

## Exemplars

What I take from Mishler's essay and my own reading of Kuhn is that for a new area, or a new approach in an established one, to gain traction and coherence it is necessary for certain examples of work—for example, analyses of data, applications of methods, theory building, or inferences from theories—to come to be seen as shared exemplars of what counts as “good work” or accepted work in the emerging area or approach. People may first come to share an appreciation for these exemplars as good work before they can articulate exactly why this is so. Indeed, such articulation by members of the emerging area or approach, as well as debate over what pieces of work constitute such exemplars, is one way in which shared theories, methods, language, models, and even values can emerge. What I was trying to do in *Sociolinguistics and Literacies* for the NLS was to point to what I and others thought were such exemplars. To the extent that others come to agree or propose other exemplars—as, indeed, many did in that case—the area emerges.

Such exemplars arise, of course, historically through the normal give and take of academic research working at the bor-

ders of different disciplines. What is important about such exemplars to an emerging area is that they focus debate in such a way that people, via that debate, come to articulate and share a common set of standards and values. These standards and values form, in turn, the foundation of the new area.

Exemplars normally arise naturally in the course of work in an emerging area, if they arise at all. What I want to propose here is that we could, in a sense, make a game (albeit a serious one) or market out of exemplars. Rather than waiting for the natural process to take its course, we could create “play exemplars” that we could use as tools for thought and debate. We could “bid” to have certain pieces of work accepted as exemplars and see if such bids—in comparison and contrast to others—began to energize debate, collaboration, and progress. One way such bidding could occur would be in a sort of “market” where contributors to DMAL listed exemplars they considered central to their vision of the area or an aspect of it. In turn, people could debate their different lists, clarifying how and why they viewed certain sorts of work or approaches potentially central for progress. Whether or not we actually created such a market, we could view the presentation of proposed exemplars as a new form of scholarship, one especially fit for developing new areas of inquiry.