

Discourse Community Ethnography (DCE) Assignment

Goals for this assignment:

1. Learn and use tools for analyzing a discourse community's practices
2. Begin to understand empirical research
3. Practice writing about primary research

The Task:

- ❖ Choose a discourse community that has impacted you or interests you and find a preliminary answer to this research question: "What are the goals and characteristics of this discourse community?"

Collect Data:

- ❖ Observe members of the discourse community while they are engaged in a shared activity; take detailed notes (what are they doing? What kinds of things do they say? What do they write? How do you know who is in and who is out?)
- ❖ Collect anything people in that community read or write (their genres)—even very short things like forms, football plays, notes, IMs, and text messages
- ❖ Interview at least one member of the discourse community (record and transcribe the interview) You might ask things like, "How long have you been here? Why are you involved? What do X, Y, and Z words mean? How did you learn to write A, B, or C? How do you communicate with other people (on your team, in your restaurant, etc.)?"

Use Swales to Analyze the Data:

Analyze the data you collect using the six characteristics of Swales' discourse community.

- 1) What are the shared goals of the community? Why does this group exist? What does it do?
- 2) What mechanisms do members use to communicate with each other (meetings, phone calls, email, text messages, newsletters, reports, evaluation forms, etc.)?
- 3) What are the purposes of each of these mechanisms of communication (i.e. to improve performance, make money, grow better roses, share research, etc.)?
- 4) Which of the above mechanisms of communication can be considered genres (textual responses to recurring situations that all group members recognize and understand)?
- 5) What kinds of specialized language (lexis) do group members use in their conversation and in their genres (name some examples—ESL, on the fly, 86, etc.)? What communicative function does this lexis serve (i.e. why say "86" instead of "we are out of this")?
- 6) Who are "oldtimers" with expertise? Who are the newcomers with less expertise? How do newcomers learn the appropriate language, genres, knowledge of the group?

Write about your Findings:

- ✦ In 4-5 pages write about what you found in answer to the research question.
- ✦ Begin with a short literature review—"we know X about discourse communities—cite Swales
- ✦ Name a niche ("But we don't know Y" or "No one has looked at X")
- ✦ Explain how you will occupy the niche
- ✦ Describe your research methods
- ✦ Discuss your findings in detail (Use Mirabelli as an example of how to do this—quote from your notes, your interview, the texts you collected, etc.)
- ✦ Include a works cited page

What will you turn in?

- All the data that you collected, including observation notes, interview questions, transcriptions, and text samples
- Draft of your analysis
- Peer Feedback
- Handouts from your presentation

Response Criteria:

- Effectively answered the research question
 - How well you analyze the discourse community
 - Clarity of the writing
 - Organization of the analysis
 - Mechanics, Grammar, Usage, Spelling
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- Note, please make sure that you focus on a discourse community in which you are not a member. We are asking you to take the etic, outsider, perspective to learn about others. This is meeting a diversity assessment measure. So, it would be particularly helpful if you would focus on a discourse community that is different from you in some way, perhaps in race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status (SES), etc.