We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,300

Open access books available

172,000

International authors and editors

190M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities

WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.
For more information visit www.intechopen.com

Tourist or Traveler? Unpacking Informal Conversations between Teachers and Young Children across Diversity

Raeshell L. Randazzo and Martha J. Strickland

Abstract

The world is in the midst of a dramatic demographic shift: culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically. To address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, research has examined the effects of teacher-student relationships. This chapter describes a study that used autophotography to examine the ways teachers engage in informal conversations with young children who come from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, around the child's own photos of home. Specifically, conversations were interrogated to identify what impacts the teacher-student interactions across differences. Using Gee's discourse analysis, this study explored how the teachers built or lessened what the children viewed as significant, how they distributed their social goods—influence, power, or status—and how they created or positioned identities within the conversations. The findings inform the mission of enhancing teacher-student relationships and content relevance through providing new insights into how teachers and young children interact, connect, and change within their conversations.

Keywords: diversity, autophotography, teacher-student relationships, conversations

1. Introduction

The United States is in the midst of a dramatic demographic shift that may necessitate similarly striking changes in how education is conceived [1]. Although historically a nation of White, European ancestry that privileged English-language speakers, twenty-first century America abounds with unparalleled diversity. Forty-two percent of the U.S. population, 142 million Americans, now self-identify as ethnicities other than White, non-Hispanic [2]. This compositional shift is due, in part, to international migration; nearly 14% of the current population was born outside the United States [3]. As of July 2014, nearly half (49.7%) of the nation's children under 18 years old are identified as other than White, non-Hispanic [4]. By the year 2030, it is predicted that international migration population growth in the United States will overtake that of the natural population consisting of more than 60% of the school-aged children identifying as other than White, non-Hispanic [4].

It is within this kaleidoscopic cultural context where we consider the ways in which teachers and students communicate. The students that schools must serve have changed markedly in terms of their world experiences, first languages, readiness for school, and range of learning needs. The teaching population, however, has not. While the actual number of teachers in the workforce has steadily increased over the past 10 years, the demographics of the teacher population have remained essentially homogeneous and unchanged. They are overwhelmingly White (82%), female (77%), monolingual English-speaking, and middle class [5]. Although teachers and administrators have acquired specialized knowledge of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, data-driven decision-making, and learning theory, researchers note that they remain ill-equipped to address the manifest rift in understanding between school-home and teachers-students [6]. Today, educators have less in common than ever with the students, parents, and communities they serve, and more is at stake than perhaps ever before.

1.1 Teacher-student relationships

In an attempt to address the causative conditions for the aforementioned rift, researchers have studied the effects and significance of the teacher-student relationship [7–13]. One genre of studies focuses on understanding communication and interactions between teachers and their students. Nearly 20 years ago, Howes et al. [10] found that positive teacher-student relationships promote engagement in learning tasks and assist students in coping with the demands of school. Research has repeatedly confirmed that a positive teacher-child relationship is fundamental to a child's healthy development and academic success [14]. Effective communication is a key component of positive teacher-student relationships—essential for young children's healthy development and academic success [8, 9]. Roorda et al. [12] inform this study's focus in its aim to understand teacher-student interaction and communication and improve the quality of relationships in the classroom.

1.2 Teacher-student communication

Effective communication is a key component of productive relationships. Researchers have identified several areas in which communication between teachers and students can be compromised. First, misunderstanding between teachers and students is unsurprisingly widespread as teachers filter their interactions with students through the lens of their own culture values, beliefs, and practices [15, 16]. Miscommunication and misunderstanding is the result of differing cultural norms and reference points, linguistic norms, and norms of engagement with schools or what could be identified as what is valued or positioned as significant [17]. Heath [15, 16] found that student cultural or subgroup norms may differ widely from institutional values of the school or personal values held by staff and faculty. Other families may hold active or passive views with respect to their participation in their child's education. Parents or caregivers may have a mistrust of authority and institutions or incomplete knowledge about how best to help their child [18]. Finally, incongruences may exist between school expectations and values and home realities [18]. The school or teacher may assume or expect a home to have a computer, Internet access, quiet time for and adult help with homework, and bedtime stories read by a parent. Those conditions may or may not exist. When schools fail to understand the students they serve, research notes that communication breakdown, disengagement, and school failure may result [18]. As such, researchers continue to call for research that explores discourses critical to enhancing relevance in the classroom: those of teachers, students, family, community, and

educational institutions, and how those perspectives can be leveraged to foster mutual understanding across differences.

2. Purpose/objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways teachers engage in informal conversations with young children who come from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, around the child's own photos of home. Specifically, conversations were interrogated to identify what impacts teacher-student interactions across differences. Using Gee's [1] discourse analysis, this study explored how the teachers built or lessened what the children viewed as significant, how they distributed their social goods—influence, power, or status—and how they created or positioned identities within the conversations. The findings inform the mission of enhancing teacher-student relationships and content relevance through providing new insights into how teachers and young children interact, connect, and change within their conversations.

3. Theoretical framework

This study is framed by a sociocultural approach to teacher-student relationships as understood through the writings of Vygotsky [19] and later neo-Vygotskian researchers such as Kozulin [20] and Wertsch [21]. Because social interactions within conversations, or dialog, are the primary point of investigation, Bakhtin's [22] dialogism was chosen to further inform the research.

The focal point in the sociocultural meta-narrative is that social interaction, embedded within social, cultural, and historical contexts and mediated by language and sign systems, is where shared activities are transformed into internalized processes and knowledge, or learning [19]. For Vygotsky, semiotic mediation is the foundation for all manner of knowledge construction. Tools such as language, mathematics, diagrams, and works of art are products of the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which they exist. Language, according to Vygotsky, is central to learning as talking precipitates thinking [23]. Wertsch [21] added that these semiotic means comprise the tool kit that shapes individual cognitive development.

The diversity inherent in these tools, the contexts from which they arise, and the manner in which they are brought to bear on new settings is of particular consequence to educators working in diverse settings. The sociocultural approach hinges on the fundamental belief that internalization—that is to say learning—is a process of cognitive development rather than transmission. According to Vygotsky [19], students learn through making connections to new information using their tools within social interactions with teachers and peers.

3.1 Discourses and social language

In addressing the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, researchers have identified an opportunity for dialog and interaction to span the distance between the cultural models (experiences gleaned from everyday life) and Discourses (the socially acceptable use of language) [1] of students and teachers [24–27]. According to Gee [1], "A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting" (p. 154). Language allows individuals to take on socially significant identities as they express who they are, what they are trying to do by saying it, and

who they are trying to be by saying it [1]. A primary Discourse, like one's primary cultural model, functions as a base for future learning. Individuals learn new Discourses throughout their lives and those Discourses, in turn, shape (or re-shape) the primary Discourse. Individuals can, and do, operate across several Discourses, though not all Discourses are used equally.

A critical component of every Discourse is its associated social language. Social languages are the various registers that speakers employ to negotiate the identities and goals of the discourse in a given context [28]. Each person uses different social languages depending on the occasion, location, or context. These variations allow a speaker to switch between (or blend) Discourses. In some instances, the social languages among various Discourses are successfully blended, and in others the social languages are compartmentalized for use in specialized locations and contexts. Some primary Discourses underpin and inform all the secondary Discourses acquired later in life. As Heath and Street [29] emphasized, social language is germane to education settings because the research demonstrates that fluency and breadth in language use, styles, and modes translates to later academic and professional achievement. Students acquire this knowledge and skill through social interaction and language practice.

Therefore, informing this study is Gee's Discourse Analysis [1], which suggests that in every dialogue speakers and listeners build significance, politics, and identity. To explore significance building, one examines the cues in language that build or lessen significance which are based on what is explicitly stated or what is implied by the speaker/writer or inferred by the listener/reader. Politics building within dialogs involves examining how influence, power, acceptance, and status (social goods) are distributed or withheld during the dialog [1]. Identity building is the third focus. Language in dialogs also exhibits which identities are being identified, attributed to or built for others, and/or how a speaker or writer defines his or her own identity in relation to others and in a given context [1].

3.2 Student identity and voice

Classroom conversation research also touches on children's perceptions of self and others [30]. Children's perceptions of their social position in the classroom, the nature of their relationships with others, and their expressions of personal identity are all tied to communication. Dialog promotes children's self-expression in their interaction with adults [31], but, according to Mannion and I'Anson [32], that adult interaction must be complementary and dialogic.

3.3 Dialogic discourse

Dialogic discourse is a critical component of teacher-student relationship building and student expressions of personal identity and voice. Several studies that are focused on dialogic classroom interaction inform this study. Christoph and Nystrand [33] found that the potential for dialog between teachers and students is largely dependent on the relationships between the teacher and class and the willingness of the teacher to take a risk in engaging in dialogic talk, with its inherent unpredictability, with students.

Hayes and Matusov [26] work illuminates the need for teachers to share power within teacher-student conversations by balancing teacher and student talk. Further, Hayes and Matusov [26] found that children participate more readily in conversations when they initiate the topic and when the conversations are personally relevant. Baraldi's [31] research on the conditions of self-expression in classroom interactions drew from nearly 100 h of videotaped and

transcribed conversations between teachers and students at 12 elementary and middle schools. His research demonstrated consistent attempts by teachers to employ monologic patterns of discourse to guide conversation toward normative cultural expectations or achievement and learning expectations. Teacher monologs do not foster student self-expression or identity development. Many researchers have focused on children's talk in the classroom and how this talk, incorporating home and community funds of knowledge [34] opens up third spaces for the student's voice and identity to be heard, explored, and valued [35–37].

4. Method

This mixed-method study was conducted in a diverse, at-risk public elementary school located just outside an urban center. All five of the first-grade teachers, 29–43 years old with an average of 8 years teaching experience, consented to participate in the study. Four teachers self-identified as White, non-Hispanic females. One teacher self-identified as a bilingual (Portuguese and English), multiethnic male. All teachers lived in suburban communities outside the school district bounds, and with no experience living in urban settings. Their cross-cultural experiences were limited to foreign travel. Of the 81 first graders, 68 parents' consents were received and 60 children returned cameras. To garner informal teacher-student conversations while providing the children with the tools to present themselves and converse within their context of expertise, an autophotography method was employed in which the child talked with their teacher about the photos they took of their context outside of school [38–40]. Forty-six children (Black, 32%; White, 23%; Hispanic, 17%; Multi-ethnic, 28%) were present and able to participate on the days when the autophotography conversations took place. Each student received a disposable camera and verbal instructions for its use. Students were instructed to take photographs of people, things, and places of importance to them. The researchers clarified student questions about the subject of their photos with specific examples such as a photo of family, a pet, a room in the home where the child spends time, or a favorite toy. Cameras were sent home in a bag containing a memo to remind parents that their child was to take photos of people, places, activities, and things the child chose and return the camera within a week. Students took the cameras home to capture images, and several days later returned the cameras to be processed. Cameras were processed at a local drugstore.

Subsequently, each teacher was afforded time outside of the classroom in an informal, quiet space to listen to their students narrate their photos. The expressed goal was to get to know each child better. Each child, without exception, eagerly entered the room to look at their photos spread out on the table in front of the teacher. The child was invited by the teacher to choose photos to talk about with the teacher. No additional protocols were given.

The teacher and student then engaged in a conversation about the selected photographs. Each teacher-child conversation lasted an average of 6 min, with some as brief as 3 min and some lasting nearly 15 min. As the conversations were recorded, two researchers observed and recorded field notes. In all, 46 conversations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, noting extraneous noise, pauses, laughter, interruptions, and turn-taking. A follow-up, 30-min focus group with all the participating teachers was also conducted for clarification of the data. For the purpose of this study, the 46 transcripts were stratified by teacher and by each child's ethnicity/racial background (FRL).

For this study, a random sample of 25 conversations—5 transcripts from each of the 5 participating teachers—were analyzed, guided by Gee’s discourse analysis [1] three building tasks: significance, politics/social goods, and identity. These three building tasks were positioned as initial nodes for the first round of coding using Dedoose software. Demographics data, including ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, and gender were entered for all participants. Frequency counts and categorizations of language use and grammatical structures were employed to add richness of understanding and “layering of meaning” [29] (p. 93) to the qualitative analysis.

5. Findings/results

The teacher-student conversations, when analyzed using Gee’s [1] Discourse analysis, reveal different areas of significance, and imbalance in terms of distribution of social goods. The findings also expose the dialogical and intersubjective (i.e., development of mutual understanding) synopsis appearing between the social languages of teacher and student as situated within the classroom context [21].

Within the qualitative data analysis, Gee’s [1] building tasks were applied as a priori codes to explore what topics were granted significance, what themes emerged from the conversations, how social goods were distributed or withheld by teachers, and what identities were advanced through students’ narrations of their photos. The episodes chosen are illustrative excerpts of the teacher and student conversations.

5.1 The building and lessening of significance

Gee [41] viewed significance building as how meaning and significance are assigned to different topics within the discourse. This uncovers not only the situated meanings and values attached to words and phrases, but also the reinforcement or transformation of cultural models during the interaction. Therefore, in this study, as teachers talk with the students, their verbal responses signify the value they place upon what is being said and shown, and how that value is positioned within the conversation.

First, the resulting topics and themes speak to what was positioned as significant and what was not. Within the teacher-child conversations, five common topics emerged (Table 1). These included, in descending order of frequency: *family*, *play*, *pets*, *friends*, and *places*. Each child, without exception, talked about the *family* members in his or her life. They shared details about their favorite pastimes and games. All the children included photos of their *pet*, offering anecdotes about each pet. Many children included photographs of their *friends*. Finally, they talked regularly about the places that were meaningful to them. Bedrooms, kitchens, family rooms, classrooms, houses of grandparents, horse stables, and places visited on vacation were all shared with enthusiasm with the teachers. Therefore, the student

Speaker	Topics	Themes	Stance
Child	Family Play Pets Friends Places	Kinship Amusement	Affective

Table 1.
Common topics within teacher-child conversations, child topics in descending order.

themes that emerged were Kinship and Amusement, reflecting their affective stance toward interpersonal relationships and play.

Within the teacher utterances, topics were distinctly different. In descending order, the most common topics were: teacher knowledge; living arrangements; rules and roles of the home; and how time is spent. A preponderance of teacher statements included “I don’t know,” “I didn’t know that,” or a variation thereof (Table 2). The topic associated with these statements is teacher-owned knowledge. All teachers within the study steered the conversations to discussions of what they knew or did not know about the children and their families. All teachers queried the children on living arrangements. This is noted in such statements as, “Is it just you and your mom in the house, then?” and “Who sleeps here?” Roles and rules of the home were also prevalent within these conversations. Teachers shifted the children’s affective topics about cuteness of their puppies to discussions of the particulars of pet care and nutrition, including: how many animals are living in the house, and if the pet is fed properly. Teachers also asked about chores and responsibilities noted in such statements as: “Do you clean up?” and “Do you change diapers?”, as well as adult roles in the home seen in such statements as: “Does Mommy read to you?” and “Does your Dad play the Xbox a lot?” Teachers also asked about how the children spent their time outside of school. Therefore, the themes that emerged from the teachers’ topics were knowledge and examination.

According to Gee [1] when speakers build significance in dialogs, they may use grammatical devices or words to achieve their goals. After the first cycle of initial coding revealing the topic and themes, the following three grammatical devices emerged as markers for significance building or lessening: emphatic auxiliary verbs, intensifying adverbs, and downtoners.

5.1.1 Lessening significance with emphatic auxiliary verbs

When a speaker or writer uses emphatic auxiliaries, that is to say, adding vocal emphasis to an auxiliary verb, significance building or lessening can take place. Auxiliary verbs include all forms of *do*, *is*, *am*, *be*, *will*, and *have* and are followed by another verb in order to form a question, a negative sentence, or passive voice. When a speaker or writer stresses an auxiliary verb, it indicates that he or she is attempting to assert a position, correct someone else’s understanding, or contrast a position with something else. Auxiliary stress can also be employed for affective emphasis when using, for example, *do*, *is*, *has*, and *can*, to show enthusiasm or to confirm something a speaker or writer already knows by following the statement with a question tag such as “You *did* make your bed, *didn’t* you?”

Throughout the conversations, teachers used emphatic auxiliary verbs most often to lessen significance by repeatedly questioning the truthfulness of a student’s story. Table 3 presents the incidence of teacher emphatic auxiliary verb usage by student ethnicity and socioeconomic status across all 25 transcribed conversations. Of all instances of auxiliary verb usage, 56.4% were found within conversations with students identified as Multiethnic. Seventy-eight percent of emphatic auxiliary

Speaker	Topics	Themes	Stance
Teacher	Teacher knowledge	Knowledge	Cognitive
	Living arrangements	Examination	
	Rules and roles of the home		
	How time is spent		

Table 2.
Common topics within teacher-child conversations, teacher topics in descending order.

Markers of significance	SES	Black	White	Multiethnic	Hispanic
Teacher use of emphatic auxiliary verbs	FRL eligible	5	4	19	2
	FRL not eligible	0	0	3	6
Teacher use of intensifying adverbs by student	FRL eligible	32	0	19	16
	FRL not eligible	0	0	1	9
Teacher use of downtoners	FRL eligible	5	0	4	3
	FRL not eligible	0	0	0	0
Teacher use of deference politeness	FRL eligible	22	0	39	6
	FRL not eligible	0	0	3	5
Teacher use of vernacular	FRL eligible	67	7	63	22
	FRL not eligible	0	0	1	13

FRL: free and reduced lunch.

Table 3.
Markers for significance building or lessening.

verb uses were with students identified as eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL). Further, emphatic auxiliary usage of the questioning, correcting, and asserting variety are used more often with Black and Multiethnic students as well as with students who are identified as free and reduced lunch eligible. Affective, enthusiastic auxiliary verbs were used more often with Hispanic students and students identified as not eligible for free and reduced lunch.

5.1.2 Significance and insincerity with intensifying adverbs

Speakers or writers can also build significance by using intensifying adjectives and adverbs that emphasize (*really, for sure, certainly, obviously, so, totally, very*). Ironically, the overuse of intensifiers or use of repeat intensifiers such as, “That photograph is *really, really* awesome,” lessens the perceived sincerity of the sentence.

Notably, the majority (87%) of intensifying adverbs were found in conversations with the children from low-socioeconomic status homes. Also, repeat intensifiers, markers of insincerity, were found most often found in conversations between teachers and Black children eligible for free and reduced lunch. **Table 3** depicts intensifying adverbs spread throughout conversations with students of all ethnicities except White. The majority (87%) of intensifying adverbs were found in conversations with students from low-socioeconomic status homes. Repeat intensifiers, markers of insincerity, were found most often found in conversations between teachers and Black students eligible for free and reduced lunch.

5.1.3 Undermining significance with downtoners

Speakers and writers may also use degree adverbs known as downtoners (*somewhat, fairly, relatively, slightly, nearly, almost, kind of, sort of, pretty*) to diminish or undermine significance. According to Biber and Conrad [42], the common conversational downtoner *pretty* (as in *pretty good* or *pretty cool*) functions as an evaluator and may imply the speaker or writer is judging the action or item rather than affirming it. Downtoners—degree adverbs—worked similarly to lessen significance by hedging compliments with a negative modifier.

While downtoners were found in conversations between teachers and Black, Multiethnic, and Hispanic students, they were absent from the conversation between a teacher and the single White student in the sample. Downtoners were found in more than half (57%) of the conversations with students eligible for free and reduced lunch (**Table 3**). No conversations between teachers and students ineligible for free and reduced lunch contained downtoners.

5.2 The granting of social goods

Gee [1] states that in conversations, social goods are identified. These are statements that identify something as good or acceptable to the social group [1]. Throughout the transcripts, teachers granted *social goods* to the children through approval and verbal praise of the student's work, photographs, family, or a positive response to the content of the photographs. Many instances of approval were granted for what was noted as *correct* behavior such as listening, working on schoolwork, or paying attention. Far fewer instances demonstrated the granting of social goods based on student interests, talents, or interactions with peers. Key words indicating granting of social goods include such terms as: good, correct, smart, and "I like..." In the following episode, the teacher grants social goods to the student, positioning him as a good listener and student.

Episode Seven:

T: Oh, I see. Okay. What else do you want to show me? Any other pictures? Looks like you have a lot of daycare pictures. Did you take a lot of pictures at daycare? Yeah? Do you like that picture? **That's a nice picture.** Do you like that? Picture of you. **That looks great.** Wow, looks like **you're being a good listener** in that picture. **Doing your work. I love it.** Any other pictures you want to show me? Look at all these. Did you see these yet? Where's this at?

C: Daycare.

T: Daycare? What is it? ABC Academy?

C: Sunnyside.

The following is another episode illustrating granting of social goods as the teacher compliments the student on his attitude about practice, perseverance, and hard work. Not only does she grant social goods, she reinforces a prior implied social good that based on her experiences in the past with the student, she would expect him to respond as he did.

Episode Eight:

T: So what do you like about basketball so much?

C: Because we win every single game.

T: [laughs] 'Cause **you're on a good team.** Well, what if you didn't win all the time?

C: Then...I would just keep on playing until I get gooder.

T: Oh! **That's a really good attitude. I would expect that from you. That's awesome.**

5.3 The politics of politeness

Following Gee's [1] protocols, the transcripts were also coded for politeness to provide a richer picture of the politics in this classroom setting. Solidarity politeness indicates the goal of solidarity between speaker/writer and listener/reader [1]. Instances of joking, attending to listener needs and wants, avoiding disagreement, claiming in-group membership, and showing exaggerated interest in a student or

the student's interest are markers for solidarity politeness. Deference politeness works to maintain distance and privacy for the speaker/writer and independence/autonomy for the listener. Instances of ambiguity, avoidance, apologies, formal constructions, statements of rules, and *not* making assumptions about the listener were noted and coded.

The data indicate that deference politeness was used about half as much as solidarity politeness. Deference was nearly twice as likely to be found in conversations between teachers and multiethnic students than Black students and nearly four times as likely compared to Hispanic students. Within the single conversation between a teacher and White student, there were no instances of deference politeness recorded (**Table 3**). Similar to many of the indicators for Significance, the language markers of deference and solidarity varied depending on the gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of the student. When viewed according to socioeconomic status deference politeness is revealed to be more prevalent in the teacher utterances in transcripts of Black and Multiethnic students. One outlier, the male teacher, used Deference Politeness with a bilingual, female, Hispanic student. This, perhaps, reflects a more formal orientation that this particular teacher has toward all students. Further analysis of the data revealed marked use of deference politeness in conversations between female teachers and male students.

5.4 The building of identities

Building identities, as conceptualized by Gee [1], is examined by looking at the speaker's use of language that reveal their roles, beliefs, values, feelings, and cultural knowledge. According to Holmes [43], when formality increases between interlocutors, social distance is maintained. Further, Holmes [43] noted that when speech diverges within a conversation, that is, when a speaker deliberately chooses a style of language not being used by the listener, it often signals that the speaker wants to demonstrate cultural distinctiveness, deference, or an identity separate from that of the listener. Within the transcripts, instances of formal, academic language and informal, vernacular language were coded. Across all 25 transcripts, 221 separate instances of social language were noted. The vast majority of these were Informal/Vernacular Language (173 codes; 78%). Just 48 instances of formal language were found. However, in transcripts where formal, academic language was noted, it was used repeatedly and tended to stifle teacher-student interaction (**Table 3**).

To understand how Identities were shaped and interacting within the conversations, I asked: How do teachers and students shape their Identity (or Identities) within the school context using academic or vernacular social languages? Gee [1] suggests the analysis of formal, academic language and informal, vernacular language within conversation to determine what identities are being put forward. Teachers' utterances were a mix of both formal and informal languages. Several teachers heavily used "gonna," "wanna," and other informal constructions in their exchanges with students. These constructions position the teacher as approachable and friendly and making an attempt at connection. Academic language was used less frequently across all conversations. In instances when it was used, however, it tended to chill conversation, with students replying in single word utterances.

6. Discussion

The findings, when juxtaposed against the present understandings of teacher-child relationships, with a focus on communication, point to a simple distinction. The informal dialog afforded by autophotography between teachers and their

students who come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds provides an authentic opportunity for developing understanding. Within conversations, language can be used to build or lessen significance, grant or withhold social goods, and create or position identities. Given that opportunity, teachers relied on their tacitly held cultural models and relied on assumptions and preconceived notions about students from ethnicities and cultures different from their own to drive conversation.

6.1 Address communicative divide

While topics varied across the conversations, the underlying conclusion of the data was that there existed a communicative divide, along ethnic and socioeconomic lines, between teachers and the children. Whereas, the children were providing openings for authentic dialog, the teachers were not open to what those children offered in terms of new understandings.

Emerging from these findings is a theme which is best portrayed in a metaphor: In relating to those unlike ourselves: we can be travelers or we can be tourists. Chesterton [44] in the chapter “The Incomplete Traveller” from his autobiography “Collected Works: The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton, Volume XVI” observed that “*The traveller sees what he sees; the tourist sees what he has come to see*” (p. 301).

The question of difference between the notions of *traveler* and *tourist* has been exhaustively explored in travel and tourism research [45–49]. In essence, a tourist wants the familiar in strange locales. They meet others like themselves and their journeys are scripted and planned out with itineraries that leave little room for exploration. There is safety in being a tourist, with staying on the beaten path, with the control that comes from knowing what to expect. Travelers, by comparison, are open to the experience as a journey of self and welcome unexpected discoveries and impromptu interactions because there is always something to learn from every new experience.

Based on the findings of this study, it may be suggested that the teachers are approaching these photos and narrations from a tourist perspective. They know what they have come to see, so, invariably, that is what they see. They look to make sense of what they see through the lens of their own prior experiences. In doing so, they frequently lessen the significance of what students value as they simultaneously withhold social goods such as acceptance and approval. In the meantime, they collect facts and information, meant as way finding for their own intercultural tourism.

The teacher’s approach to the children conformed to what researchers [50–52] would call a tourist orientation. To extend the metaphor, teachers packed a symbolic suitcase filled with their expectations, biases, and misconceptions about others and brought it along on the narrative journey of autophotography with their children. As such, the teachers sought to confirm what they thought they knew about the children, their families, and their home lives.

Additionally, the teachers used the contents of their suitcase to lessen significance and withhold social goods from certain children who told stories that did not conform to the teachers’ normative expectations. The teachers, as tourists, redirected conversations to ones that they were comfortable discussing, and in doing so, frequently missed the opportunity to learn something from the conversation. By contrast, the children approached the conversations, and school more generally, as travelers. They were open to the interaction with the teachers and readily shared themselves through their photos.

The theoretical framework of sociocultural theory proposed that social interaction, embedded within social, cultural, and historical contexts and mediated by language and sign systems, is where shared activities are transformed into internalized processes and knowledge [19]. The data findings reveal that while the autophotography

was a shared activity, in the sense that two people participated, it was not a learning experience as a sociocultural theorist would identify it. The teachers, who in this setting were positioned as the learners as they interacted with the students' stories, reflected little or superficial transformation or internalization of knowledge; they approached conversations with predetermined ideas about how things were and how things ought to be. They presented an approach to student diversity that Cai [50] and Fang et al. [51] would identify as superficial, intercultural tourism.

The literature pointed to teacher-student conversations as vital to bolstering academic, social, and behavioral outcomes. Recognizing the importance of students participating in meaningful conversation within the school context [27], autophotography was chosen as the vehicle to open the dialog. According to this study's analysis of the words of the 30 participants in this study, teachers and students approached informal conversation about the photos in distinct ways: teachers with an orientation toward knowledge and examination; and students with an orientation toward Kinship and Amusement. While topics varied across the conversations, the underlying conclusion of the data in this research study is that there exists a communicative divide, along ethnic and socioeconomic lines, between teachers and students. Teachers had distinct ways of relating to students that were different from themselves. They were not open to what those students offered in terms of new understandings.

6.2 Foster dialogic conversations

The potential of teacher-student talk to enhance teacher understanding of their approaches to conversation and connection cannot be overstated. This study suggests that a shift in perspective from tourist to traveler is required to turn the lens of inquiry and introspection within. The word travel comes from the French word *travail*, meaning, "to labor." And indeed, the kind of metaphoric travel suggested here requires hard work. The present education context is rife with disconnections between teachers and the children in part due to increasing socioeconomic and cultural diversity. This study's findings introduce a turning of focus from cultural knowledge to feedback tools, facilitated self-reflection, and instruction on dialogic methods [53].

As teachers attempt to build relationships and connect with children from backgrounds different from their own, this study's findings speak to a persistent need to foster dialogic communication in the classroom through affective engagement and reflective work. In schools that are struggling academically and where a focus on scripted instruction and data are the de facto norm, there is a marked lack of the kind of dialogic conversation that encourages the development of student voice and the inclusion of student identity. Understandably, the testing and reform context and its time constraints complicate the efforts of educators and researchers interested in moving away from behavioral approaches and toward sociocultural approaches to intercultural communication and improving teacher-student relationships. However, with nearly half of all the nation's school-aged children of diverse ethnic and cultural origins [4] and more than 80% of the teachers are White [5], the rift in understanding between teachers and students can no longer afford to be ignored.

7. Conclusion

Assuming the traveler stance, teachers may advance the relational and interpersonal aspects of education that this study seeks to address. Considering the

complexities of contexts and one's own identity and interactions while traveling is not easy. One must juggle the sometimes-perplexing demands of unfamiliar people, cultures, languages, customs, traditions, and beliefs—much like in many classrooms across the country. Through the use of autophotography, this study informs the mission of enhancing teacher-student relationships and content relevance, promoting the traveler stance that revels in the differences of other people and places and welcomes those interactions that enrich their lives.

Acknowledgements

This work was generously funded by Penn State Harrisburg.

This work could not have been accomplished without the participation of the teachers and children heard in this study, the support of Penn State Harrisburg's Teacher Education Program, and the support of friends and families who kept us going throughout this research and writing process.

Conflict of interest

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Raeshell L. Randazzo

Martha J. Strickland

Author details

Raeshell L. Randazzo¹ and Martha J. Strickland^{2*}

¹ Manheim Central Middle School, Manheim, Pennsylvania, USA

² Penn State Harrisburg, Middletown, Pennsylvania, USA

*Address all correspondence to: mjs51@psu.edu

IntechOpen

© 2018 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

References

- [1] Gee JP. *How to do Discourse Analysis: A toolkit*. London, New York, NY: Routledge; 2011
- [2] U.S. Census Bureau. *Quick Facts: United States*. 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov>
- [3] Zong J, Batalova J, Hallock J. *Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute Report. February 8, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/print/16099#.W0Nl3VUzrIU>
- [4] Vespa J, Armstrong DM, Medina L. *Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060*. Current Population Reports, P25-1144. Washington, DC: U. S. Census Bureau; 2018
- [5] Taie S, Goldring R. *Characteristics of public elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States: Results from the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey First Look (NCES 2017-072)*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; 2017. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017072>
- [6] Nieto S. *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical Perspectives*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press; 2009
- [7] Cornelius-White J. *Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis*. *Review of Educational Research*. 2007;77(1): 113-143
- [8] Hamre BK, Pianta RC. *Can instructional and emotional support in the first-grade classroom make a difference for children at risk of school failure?* *Child Development*. 2005;76(5): 949-967
- [9] Hamre R, Pianta RC. *Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of the children's school outcomes through eighth grade*. *Child Development*. 2001; 72(2):625-638
- [10] Howes C, Hamilton CE, Matheson CC. *Children's relationships with peers: Differential associations with aspects of the teacher-child relationship*. *Child Development*. 1994;65:253-263
- [11] Pianta RC. *Enhancing Relationships Between Children and Teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; 1999
- [12] Roorda DL, Kooman HMY, Spilt JL, Oort FJ. *The influence of affective teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach*. *Review of Educational Research*. 2011; 81(4):493-529
- [13] Saft EW, Pianta RC. *Teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students: Effects of child age, gender, and ethnicity of teachers and children*. *School Psychology Quarterly*. 2001; 16(2):125-142
- [14] O'Connor E, McCartney K. *Examining teacher-child relationships and achievement as part of an ecological model of development*. *American Educational Research Journal*. 2007;44: 340-369
- [15] Heath SB. *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press; 1983
- [16] Heath SB. *What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school*. *Language in Society*. 1982;11(1): 49-76

- [17] Wolfram W, Adger CT, Christian D. *Dialects in Schools and Communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 1999
- [18] Epstein J. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; 2001
- [19] Vygotsky L. *Mind and Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1978
- [20] Kozulin A. Psychological tools and mediated learning. In: Kozulin A, Gindis B, Ageyev VS, Miller SM, editors. *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 2003. pp. 15-38
- [21] Wertsch JV. *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1991
- [22] Bakhtin MM. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press; 1986
- [23] Myhill D, Jones S. How talk becomes text: Investigating the concept of oral rehearsal in early years classrooms. *British Journal of Educational Studies*. 2009;57(3):265-265
- [24] deHaan M. The authoring of school: Between the official and unofficial discourse. *Culture & Psychology*. 2005; 11(3):267-285
- [25] González N, Moll L, Amanti C. *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2005
- [26] Hayes R, Matusov E. From "ownership" to dialogic addressivity: Defining successful digital storytelling projects. *Technology, Humanities, Education, Narrative Journal*. 2005. Issue 1. Retrieved from <http://thenjournal.org/index.php/then/article/view/34/33> (e-journal)
- [27] McNaughton S. *Meeting of Minds*. Wellington, NZ: Richard C. Owen; 2002
- [28] Gee JP. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. 4th ed. New York, NY: Routledge; 2012
- [29] Heath SB, Street BV. *On Ethnography: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press; 2008
- [30] Colwell M, Lindsey E. Teacher-child interactions and preschool children's perceptions of self and peers. *Early Child Development and Care*. 2003;173(2-3):249-258
- [31] Baraldi C. Promoting self-expression in classroom interactions. *Childhood*. 2008;15(2):239-257
- [32] Mannion G, I'Anson J. Beyond the Disneyesque: Children's participation, spatiality and adult-child relations. *Childhood*. 2004;11(3):303-318
- [33] Christoph JN, Nystrand M. Taking risks, negotiating relationships: One teacher's transition toward a dialogic classroom. *Research in the Teaching of English*. 2001;36(2):249-286
- [34] Gonzalez N, Wyman L, O'Connor BH. The past, present, and future of "Funds of Knowledge". In: Levinson BA, Pollock M, editors. *A Companion to the Anthropology of Education*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell; 2011. pp. 481-493
- [35] Christ T, Wang XC. Negotiation of "how to" at the cross-section of cultural capital and habitus: Young children's procedural practices in a student-led literacy group. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*. 2008;8(2):151-176

- [36] Gutierrez K, Baquedano-Lopez P, Tejada C. Rethinking diversity: Hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*. 1999;6(4):286-303
- [37] Kamberelis G. Producing heteroglossic classroom (micro)cultures through hybrid discourse practice. *Linguistics and Education*. 2001;12(1): 85-125
- [38] Noland CM. Auto-photography as research practice: Identity and self-esteem research. *Journal of Research Practice*. 2006;2(1):M1
- [39] Taylor EW. Using still photography in making meaning of adult educators' teaching beliefs. *Studies in the Education of Adults*. 2002;34(2): 123-139
- [40] Ziller RC. *Photographing the Self: Methods for Observing Personal Orientations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage; 1990
- [41] Gee JP. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. New York, NY: Routledge; 1999
- [42] Biber D, Conrad S. Register variation: A corpus approach. In: Schiffrin D et al., editors. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell; 2003
- [43] Holmes J. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London, UK: Longman; 2008
- [44] Chesterton GK. *Collected Works: The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton*, 16. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press; 1988
- [45] Boorstin DJ. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York, NY: Harper & Row; 1964
- [46] Dann G. Writing out the tourist in space and time. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 1999;26(1):159-187
- [47] Galani-Moutafi V. The self and the other: Traveler, ethnographer, tourist. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 2000; 27(1):203-224
- [48] Jacobsen JKS. Anti-tourist attitudes: Mediterranean charter tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 2000;27(2): 284-300
- [49] Nash D. On travelers, ethnographers and tourists. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 2001;28(2):493-496
- [50] Cai M. Multiple definitions of multicultural literature: Is the debate really just "ivory tower" bickering? In: Fox DL, Short KG, editors. *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English; 2003. pp. 269-283
- [51] Fang Z, Fu D, Lamme LL. The trivialization and misuse of multicultural literature: Issues of representation and communication. In: Fox DL, Short KG, editors. *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English; 2003. pp. 284-303
- [52] Hofstede G. *Cultures Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2001
- [53] Lehesvuori S, Viiri J, Rasku-Puttonen H. Introducing dialogic teaching to science student teachers. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*. 2011;22(8):705-727