pool
Video clip – Dogtown and Z-Boys

Argumentation and learning

- **Utilization of prior knowledge & transfer** (e.g., Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 2000)
  - “…completely foreign mentally and physically but the, the fact that we were surfers, we knew which movements needed to be done. We just didn’t know if they were possible yet.”

- **Goal setting** (cf., Butler, 2000)
  - “…make it over the light…successfully.”
  - “Going big worked only as long as you looked good doing it.”

- **Imitation** (cf., Meltzoff & Prinz, 2002) & **Internalization** (Vygotsky, 1978)
  - “We used to call ‘em, ‘Do a Bert.”
  - “…copying that [surfing style] on the ground.”
**Directions for future work**

- Continue to build an analytic toolbox for analyzing argumentation episodes across contexts

- Continue to explore the relationships between argumentation, learning, and identity formation

- Continue to construct a coordinated account of argumentation across contexts

- Attempt to leverage young people’s varied argumentation expertise when engaging them with how to argue scientifically