The collection of data sources in the social sciences involves communication in one form or another: between research participants who are observed while communicating or between researcher and researched, who communicate so that the former can learn about/from the latter. How does one analyze communication? In particular, how does one learn to analyze data sources established in and about communication?

In response to these questions, the authors provide insights into the “laboratory” of social science research concerned with the analysis of communication in all of its forms, including language, gestures, images, and prosody. Writing in the spirit of Bourdieu, and his recommendations for the transmission of a scientific habitus, the authors allow readers to follow their social science research in the making. Thus, each chapter focuses on a particular topic—identity, motivation, knowing, interaction—and exhibits how to go about researching it: How to set up research projects, how to collect data sources, how to find research questions, and how to do many other practical things to succeed. The authors comment on excerpts from the findings of between 2 and 4 published studies to describe how to write and publish research, how to address audiences, which decisions they have made, which alternative approaches there might exist, and many other useful recommendations for data analysis and paper publishing. In the end, the authors actually follow an expert social scientist as he analyzes data in real time in front of an audience of graduate students. The entire book therefore constitutes something like a journey into the kitchen of an experienced chef who gives advice in the process of cooking.
ANALYZING COMMUNICATION
Scope
Research methods and research methodology are at the heart of the human endeavors that produce knowledge. Research methods and research methodology are central aspects of the distinction between folk knowledge and the disciplined way in which disciplinary forms of knowledge are produced. However, in the teaching of research methods and methodology, there traditionally has been an abyss between descriptions of how to do research, descriptions of research practices, and the actual lived research praxis.

The purpose of this series is to encourage the publication of books that take a very practical and pragmatic approach to research methods. For any action in research, there are potentially many different alternative ways of how to go about enacting it. Experienced practitioners bring to these decisions a sort of scientific feel for the game that allows them to do what they do all the while expressing expertise. To transmit such a feel for the game requires teaching methods that are more like those in high-level sports or the arts. Teaching occurs not through first principles and general precepts but by means of practical suggestions in actual cases. The teacher of method thereby looks more like a coach. This series aims at publishing contributions that teach methods much in the way a coach would tell an athlete what to do next. That is, the books in this series aim at praxis of method, that is, teaching the feel of the game of social science research.
Analyzing Communication

Praxis of Method

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PREFACE

Communication is the foundation of human beings’ lifeworld because it underlines and makes possible peoples’ interactions and collaborations in everyday life and work. Researching communication therefore is a fundamental and important mission in social science. However, it is not uncommon to hear new researchers’ hardship of doing research in different stages of their projects. For nearly two decades, one of us (Wolff-Michael Roth) has taught quantitative and qualitative research methods at different universities. Despite very high student evaluation of his courses, there has been one striking student response to every course he had taught: students complained about any and all available textbooks. These complaints generally address the distance between what is written in a methods text and the students’ own attempts in doing qualitative research (Roth, 2006c). They complain about the philosophical nature of the texts used, or about the distance between generalized comments of what you do (in any research context there might be) and the concrete research situations in which they inevitably found themselves while realizing a practical course assignment. Also, students complain about the fragmental nature of each textbook that only considers certain stages of research rather than proving an inclusive picture of doing research. That is, although many methodological textbooks exist in the field of social science, students often still find themselves having barriers of conducting their own projects after reading these textbooks. These are all frequent concerns about methodological textbooks raised by new researchers when we interacted with graduate students in courses or collaborated with newcomers to the field of research involving communication. These traditional textbooks from students’ perspective therefore are generally experienced as abstract and inapplicable. Thus, our students’ voices exhibit an urgent need to write a practical book on researching communication to help new researchers overcome their struggles and barriers.

Over the same time period, we have had many queries from graduate students around the world about various questions about researching communications in different stages of projects. For instance, at the very beginning, they have no ideas where to start, what issues to address, and how to design a research project on communications. Later, they have concerns about what kinds of data sources to collect and how to collect. Once they have data sources, frequent obstacles encountered by new researchers concern the analysis of these data sources and how to generate new insights from and by means of their data analyses. At the end of projects, new researchers also experience difficulties in publishing their findings or suddenly find out that they need to collect more data to validate their findings. These all are frequent difficulties confronted by students and new researchers throughout their research projects. In particular, most of these questions concern issues of how to analyze the interviews, videotapes, or written texts that they have
collected and what to “get out of them.” In general, there are two problems. First, graduate students and new researchers have gathered sources of potential data but did not know what to extract from the sources and how to extract it. One of frequent questions asked by graduate students is “I had collected all the interviews and materials, now what!? What should I do with the data sources?” Their queries exhibit a high degree of uncertainty and difficulty encountered by graduate students to enter the world of doing qualitative analysis. Second, when students start to analyze their data sources, their analysis is usually ungrounded and questionable. Consequently, their claims and findings are not well supported by their data and so cannot address their research questions. In such cumbersome circumstances, questions such as “what do my data sources really tell me?” or “how do I generate a paragraph of objective analysis?” are often raised by students in qualitative method courses.

This frustration of doing qualitative analysis of communicative data not only happens in graduate students’ cases. As editors and reviewers of works in which authors analyze and draw inferences from verbal and textual data, we are confronted daily with evidence whereby the state of the methodological art is not implemented. Just last summer we had a European colleague stay in Victoria to learn how to analyze interviews and classroom conversations, which he, despite having obtained a PhD over a decade ago, obviously had difficulties in doing. Over nearly two decades we have done research with colleagues who, faced with transcriptions, did not know how to construct data from these sources and how to analyze them—rather than simply offer up excerpts to stand on their own (a frequent mistake in the research articles we have to evaluate as peer reviewers). In fact, when we do see transcriptions in articles, they are often taken to speak for themselves. That is, although a rule of thumb among discourse and conversation analysts is that there is a between five and ten to one relation between interpretation/analysis, on the one hand, and source text, on the other hand. However, the literature is replete with examples where a page of transcript is followed by a three-sentence or five-to-eight-line text telling the reader what to make of the transcript generally without actually grounding the analysis in the careful reading of the text. And this error we see being committed even by experienced colleagues. But excerpts do not speak for themselves or on their own behalf; authors have to tell readers what can be seen in the excerpts, unless they want to run the risk that many alternative “interpretations” get the article rejected in the peer review process.

All these aforementioned phenomena are indicators of the difficulties researchers face in analyzing qualitative data sources; these phenomena thus cry out for a practical book that concretely guides readers to do analysis with the authors. This is then the solution we offer: a book in which readers are invited to engage in the analysis of communicative data sources with us and to learn from our commentaries about what we are and have been doing. We attempt to get as close to the ideal of learning to research communication (data analysis in particular) at the elbow of an experienced practitioner, as this is possible when the other is not co-present in person but only through the traces of his/her writing.
In a recent article we provided a critical analysis of traditional textbooks and offered a demonstration of how to write alternative textbooks in which “authors on ‘methods’ concretely realize a particular form of articulating what they have done and how they have done it in exemplary studies” (Roth, 2006c). The present book is intended to realize this project of concretely writing a methods book that addresses the real needs of graduate students and other students of the analysis of verbal (communicative) data. Also, the book is intended to be for these perplexed individuals faced with the task of collecting and analyzing communication-related data sources. We provide these readers with an easily understandable narrative doing and commenting on the concrete praxis of collecting and analyzing data sources that are evidence of communication. Here we include interview texts, videotaped lessons, written artifacts containing words and diagrams, computer simulations, and, reflecting a more recent trend, gestures, prosody, body movements, and body positions. To write a textbook on methodology—the science of the different methods that researchers tend to use—that can really help our readers’ own projects, we had rigorously considered about the pervasive questions and obstacles of researching communication. We explicitly designed a variety of structures to address the concerns about textbooks that we have come to hear about in our teaching experience. In the following sections, we introduce four distinct characteristics of the book to assist readers’ reading and understanding about the rationales for researching communications.

First, we present the book in chapters focusing on major topics in current educational discourses such as identity, attitudes/beliefs/motivations, social structure/interactions/powers, knowledge/conceptions, and so on. One of pervasive problems for new investigators (sometimes for old-timers too) is that researchers tend to investigate their topics in terms of their familiar methods. Sometimes, researchers even use the method they are good at to investigate all kinds of topics regardless of the nature of their research topics. This is not uncommon in academia (see Bourdieu, 1992, for a critique) but it is a dangerous disposition of doing research. The term of method means “rational procedure,” and so we should make a rational decision for choosing a proper method to investigate our research topics adequately rather than the other way around. Moreover, our observations indicate that new researchers generally are interested in a topic, for example, what students know and learn, the relationship of power between teachers and principals or students and their teachers, or in student and teacher identities in some subject-matter domain of interest. Thus, we do not organize the book in the way other books have done in the past, that is, present a whole textbook focusing on discourse analysis, conversation analysis, discursive psychology, and so on. Rather, we take as our thread for writing each chapter the question, “What do I need to do to get at identity [knowledge, belief, attitude, . . .] issues when I have interviews/classroom lessons/written artifacts and so on as my source?” We show what kinds of data (not) to collect if my interest is in one of the major educational discourses at the present time. Organizing chapters in terms of topics (rather than methods as other methodological textbook normally do) then becomes one of the most distinct features of our book. Doing so allows readers to understand how to consider the nature of re-
search topics and choose appropriate methods to investigate them. For this book, we draw on key topics to demonstrate how researchers approach them deliberately. These topics include identity, belief, attitude, interest, motivation, knowledge, knowing, inscription, participation, interaction, participation, institutional relations, power, agency, structure, technology interaction, and so on.

Second, we organize our pedagogy around specific published research studies (conducted by our own research group) and present excerpts and analyses from published articles/chapters. That is, instead of articulating research design or methods in an abstract and philosophical manner, we excerpt two to four published articles that addressed the particular topics of each chapter. These excerpts from published articles provide contextualized examples that demonstrate concrete and doable ways of researching communication. Also, these excerpts allow readers to develop a better sense of how researchers present their findings and what final reports of research projects look like. These excerpts, in fact, are our data that we comment upon to teach the reader what was done, why it was done, and how it was done. That is, readers receive descriptions and samples from the original study to see how the material was transformed to make them analyzable, how it was analyzed, how excerpts were constructed and selected, and how the claims arose from the materials at hand. In other words, our pedagogy is practical, providing concrete step-by-step examples, instructions, and descriptions for how experienced researchers go about collecting and more importantly about interpreting/analyzing traces of recorded and transcribed events. Rather than telling what to do and how to do it, we show how we do it (how it has been done) and we provide a running commentary about why we chose this over that action and what we might do differently today with more insight and hindsight.

Third, each chapter introduces research projects in an inclusive and complete manner. That is, different stages of conducting research projects are articulated and discussed. Methodical considerations such as research design, equipment preparation, variety of data sources, methods of collecting data sources, field notes taking, participatory thinking trajectory, interacting with participants, data sources organization, processing data sources, data analysis, reliability and validity, results presentation, writing reports, publishing considerations, interactions with journal reviewers et al. Different projects focusing on different topics require different methodological considerations. Offering complete pictures of doing different research helps new researchers to grasp different orientations of addressing different topics in depth and in breadth. In so doing, this book also allows readers to evolve a better sense for how to conduct research projects and how to minimize the number of mistakes. For example, researchers often find out at the later stage of their projects that they forgot or lost chances to collect certain data sources. Thus, having a complete picture of conducting research in mind can help new researchers to design a thorough plan for their projects from the very beginning. Especially, this book also describes the feedback from and interactions with journal reviewers/editors—aspects that are rarely addressed in other textbooks on methodology but are significantly important for orienting research directions. Given that our research has been published in very different disciplines, including science educa-
tion, mathematics education, teacher education, curriculum, applied cognitive science, linguistics, social studies of science, sociology, and epistemology, there exists a range of very different examples of research results. Furthermore, our writing represents a wide variety of genres, which allows us to exemplify how the writing of research itself is adapted to the particular audience one chooses, itself a consequence of the themes identified in the data—that is, theory and method.

Forth, we also make commentaries on methodological issues by means of grey boxes at the textual margins throughout each chapter and at the end of each article excerpt. These commentaries were designed to facilitate readers’ reading comprehension and reflection. These commentaries include reflective notes, formulations of hidden considerations, and alternative choices on the research of communication. The presentation of the book is that of a textbook, with additional grey boxes that highlight particular things to do or not to do. For instance, we explicitly illustrate forms of more and less objective analyses. That is, these commentaries not only formulate a deeper sense of the rationale of doing research but also extend discussions for a broader sense of different approaches on addressing the same topics. Many unarticulated assumptions and hidden thoughts for research projects are explicitly exhibited from researchers’ own perspectives. That is, this book takes readers on a journey of exploring actual data sources, and putting them face to face with problems that we actually or possibly encountered, and what we have done or possibly could have done. The reader subsequently sees the results in the different analyses provided and our descriptions about how we arrived at them. In particular, these commentaries articulate historical dimensions of conducting research on two levels. One level is the trajectory of thinking within projects; the other one is the alternative and evolutionary understanding on the same topic between projects as time goes by. These illustrations of historical dimensions in this book not only provide a holistic view on researching communication but also supply an up-to-date report about different ways of researching the same topics to our readers. Normally, it is difficult for researchers to clarify these traces hidden behind their research, especially when only one isolated project was introduced. However, because of various projects conducted by our research group, these rich researching experiences over the course of two decades allow us to display these usually invisible trajectories in an explicit and conscious manner. Especially, our commentaries on these previous studies are based on our present lenses that facilitate readers’ observations on these different projects conducted at different periods and so help readers to have an evolutionary understanding for these research projects. This is especially true because the first author (Wolff-Michael Roth) had participated in every study reported in this book. He thereby takes the same kind of role that an ethnographer takes who makes comparisons between studies at different sites (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These traits of research trajectories and evolutions of research projects made explicit in this book are rarely found in other textbooks on research method.

In sum, these four distinct features of our book should allow readers to understand the discourse of these studies and follow researchers’ methodological considerations and reflections across space and time. We offer a very practical ap-
proach to the analysis of communication-related data. We organize the book around major educational discourses and how to analyze data sources in relation to these topics rather than teaching methods independent of the specific goals that orient researchers. The organization in terms of topics has been chosen because we believe that the context provides the details necessary for understanding why and how the analysts make decisions when they are in pursuit of finding out about some phenomena of interest—such as identity, or knowledge, or belief about the nature of science, or career goals. We know that this is one of the major problems graduate students have. At the same time, we also show how method is done practically because many students/new researchers generally do not know and understand how the general descriptions found in methods and methodology textbooks relate to the practical situations they face in their research. We show explicitly how a researcher interested in certain topics might go about analyzing interviews and recordings of un/focused encounters to extract what is necessary to support arguments about the phenomenon of interest.

In our presentation, we use and distinguish different types of text. Our presentation uses the normal format. We draw vertical lines on the left side of the excerpted texts to distinguish these from the remaining text. Square brackets are used in the excerpted texts to indicate relevant figures or tables appearing in this book to assist readers’ reading of these selected excerpts. Grey-shaded boxes are inserted and should be read as reflective formulations inserted in corresponding texts to articulate methodical and methodological considerations or alternatives.

Victoria, BC
September 2009
GLOSSARY

Audit trail To ascertain the quality of their research, interpretive researchers establish an audit trail that would permit anybody to backtrack from the claims made in some article to the original empirical materials via all the intermediate steps and processes that were used to make sense and structure the data sources.

Confirmatory ethnography This term denotes an ethnographic study that seeks to test the extent to which thick descriptions and grounded theory are transferable from a previous setting studied to another.

Conversation analysis (CA) is a research practice that focuses on the turn-by-turn unfolding of human interaction. In classical conversation analysis (CA), only talk was analyzed. Many applied CA studies now also include gestures, body positions, and prosody as materials to be analyzed.

Data Some material extract or artifact used to support a research claim. It is the end result, that is, the outcome of an interpretive process.

Data source Any material that is included in the set of entities that is analyzed and interpreted. Data sources are not inherently structured; rather, any structure ascribed to them emerges in and is the result of the reading and interpreting processes.

Dependability The extent to which the inquiry process is stable or consistent over time. This concept corresponds to that of reliability used in statistical research to ascertain the degree of consistency with which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure.

Discourse In the literature, this term is used in various ways. Sometimes, its sense is that of spoken language; at other times, its sense is that of all forms of written and spoken language, even including other representational forms such as diagrams, photographs, maps, and so on.

Discourse analysis (DA) Depending on the sense in which discourse is taken, the analysis of discourse focuses on language use in spoken conversation or written media. When discourse is understood to include all representational forms that are used in a culture, then diagrams, photographs, film, and other media are also objects of analysis.

Discursive device When an individual has made contradictory statements based on two incompatible interpretive repertoires, he or she may draw on some discursive device to explain how the contradiction can be resolved.
GLOSSARY

Ecological validity  is the extent to which a test measures what actually has been learned in the intervention studied.

Ethnography  literally means *writing the people*; the field concerns itself with the scientific description of nations or races of men, with their customs, habits, and points of difference.

Ethnology  is the science of races, peoples, and their relations.

Ethnomethodology  The term literally refers us to the methods of the people (ethnos); it denotes the study of the way in which all of us make the everyday, mundane world emerge in what we do. Whereas normally hidden, these methods are made explicit when we face some sort of breakdown. The normally tacit ways in which we queue up are made explicit when a queue does not work— we ask, for example, “Is this the queue to get tickets for the concert?”

Field note  denotes any form of note made during the phase of a research project in which the material evidence for subsequent (or ongoing) sense making is established. Field notes may be observational, when they record and summarize what the researcher has seen but not recorded on a camcorder. They may be theoretical, in which case the recorded notes and comments on theoretical aspects that pertain to the study at hand. Or they may be methodical-methodological, in which case the notes pertain to the research design.

Generalizability  A term used in research employing statistics to articulate the extent to which the research results of a study can be said to be valid in a much larger group of people than the one that actually participated. In a dialectical approach, the general is a concrete rather than an idealized general, always concretely realized in the specific observation at hand.

Grounded theory  refers to the results of an analytic process striving to represent thick descriptions, that is, largely textual materials into a more parsimonious, often diagrammatic form. A grounded theory only stands for the evidentiary materials available—whether it has relevance to any other situation is an empirical matter.

Inscription  denotes anything other than language used as a sign (sign complex, symbol) to refer to something else—including such things as photographs, drawings, diagrams, equations, and graphs.

Interaction analysis  is an analytic *practice* in which a group of researchers meet to collaboratively analyze a videotape owned by one of them. The videotapes generally show interactions. The intent of interaction analysis is to generate many different ideas about how to understand the recorded events.

Interpretive repertoire  is a term used in *discourse analysis* to refer to particular forms of *discourse* taken to be unassailable for the moment. Participants draw on these forms of *discourse* in supporting more contentious claims they make. When the same person draws on two incompatible interpretive repertoires,
they may, if the situation requires, draw on some discursive device to explain the contradiction away.

**Negative case analysis** can be thought of as the interpretive researcher’s equivalent to experimental design. The thick description of a case or cases that do(es) not support a research claim or assertion articulate(s) the conditions that mediates the applicability of an interpretive concept or construct.

**Practice** A practice is equivalent to a set of patterned actions, not as it is lived but as it is articulated in talk.

**Praxis** The actual ways in which we do something in a situation, the doing of work and the living of life.

**Progressive subjectivity** refers to the process by means of which researchers monitoring and record their developing construction of patterns and understanding in the research site.

**Prosody** Linguists refer to the particulars of sound production, including pitch, speech rate, and speech intensity as prosody.

**Qualitative research** The term qualitative research really is a misnomer, for all life processes are both qualitative and quantitative. It would be much better to talk about the extent to which researchers make inferences about the generalizability or transferability of research findings to other contexts. Thick descriptions do not as easily generalize or transfer to other settings, whereas the results of statistical research often do.

**Quantitative research** A term falsely used to refer to a style of research (see qualitative research) to denote a form of research that uses experimental design and statistics to make inferences about the extent to which observed patterns can be generalized to populations much larger than the group of individuals who actually participated in the research.

**Reflexivity** The term is used when an entity—an observation, a statement, a fact—about something else refers to itself. For example, researchers implement reflexivity when they not only claim that knowledge is socially constructed but also make explicit that this is the case for their own knowledge claims.

**Speech act theory** attempts to explain real, ordinary conversation by making salient that speech simultaneously (a) is a physical event (utterance, locution), (b) is a form of action (illocution) to which intents can be ascribed, and (c) has effects (perlocution). A speech act can be understood only through the coincident analysis of all three functions, which inherently means going beyond the individual speaker.

**Thick description** denotes texts that attempt to record and render the complexities of a culture in as much detail as possible and feasible. An IQ score is an example of a thin description, because one number is used to characterize a person as a whole.
**Transferability** In experimental research, which makes use of statistics, the concept of *generalizability* is used to discuss the extent to which the patterns in the data sources describe patterns of situations not included in the collection of material evidence. In interpretive research, the equivalent concept is *transferability*, which is the extent to which patterns identified in one situation are useful for understanding another situation. Transferability is an empirical matter rather than something that can be established a priori.

**Unit of analysis** refers to the smallest unit (“atom”) that an entity under investigation can be reduced to. When the individual participant is the unit of analysis, researchers assume that (the results of) actions can be understood just by looking at the individual; social phenomena are understood as the sum total of all individuals contributing to the event. For example, many researchers assume that an interview can be reduced to what the interviewee says plus what the interviewer says. A different unit of analysis is chosen when a researcher assumes that a conversation (its transcription) is a phenomenon sui generis, that is, in its own right. In this case, for example, the conversation cannot be attributed to the independent contributions of individuals and the researcher cannot attribute a particular belief to the interviewee but can only make assertions about belief talk.
CHAPTER 1

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIAL

How to Research the World and its Inhabitants

The social world is the product of human interactions (Schutz, 1996). Communication is the means by which these interactions come about. That is, communication is everywhere we care to look and listen. Communication generally and language specifically are so much tied to who we, human beings, are that the Greek already specified the human race as 
\( \text{z\ddot{o}on logon ekhon} \), the animal that possesses \( \text{logos} \), in both of its senses, that is, as language and as thought. But even the most simple conversations do not only make use of words, as the following brief episode from an interview that a graduate student (I) conducted with another graduate student (Mary) concerning her explanations of the existence of day and night. The two participants are comfortably seated on a couch, talking both to one another and to the camcorder that records them (Figure 1.1). (The transcription conventions are available in the appendix, p. 353.)

Episode 1.1
105 I: <<f>[s:o::> ] so you mEAn (0.16) earth is here ((sets left hand, Figure 1.1a)) an::: (0.32) sUN is hE[re] ((sets right hand))

106 M: [uh] hm=

107 I: =so when sun is ¯here= ((Slightly moves right hand up and down))

108 M: =anda ((points to right hand of I, Figure 1.1b, then moves to “Earth”)) thIS: part of the earth can hav[e bu]:t

109 I: [yea ]

Figure 1.1. A graduate student, left, interviews Mary (right) about the reasons for having day and night, a perennial topic of research in science education and psychology.
Just after Mary has concluded her explanation, the interviewer utters, “So, so you mean [the] Earth is here and [the] sun is here . . . so when the sun is here.” Simultaneous with uttering the first “here,” the interviewer moves her left hand forward and then does the same for the right hand at the time she utters the second “here.” While the interviewer is still talking, Mary, who squarely looks at the current speaker, produces an interjection, “uh hm,” before the interviewer continues in her turn at talk, “so when the sun is here,” where she moves her right hand slightly up and own. Mary latches on, that is, immediately begins to talk without leaving the slightest of talk. She points to the interviewer’s right hand, then moves her index finger in a straight line to the interviewer’s left hand while saying, “this part of the Earth can have the sunshine” (turn 108) overlapped in part by the interviewer’s interjection “yea.” Mary then continues, “but the other part didn’t” (turn 110).

The interviewer and Mary do more than just talk about the sun and Earth. In talking, they actually make the interview happen. That is, whereas some analysts take the interview so much for granted that they treat it as a box within which individuals take specific roles that determine how they behave, any careful analysis of an interview provides evidence that the situation itself also is the outcome rather than only the starting point of the interaction. Unless the interlocutors collude to produce the interview, the situation could actually turn into something else, as we found out in the past when interviews turned into tutoring sessions, where the interviewer, prodded by the interviewee, began to respond to question and ultimately turned to explaining the problem that the interviewee was supposed to solve. That is, the two interlocutors in this episode produce a social structure; they do so in an accountable manner, for they exhibit their understanding and lack or uncertainty thereof available to the other. And researchers provide descriptions (accounts) of the interaction and what it achieves, in terms of the situation and the contents of the talk.

But there is more to see in even the briefest of episodes, such as the one featured here. Thus, we might use the interview segment to produce conjectures or claims about who the individuals are, that is, their identity. For example, the interviewer does not use definite articles preceding the nouns “earth” and “sun.” An analyst may take this as evidence to make attributions in the form of “the interviewer is . . .” or “Mary is knowledgeable about . . .” and thereby articulate an aspect of the person’s identity, who she is. Analysts may even say that Mary exhibits willingness to participate and to make provisions for the interviewer to understand, because she apparently participates in clarifying an uncertainty that the interviewer expresses concerning her understanding of what Mary has said before.

It does not take much to understand what this episode is about. Any individual with cultural competence overhearing this conversation understands that the interviewer is asking a question to ascertain that she has understood what Mary has said earlier. Together they then produce a description in which the interviewer’s hand model the relative positions of Earth and sun, providing Mary, in turn, with the
possibility to point to the facing sides of the two celestial bodies and to trace out the trajectory of the sunlight on its route to the planet. We might be tempted, as many science educators and psychologists are, to attribute to Mary a conception about how day is produced on the Earth. The fact that we do have the cultural competence to listen to and understand the recording and transcription of the interview should not exempt us from conducting analyses that show how the two individuals actually produce the text that analysts subsequently take as the “evidence” to make attributions about such things as knowledge, motivation, identity, skill, and so forth.

But what can an analysis of this episode reveal that researchers subsequently report in their theses, papers, monographs, or books as their “finding(s)?” The answer to this question actually depends on what the research wants to know, that is, his/her research questions. We analyze communication because we want to find out something about knowing/knowledge, interaction, identity, or motivation—lest we be happy to be in the situation of the blind chicken that is happy to find something at all. Normally, however, interviews are conducted for particular purposes, and the transcriptions will be subjected to particular analyses that then reveal something about the phenomenon of interest. For example, a science educator or psychologist interested in conceptions and conceptual change may look through this interview and identify the conception Mary has concerning the relation of the Earth and sun in the production of the phenomena of day and night. But others, for example, sociolinguists or conversation analysts may be interested in the interaction itself. They might be interested in questions such as “How is the answer to an interview question produced?” In the present situation, we have strong evidence for saying that the answer to this question will include the collaboration of the two interlocutors, which then would question the answers of science educators and psychologists, who likely would have located the origin of knowledge somewhere in Mary’s mind.

The transcription together with the figure depicting the body orientation and gestures of the interlocutors shows that communication includes more than just talk. Mary and the interviewer clearly orient toward one another (Figure 1.1). Mary has turned her head squarely looking at the interviewer while the latter begins asking her question. The interviewer has turned toward Mary placing the two hands such that Mary not only can see them and their coordination with the words “Earth” and “sun” but also can use them as a physical model that she uses as a background to and object of her own pointing (deictic) and depicting (iconic) gestures. With their body orientation, Mary and the interviewer exhibit attention to one another. Moreover, in directly speaking to and using the Earth-sun model that the interviewer situationally produces with her hands, Mary makes available that she not only generally attends but also that she specifically attends to the nature of the question that the interviewer asks of her. And because the two display attention to each other, they can say what they say being pretty much certain that the other will do anything possible to follow what the speaker says.

The use of gestures further shows that communication by far exceeds the use of word, sometimes display what would be much more difficult if not impossible to
articulate by means of words. Thus, the interviewer marks each of her fists as belonging to one of two celestial bodies. She does so by “locking” the fists into their place precisely coordinated with the utterance of the corresponding name or precisely with a corresponding demonstrative adverb or pronoun also known as indexical (e.g., “there,” “this”). Mary points—i.e., uses a deictic gesture—to the “sun” and then moves the index finger to the other fist of the interviewer, thereby using an iconic gesture to show the trajectory of the sunlight on its way to the Earth.

In the transcript, we see other types of communication that exceed the verbal aspects. Thus, there are emphases that show how certain words are made to stand out from the sound stream. Some words are spoken considerably louder than with the average speech intensity, again leading to an effect of the corresponding word to stand out. There are also changes in speech rate, such as when the interviewer slowly produces an extended “so.” Some researchers are interested precisely in the effect of such prosodic means on communicative interaction.

One interesting issue that most researchers in the social sciences do not attend to is the fact that interlocutors such as the interviewer and Mary in the present episode are analysts of communication in their own right. Thus, the interviewer, in asking a question that apparently has as its (intended or unintended) purpose the verification of understanding, also exhibits that she has analyzed, to a certain extent, what has been said before. It makes only sense for her to engage in a process of ascertaining or verifying an understanding if there is a certain level of uncertainty, which itself is the result of an assessment. Mary, too, is an analyst, exhibiting her understanding of the expressed intent of clarifying what she had meant to say. She actively contributes to the production of an account what she said or has meant to say about how the movements of Earth and sun produce the phenomenon of day and night. That is, both interviewer and interviewee are lay analysts (sociology, psychology) making available the results of their analyses for the benefit of producing structured social interaction. In fact, any analyst intending to recover what is being said and how it is said has to have the same cultural competencies of communication analysis—or, to be more precise, they have to be competent in the same ethno-methods, the methods employed by ordinary people to exhibit the way in which social structure, context, meaning etc. is produced and transformed—as do the two interlocutors.

This cursory and ever-so-brief analysis of an interview fragment shows that we may want to analyze an episode for many different reasons. We do not just analyze an episode; we analyze it because we are interested in the question of identity, dimensions of human character (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, interests, motivations), knowledge and conceptions, interaction, institutional relations, or interactions with technology. That is, the research question drives the analysis. It is precisely for this reason that we organize this book concerning methods of analysis of communication around some of the major topics in educational research rather than around method itself. The purpose of this book is to give readers an opportunity to see and learn how research work, analyses of communication and writing, are actually carried out.
BECAUSE OF THE CENTRAL ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE AND SOCIO-TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS (INCLUDING INTERVIEWS THAT ARE PART OF KNOWLEDGE-GENERATING RESEARCH), ALL SOCIAL RESEARCH, IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, DRAWS ON COMMUNICATION OR MAKES COMMUNICATION ITS TOPIC. IN CONVENTIONAL RESEARCH, INVESTIGATORS OFTEN TAKE WORDS (ORAL OR WRITTEN) AS THE MEANS FOR HUMAN BEINGS’ COMMUNICATION. HOWEVER, TREMENDOUS WORK IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES HAS IDENTIFIED OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES IN THE SITUATIONS TO ACHIEVE COMMUNICATION. IN THIS BOOK, WE DRAW ON A VARIETY OF EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES TO EXEMPLIFY HOW TO ANALYZE DIFFERENT FORMS OF COMMUNICATION TO FIND OUT ABOUT TOPICS OF INTEREST, INCLUDING STUDENTS’ LEARNING IN SCHOOLS, STUDENTS’ INTERVIEWS, STUDENTS’ INTERNSHIP IN UNIVERSITY LABORATORIES, TEACHERS’ COTEACHING LESSONS, TEACHERS’ INTERVIEWS, SCIENTISTS’ INTERVIEWS, AND THE READING OF TEXTS. THE EXAMPLES WE MOBILIZE ALSO ILLUSTRATE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SOCIAL ORDERS PRODUCED AND REPRODUCED IN PEOPLE’S COMMUNICATION.

IN THE PAST, WE HAVE ADOPTED DIFFERENT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND METHODS, SUCH AS CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY, ETHNOGRAPHY, HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY, CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY, CONTENT ANALYSIS, GROUNDED THEORY, DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY, DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, AUTO/BIOGRAPHY, ETHNOMETHODOLOGY, CONVERSATION ANALYSIS, DESIGN EXPERIMENT, SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS, ANTHROPOLOGY, SOCIOLOGY, AND PRAGMATICS. INITIALLY, THE CHOICE FOR A PARTICULAR FRAMEWORK OR METHOD WAS HISTORICALLY CONTINGENT, AS WE WERE UNAWARE OF THE PLURINUM OF METHODS AND THEORIES AVAILABLE IN DISCIPLINES OTHER THAN EDUCATION, OUR ROOT DISCIPLINE. HOW TO CHOOSE A PROPER MEANS AMONG THE DIFFERENT THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS IS AN IMPORTANT TASK FOR THE RESEARCHER.

WE ORGANIZE THE BOOK SUCH THAT EACH CHAPTER FocusES ON A MAJOR EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE OR ON A COLLECTION OF TOPICS OF INTEREST. IN SO DOING, WE BRING TO THE FOREGROUND THE IMPORTANCE OF CHOOSING A METHOD IN TERMS OF RESEARCH TOPICS RATHER THAN CHOOSING A RESEARCH TOPIC IN TERMS OF THE METHOD(S) A RESEARCHER IS FAMILIAR WITH. BOURDIEU (1992) HAS NOTHING BUT CONTEMPT FOR “MONOMANIACS OF METHOD,” WHO LOOK AT THE WORLD THROUGH METHOD RATHER THAN ATTEMPTING TO UNDERSTAND THE RESEARCH OBJECT ON ITS OWN TERMS. Thus,

[JIT] IS REVEALING THAT ENTIRE “SCHOOLS” OF RESEARCH TRADITIONS SHOULD DEVELOP AROUND ONE TECHNIQUE OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS. FOR EXAMPLE, TODAY SOME ETHNOMETHODOLOGISTS WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE NOTHING BUT CONVERSATION ANALYSIS REDUCED TO THE EXEGESIS OF A TEXT, COMPLETELY IGNORING THE DATA ON THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT THAT MAY BE CALLED ETHNOGRAPHIC (WHAT IS TRADITIONALLY LABELED THE “SITUATION”), NOT TO MENTION THE DATA THAT WOULD ALLOW THEM TO SITUATE THIS SITUATION WITHIN THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE. (PP. 225–226)

PERTAINING TO THE LAST POINT IN THE QUOTE, OUR INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS ALREADY SHOWS HOW THE TWO INTERLOCUTORS NOT ONLY TALK ABOUT SOMETHING BUT ALSO, IN DOING, PRODUCE THE INTERVIEW AS A SOCIAL SITUATION. WE THEREFORE CANNOT JUST LOOK AT THE WORDS BUT NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATING OF THE SITUATION ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INTERLOCUTORS AS WELL AS BY THE RESEARCHER.
Theories and methods are tools that offer certain opportunities and constraints simultaneously, assisting researchers to understand their research object as it presents itself under the theoretical and methodical lens chosen. Thus, to understand a research object more fully, researchers have to be conscious of the nature of their tools and what are the things that tools allow to discover. For example, using a questionnaire always already imposes a grid on social life, weeding out everything that does not fit with the researcher’s position and gaze. This approach has come to be denoted as a Procrustean bed, because, like the ancient bandit, researchers force their subjects to fit their methods and theories rather than attempting to understand the object from itself. Realizing the advantages and disadvantages of tools, therefore, is the first step for researchers to conduct credible research. Sometimes when research topics are very complex, it is always necessary and useful to draw on more than one theoretical and methodical tool. However, researchers need to notice the different natures of tools and choose them deliberately. For instance, researchers may prefer to choose tools that are compatible or complementary rather than constitute fundamental conflicts between tools. Importantly, the compatibility between topics and tools is always the primary consideration for conducting good research. Throughout this book, we take pains to explain our rationale of choosing certain tools for excerpted studies that focus on different topics in each chapter. In so doing, readers are enabled to follow our methodical considerations and decision-making processes in various circumstances (projects).

We make our recommendation of deliberation on purpose, because one of the repeating questions during doctoral defenses is that about why the candidate has chosen this or that method, this or that theory. Candidates can respond only when they in fact made a deliberate choice, which requires knowledge of more than of one method or one theory.

In this book, we identify two theoretical frameworks that are particularly useful in addressing communicative issues—discourse analysis and conversation analysis, because these two tools have already offered up many analytic concepts for analyzing verbal and non-verbal data. These include discursive resources, interpretative repertoires, discursive devices, ethnomethodology, turn taking, formulating, overlaps, adjacent pair, repair sequences, semiotic resource, temporal structuring (rhythm, tempo, speed of events), prosody (intensity, pitch/frequency, duration), standard one-second silence, preferred actions, dispreferred actions, initiate-reply-evaluate sequence (IRE), alignments, entrainment, continuers, production of evidence of understanding (continued attention, initiation of relevant next contribution, acknowledgment, demonstration, display), gesticulations, catchments, growth point, back-channeling, posture, stance, and communicative meaning unit.

Through this text, we introduce readers to these concepts but in the way they fit with the organization of the book according to research topics. Thus, in the chapter organized around institutional relations, one section deals with lessons as a particular example of focused encounter that produces and reproduces power and institutional relations between teachers and students. Here, research has shown that the initiate-reply-evaluate (IRE) sequence is a mainstay for the reproduction of teachers (who initiate and evaluate) as those who are “in the know” and therefore in the
position of evaluating classroom discourse. Thus, this is precisely the chapter where relevant linguistic topics are presented to the reader. In addition to introducing discourse analysis and conversation analysis in various contextualized studies, two associated frameworks—discursive psychology and ethnomethodology—are presented in greater depth and breadth (chapter 9).

CHAPTER INTRODUCTIONS

This book is organized such that each chapter takes a particular topic—interaction, identity, knowledge and conception—as a focal point and then shows how various methods of analysis can be employed to arrive at answers to relevant questions. That is, each chapter has its own topic (e.g., identity, interest) and discusses methodical considerations researchers should enact when conducting research for this particular topic. For chapters 2 through 8, we choose seven crucial themes in social science as focal topics. In chapter 9, we introduce two useful theoretical frameworks, discursive psychology and ethnomethodology, that have particularly influenced our research in the most recent past. In chapter 10, we present and explain a session in which an expert (Wolff-Michael Roth) engages in the analysis of a transcript of origin to a class of graduate students in a course on research method. The following sections summarize the content and structure of each chapter.

Identity is an important topic in education and an increasing number of educators start to realize its relevance and influence on teaching and learning. However, the theme of identity is complex and difficult to access because of its dynamic and intangible nature. It is therefore important to understand different ways of conducting research concerned with the phenomenon of identity. In chapter 2, we select two published papers from a seven-year ethnographic study of teaching and learning in urban high schools. We introduce the research design, its variety of data sources collection, and the thinking and researching trajectory concerning identity issues from the beginning to the end of the research project. The first article draws on cultural-historical activity theory to assist in analyzing the mediation of identity on teaching and learning. The second article closely examines the empirical data in a grounded-theory manner to enrich our theoretical understanding of the concept of identity.

Human characteristics—including beliefs, attitudes, interests, and motivations—are core phenomena for social scientists generally but for educators particularly. However, researchers make different assumptions about the phenomena and how they can be accessed, leading them to different methods and instruments for establishing data sources. Over the past two decades, we, too, have been interested in these human characteristics and how they mediate learning. But in the course of researching these characteristics, our own thinking and understanding has changed—and so have the methods we employ. In chapter 3, we feature four published articles to demonstrate not only different methods but also our own trajectory of addressing human characteristics. Although these four articles derive from the same database of a two-year ethnographic study of students’ discourse about knowing and learning generally, the chosen angles on students’ beliefs and atti-
tudes differ radically. Our earlier research adopted a similar view with conventional research that deems human characteristics as individual entities inscribed in a person’s mind. Later, influenced by discursive approaches and philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida, we started to look at the collective dimensions of human characteristics. We came to understand that the real issue is one of belief talk, for example, rather than that of belief as a phenomenon in and of itself somehow anchored in the person. These different perspectives on human characteristics presented lead researchers to conduct different analyses concerning beliefs, attitudes, interests and motivations and so add alternative understandings to the existing knowledge in social science.

What constitutes knowledge or knowing has been an important question for many social scientists. Generally, knowledge is viewed as something obtained through oral or written communication (tests) and, over a period of time, comes to accumulate in a person’s mind (the verbs “absorb,” “take in,” and “get across” are familiar in conversations about learning and teaching). However, there is evidence that knowing in general and learning in particular not only depends on words but also other discursive resources and is mediated by other artifacts or resources outside people’s heads. In chapter 4 we present three articles to illustrate what discursive resources mediate students’ learning and knowing. The analyses and findings in these three articles identify various resources that can be shown to mediate learning but are normally ignored in educational discourse. The results suggest a more holistic understanding of cognition; and they push us to rethink the nature of cognition. This rethinking significantly contributes to education especially when urgent calls exist in the present education system for educators to design assessments that evaluate students’ learning and knowing more accurately.

Inscriptions such as graphs and drawings are pervasive resources for human beings to organize, reorganize, integrate, and facilitate communicating and thinking. Importantly, many relationships can be displayed more easily in inscriptions than by means of words (alone). It is therefore important to understand the use and functions of inscriptions and how they mediate the activity of reading them. However, the complex relationships between different forms of text—titles, image, captions, paragraphs, and drawings—require particular attention. In chapter 5, we present and comment on three articles that analyze textbooks, scientific journals, and online texts respectively to demonstrate how inscriptions and their reading can be studied. These detailed analyses identify various functions operating in texts as well as inclusive resources and methods that readers draw on in the process of reading. Moreover, these analyses eventually build theoretical frameworks and models that explain the use of inscriptions and the reading process. We present methodical-methodological considerations for conducting research that focuses on analyzing inscriptions in particular and texts that feature inscriptions in general.

The research on communities of practice has oriented the interests of educators toward trajectories of participation. One of the most important topics for researcher to understand is the dynamic process of educational discourse in learning situations, specifically, the forms of participation and social interaction. In chapter 6, we articulate ways of conducting research on the topic of participation and social
interaction. We exemplify these methods drawing on two articles that exhibit ways of researching these topics beyond a cognitive approach. The first article focuses on how interactions are mediated by artifacts, social configurations, and physical arrangements. The second article emphasizes the conversational structures enacted in an informal setting. These two articles showcase different dimensions of participation and social interaction and how these can be studied. The methodological considerations focus on how to capture the ongoing and complicated processes of participation and interactions are articulated and discussed in the chapter.

Many terms such as power and knowledge tend to be taken as entities attached to certain people without questioning. Thus, teachers are often said to “have” power and researchers often are described to be in a “power-over” situation. Yet we understand such statements as evidence of presuppositions rather than the outcome of careful analysis. It is therefore not uncommon for researchers to explain people’s relationships in terms of these concepts. For example, teachers have power over students or males have power over females. However, if we were to examine actions more closely, complex relationships would come to the fore and the relationship might actually be operating in the reverse. We then understand that the question of who is in the know constitutes contested terrain, continuously negotiated and renegotiated in the historical and situational contingency of a social situation. We therefore caution researchers to use concepts carefully so that their analyses and results are not constrained by their unreflective use of (unreflected) concepts. Thus, the most pressing issue of social research “would be to take as one’s object the social work of construction of the pre-constructed object” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 229) that researchers use in the same way as the common people. A genuine rupture with the pre-constructed occurs precisely when researchers question the research object and how a common understanding thereof tends to underlie much of present-day social science research. In chapter 7, we use excerpts from two published articles to illustrate how to go about analyzing institutional relations in an empirical manner supported by data that are available to co-participants and to researchers (in the way our introductory analysis exposes this phenomenon). One article examines the relationships in an interview setting and the other studies relationships in lessons simultaneously taught by two teachers. In addition to analyzing words, gestures, and body moments, we draw on computer software to assist analyzing various dimensions of prosody including speech pitch, intensity, volume, rate, and rhythm.

Technology has played an essential role in the present society and increasingly appears in schools to assist teaching and learning. Although much research has been conducted to improve learning technologies, little research closely examined the actual interaction and communication between users and technology. To demonstrate methods of analyzing communication in the presence of technology, we use in chapter 8 three articles based on an eleven-week ethnographic study that aimed at understanding how students interact and learn physics concepts when provided with software that models physical processes. The three articles respectively identified the strategies the teacher used to guide students’ reading about the
activity of technology, the mapping relation between virtual activities of technology and the everyday life, and how various communicative resources such as gestures and talk mediate students’ learning with technology. Special considerations for conducting research on technology and its data analysis are articulated and discussed. This chapter exhibits how to analyze participants’ actual interactions with technology in an ongoing and dynamic manner.

In the previous chapters, we articulate many important topics (e.g., identity, belief, knowledge) in social science and demonstrate how researchers analyze and address these topics. In these chapters, we frequently draw on two theoretical frameworks that we have come to find more fruitful than others over the course of 20 years of analyzing communication—discursive psychology and ethnomethodology. These two frameworks not only inform our ways of thinking about research in general but also guide us in approaching our research topics such as methods of collecting data sources and analyzing them. Because of the significant influence of these two theoretical frameworks, we introduce in chapter 9 the fundamental principles and philosophical considerations of discursive psychology and ethnomethodology. In addition to the general introduction, we also select two articles with empirical data to demonstrate how discursive psychology and ethnomethodology help researchers to analyze data and lead us to new insights concerning knowledge. Moreover, we also synthesize the difference between the ethnomethodological approach and general formal analyses for readers to better understand the distinct characteristics of ethnomethodology.

Over 20 years of research experience have taught us that doing analysis at the elbow of an expert is an efficient way to learn data analysis because an expert’s ongoing analysis allows novices to observe some tacit skills and craft that normally go without saying. We have seen that seeing how an expert analyzes data sources in real time allows graduate students and novice researchers to learn tremendously. In chapter 10, we present and analyze one session from our own graduate teaching where an expert (Roth) analyzed unfamiliar data sources in the presence of novice researchers (mostly graduate student in a method course). In the session, two students brought a transcript that the professor had not seen before and did not know its provenance of. It turns out, the professor accurately reproduced and rebuilt information that is identical to the original video source after his data analysis of the transcript. This chapter aims to describe how an expert analyzes data sources in a grounded way without imputing thoughts into people’s heads and, in this manner, generates a more objective analysis. We can see the different (false) starts, repetitions, considerations, and so forth that the expert enacts to arrive at a principled reading of an unfamiliar transcription.

In the following pages, we present a summary of chapter contents including focal topics, theories, methods, analytical concepts, and excerpt study references (Table 1.1). For each chapter, we first provide an introductory background for its focal topic, introduce the research design of excerpted studies, demonstrate excerpts from published articles, and then make commentaries on these excerpted studies.
Table 1.1. A summary of chapter contents.

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<th>Topics</th>
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<th>Analytical Concepts</th>
<th>Commentary Boxes</th>
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# Table 1.1. A summary of chapter contents (continued)

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c. Roth (in press) |
b. Hsu, Roth, & Mazumder (2009) |
b. Roth & Tobin (in press) |
CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY

Identity has been turning into one of the core topics in recent social science research. Issues of subjectivity and identity are particularly thorny for students in education. Moving from being relatively passive consumers of neatly packed and commodified “knowledge” into being legitimate participants, authorized to act more and more fully in the school activity system, requires new teachers to continuously negotiate and renegotiate their objectively experienced positions in different but related activity systems. In the process, they make choices for their future participation and professional identity. Identity struggles are considerable as subjects sort out their participation in relation to different activity systems of formal education, peer group, work, and so forth as they construct and reconstruct their identities from among contradictory object/motives of various activity systems.

Identity continues to be a riddle despite centuries of research and reflection on the topic. In everyday usage, as a driver’s license or a passport serving as “pieces of ID” show, the question of identity is reduced to the question of when (and where) someone is born, a name, and a photograph (perhaps augmented by a description of hair and eye color). For the second-grade students in the following conversation, the question of identity is answered by giving one’s name:

Researcher: So, who are you?
Mark: Galen . . . is his name.
Researcher: But this is his name.
Galen: Galen.
Researcher: But this is your name. Who are you?
Galen: Galen!

The name, especially attached to the person or photograph, denotes a singular material entity, the person. But does this already tell us who a person is? The much-bedeceived philosopher René Descartes provided a little more elaborate answer: “I think, therefore I am.” After positing that he might not exist, Descartes showed that this presupposition leads to contradictions such that he exists just because he thinks. In the famous formulation ascribed to him, cogito ergo sum [I think therefore I am], Descartes posits the “I” and therefore his identity, which is anchored in his acting consciousness (“I think”), defines himself in terms of his thinking. In his autobiography, written in response to a request for the history of his thought, the philosopher notes: “I am at ease to exhibit in this discourse the routes I have taken and in it to represent my life like a painting so that everybody can judge it” (Descartes, 1637/1973, p. 93, our translation). For the philosopher, what and how he is thinking is who he is.
Much maligned because of the separation between cogitation, on the one hand, and material life, on the other hand, Descartes nevertheless showed that identity is tied to what we do, though he limited himself to thinking. When adults are prodded to pronounce who they are, they engage in accounts of what they have done, the kinds of relationships they have had with parents, siblings, and peers, and the outcomes of the various activities in which they have participated. These accounts are inherently intelligible not only because they are produced for the other in terms of a language that has come to the speaker from the other but also because any form of practical or discursive action “is indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other” (Hegel, 1806/1977, p. 112). There is therefore a developmental process required that allows children, who equate identity with their names, to become adults, who equate identity with their relations and actions captured in autobiographies. This developmental process is the converse side of relating to others in society; and such relations to others are the very foundation of any higher order cognitive process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Personal (life) and collective histories are captured in (auto-) biographical and historical narratives. Such narratives are made of characters (protagonists) and plots. The characters have personal characteristics or characters, which are the results of the persons’ actions, themselves embedded in a plot that is as much constitutive of the protagonist’s character as the character is to the plot. (See also chapter 3, p. 84.) Thus, in the following quote from the data sources, Ya-Meer tells his interlocutor that he curses a lot, especially at home, and even when teachers are present, in which case he possibly is helping them out.

Oh I curse in school, just not around the teachers. Or when I do curse and it is around teachers, its probably cursin’ with them. . . . Like when I’m cursin’ when the teacher hear me, its probably like helping the teacher out. . . . The teacher probably say “Thank you,” or he say, “Don’t curse, but thank you.” And like when I’m outside, it’s like all hell. It’s curse, everything curse, curse, curse. When I’m in my house, not everything, but a lot, curse, curse, curse.

In this instance, Ya-Meer is constituted as someone who both swears and helps out teachers. In telling us what he does, he communicates an aspect of his identity, which includes both swearing and helping teachers. More so, he can be constituted as an African American by the way he speaks, rendered here by means of elisions in words normally written differently in Standard English. That is in speaking, he also exhibits an aspect of identity as a speaker of non-Standard English. Even though he speaks non-Standard English, what he says is intelligible, because he concretely realizes narrative possibilities and expressions that come with Standard English. Recounting an identity in terms of an auto/biography therefore means that despite all the singularity of a lived personal life, identity is not just something solipsistic and singular but constitutes the realization of a cultural possibility, both in each concrete but fleeting action—which leads some to argue that the poststructuralist self is fractured—and in the more stable accounts of the biographical genre that they are taken up into. These accounts, auto/biographies, require an anchorage
in the constancy of the (structure of the) flesh to be able to constitute identity in its experienced, singular form. In this narrative, Ya-Meer always also is an (not-so-singular) ethico-moral protagonist in a particular plot—here an engaged student who helps out teachers and, in so doing, also helps out his peers. Surfacing successful from such events is constitutive of how persons understand and define themselves, which leads to the repeated and repeating accounts of who they are. It is through the identification with characters and plots, concretized in narratives involving themselves, that Ya-Meer specifically and human beings generally constitute their identity in narrative form—the auto/biographical genre.

In Western cultures, many find it difficult to understand identity other than in terms of an entity, self-referentially designated by “me” or “I.” and bounded by the perceptual surface of the body. Postmodern notions of a “fractured self” or of the Self as a collection of “multiple marginalities” appear to contradict a commonsense experience of Self as an entity continuous in time, undergoing at best marginal changes. The difficulty arises because of the conflation of two dialectically related aspects of Self, two aspects that have been termed idem-identity and ipse-identity (Ricœur, 1990). Idem is the Latin word for “same”; it is used to denote the material aspect of our Self, the body, which is experienced in relatively constant manner. Ipse refers to “self”; ipse-identity pertains to the experience that our Selves are related to and emerge from the social and material situation. This is the Self that changes as we move between and within activity systems. The two are dialectically related because ipse-identity presupposes a body, idem-identity. At the same time, idem-identity can be recognized only as such and better understood because we have a sense of Self. It is the recognition of our body as a body among bodies that forms the ground of intersubjectivity, of recognizing our Selves as others for other people. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity, therefore, are correlates because consciousness-for-myself always already is consciousness-for-another (Vygotsky, 1986), which is inherent in the very term consciousness, knowing (Lat. sciēre) with (Lat. con[m]-).

Participation in collective activity allows the development of knowledgeability and its articulation as such; individual subjectivity and human intersubjectivity emerge simultaneously in the context of practical activity because the grounds for individual action are always already generalizable (i.e., intelligible) grounds. A familiar person is always a concrete Other to one or more others, and in this, an instance of the generalized other. First-person subjectivity emerges in the context of cooperative and communicative relations with other people.

To present ways of getting at issues of identity in the educational discourse, we excerpt in this chapter two published papers to illustrate how we approach the analysis of data to get at the issue of identity. In and through the analysis of verbal data, one paper focuses on the “re/making identities in the praxis of urban schooling” and the other theorizes the idea of “identity as dialectic.” These two papers were derived from the same database collected in an urban high school. In the following sections, we introduce the research design and discuss our researching trajectories for these two published papers in detail subsequently.
CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN

The texts concerning identity presented here derive from the same seven-year ethnographic study of teaching and learning in the inner city high schools of Philadelphia.

Site and Participants

This study is situated at City High School, an urban neighborhood school in Philadelphia. City High School is a comprehensive public high school of approximately 2000 students of which 82% are from low-income families and roughly 93% are African American. Although we generally refuse the construction of difference based on testing technology because they contribute to deficit views, we may choose to present the following descriptive information so that readers can better situate this school with respect to other schools in Philadelphia. The average daily attendance rate is 72%. In the 1999–2000 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests, 84% of the eleventh-grade students scored in the bottom quartile for math and 86% scored in the bottom quartile for reading. These figures for reading and math are higher than the state wide percentages of 25% and 24% respectively. More interestingly, percentages for bottom quartile scores in similar schools show 70% in reading and 73% in mathematics.

The school was divided into 10 small learning communities, each of which focuses on a different theme. This study was situated in a small learning community, a school within the school, that had science, education, and technology as its focus. There are a total of seven teachers who work in the community, one of whom is the coordinator of the small learning community.

Jennifer Beers, a new teacher, was seeking certification to teach biology and general science. She was assigned to undertake a yearlong internship at City High School. Jen learned to teach at the elbow of a cooperating teacher, Cristobal Carambo, in an eleventh-grade classroom. Cristobal was a teacher of Cuban-African origin, with five years of experience teaching science in urban schools in Miami Florida. This study commenced in his first year of teaching at City High School, where he initially experienced significant difficulties despite his previous successful experience as a...
In studying identity issues, we identified the resources people have to accomplish their goals, intentions, and projects and how they used these resources in their involvement with the ongoing activity. We took into account three basic assumptions. First, we studied identity in settings where the forming of identities is at stake in the course of the activity. Second, we sought to identify cultural and historical resources because they are integral as empowering and constraining tools for identity formation. Finally, mediated action is employed as the basic unit in the analysis of identity.

For the work at City High School, the research team evolved a praxis that simultaneously achieves teaching, learning to teach, researching, supervising, and evaluating. Our goal was to participate in bringing about change in urban teaching and learning environments by involving as many stakeholders as possible in classroom processes. To learn from our collective experience and make decisions about subsequent actions, we videotaped lessons, recorded debriefings, made videotapes of our analysis sessions, and collected reflections in journals and face-to-face and email interactions; these data allowed us to develop new understanding and local theory. All results of earlier analyses were incorporated as resources in subsequent analyses or treated as objects of inquiry in their own right. In

2.3. Awareness of Assumptions in Doing Research Conducting research in general and analyzing data in particular always involves certain assumptions that orient researchers’ actions. Having awareness of these assumptions and articulating them in articles not only shows researchers’ thorough considerations and understanding in their own research but also enhances the credibility of their data analyses and findings.

2.4. The Benefits of Participants Conducting research that not only addresses researchers’ questions but also benefits participants’ lives has been recognized as an ethical and productive mode of scholarly pursuit. In this context, cogenerative dialogue not only provides researchers a site to theorize identity issues but also offers opportunities to bring positive changes into the classroom and to the lives of people. In so doing, the research itself becomes a living project that contributes to all stakeholders in an ongoing process. For example, participating in research mediated how Ya-Meer went about schooling, allowing him to go to college subsequently.
this way, our research results arose out of the recursive application of a reflexive hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. The goal of our analysis was to generate locally grounded theory that provided new possibilities for action to the participants in the research and greater control over their lifeworlds. This form of research practice is therefore “authentic” in a catalytic sense in that our evolving understandings directly informed and transformed our praxis of teaching.

Data Sources

The data sources drawn on in the two excerpts from published studies are situated in the larger study comprising seven years of ethnographic work and numerous teachers in training, a postdoctoral fellow, and graduate students doing their theses and projects on aspects of teaching, learning, and learning to teach in the school district. In the database there is an extensive record with respect to the participating teachers and teachers in training, including the ones participating as authors in the first of the two studies, and on students. Thus, Ya-Meer had become a student researcher in the larger study and, as such, contributed to the production of data sources on both sides of the student–researcher nature of his participation. For example, at one point during the summer he gave a talk “The Life and Times of Ya-Meer McKnight,” in which he used a PowerPoint presentation to state major points and to include visuals that he was identifying with (Figure 2.1). He thereby both contributed to transcriptions, the collection of video, and the interpretation of video as well as to interviews with respect to his life generally and his life in school specifically, his goals, and his biography. For example, our database includes conversations (interviews) between Jennifer Beers, a teacher in training, and Ya-Meer McKnight or between Rowhea Elmesky, then a postdoctoral fellow, and Ya-Meer. The following is an excerpt from a conversation that the two have had just prior to the intensive analysis of the existing data.

October 16, 2001

And I think my sign, my Zodiac sign, got a lot to do with me, cuz Gemini’s they change their attitude like that (snaps his fingers) like one minute I’m cool and the next minute I’m real mad.

When I’m in the house, I curse. An’ I curse, and when I’m outside I curse more. An I’m more, when I’m outside, I’m more, arright. Like arright, I don’t got to speak to nobody when I’m outside. But I speak to my boys, like “wha’a up” give em a hand shake. When I see my friend parents, I say arright, “How ya doin’ Ms. Debbie. What’s up Mr. Earl.” Like when I speak to the lady, I say how ya doin’? but the man, “What’s up”? See the difference.
When I’m goin’ like on the job, that’s the only difference, the way I think is like more working cuz I’m not expecting-- I’m expecting to give full answers to whatever that the guy giving me the job is asking so my brain work more. When I’m outside, I don’t I don’t work as much only if like someone ask me a question and I’m explaining it... It’s certain ways you talk to certain people. Like like outside of school an’ inside of school. Inside of school, I see my coordinator, I’m like “What’s up Ms. Tracy”. If I see the principal, “How ya doin’ Ms. Johnson?” See it’s a difference, “What’s up Ms. Tracy? How ya doin’ Ms. Johnson?”

The data sources also include formal and informal interviews between Michael (Roth) and Ya-Meer as well as the recordings made during research meetings modeled on the cogenerative dialogue, a praxis designed to make sense of commonly experienced situation without privileging the voice of any individual par-

2.6. Variety of Data Sources Any relevant documents that participants produce constitute data sources for researchers. In this case, the PowerPoint slide provides an excellent visual demonstration of the student’s self-representation and identity that he might hardly be able to describe in words.
participant. Cristobal, Jennifer, and Ya-Meer also wrote several pages about their identity.

As the research progressed, Ya-Meer and his chemistry teacher Cristobal Carambo had a run-in over a low test grade that the former had received (see below). Soon thereafter, Michael Roth had come for a week, contributing to the production of data sources to complete this project. We had repeated meetings with different stakeholders, including one that had both cathartic effect and led to the conclusion of the project. All participants had already read some of the draft assertions and analyses. The following is an excerpt where the two key participants talk about identity, which was the focal aspect of the study as it emerged.

Ya-Meer: You was talking about identity, and the place where you come from, in our reflection. And a lot of times, that is not the case. Like for me, the different, the way I am is too, is different from the place I am in. Like my neighborhood where I am in, I am different from the school, you will see that it is totally different. The way I was taking what you were saying about identity and place was that depending on where you grew up that this is the way you are in the classroom.

Cristobal: That is not the case. Who you are is shaped by where you grew up, like I grew up in Harlem. But I am totally different. You are not, in other words, just because I come from the hood, it doesn’t mean that I am going to be hoodish. But when you go home, whoever you are, whether you live in the hood or wherever, who you are changes, because of your environment. I don’t think there is any sense here that we are because I, where I grew up near Harlem, and I am from the street, but I have a street personality that I don’t show. That wouldn’t be true to say, because . . . we are not saying that, we are saying that the place where you are in changes you

During the night immediately following the conversation, Michael transcribed the tape so that we would have it available for analysis during the following day when Michael and Ken met to discuss what has happened and how to articulate it as the conclusion that had emerged to our study. As it turned out, it was not just a research project concerning identity, it has had tremendous influence on mediating the relation between Cristobal and Ya-Meer, who gained better understandings of one another, allowing them to grow and therefore evolve new forms of identity.

During the constant interactions with participants and as a result of the researchers’ changing understandings, the research objective changed. In the following sections, we articulate our thinking trajectory concerning identity and excerpt two published articles generated from this project to demonstrate how we approach and address the complex and difficult concept—identity.

RE/MAKING IDENTITIES IN THE PRAXIS OF URBAN SCHOOLING

From setting up this project to producing the published article on identity (i.e., Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight, & Beers, 2004), our thinking and perspectives concerning our research objective changed through continuous reading
and discussions. The following paragraphs articulate how the objective of research evolved in the interactions with theoretical positions and participants’ participation in this project.

Our initial intent was to write an article about identity in the context of becoming a teacher in an urban school (proposed title: “Becoming an Urban Teacher: Activity-Theoretic Approach to the Development and Change of Identity”). The following was a first articulation of what the article concerning identities in urban schooling should or might consist of.

May 13, 2001

Individual consciousness as a specifically human form of subjective reflection of objective reality may be understood only as a product of those relations and mediations that arise in the course of the establishment and development of society. Outside the systems of these relationships (and outside social consciousness) the existence of the individual psyche and the form of conscious reflection, conscious images, is not possible. (Leont’ev, 1978, p. 79)

For many years, our (authors) individual and collective research agendas have dealt with the problem of becoming (as) a science teacher, and the contradictions inherent in the current cultural forms of preparing future science teachers in general and those for urban schools in particular (e.g., Roth & Tobin, in press). Much of our own work was, influenced by our own culturally specific conceptions of the individual and consciousness. That is, we saw individual teachers as more or less autonomous beings that engaged in different activities—teaching, parenting, or pursuing hobbies—as the same psychological being and with the same consciousness. It was only recently that, through collective research and teaching, our own consciousness about the restricted ways in which we considered teaching and learning to teach began to expand (Roth & Tobin, 2001). We began to see, as Leont’ev expresses in our opening quote, that individual psyche and the subjective reflection of objective reality cannot be understood independently of the culturally specific activities in which we participate.

Activity theory provided us with a new way not only of seeing the world but also in becoming critical of our own concepts that had served as blinders preventing us from seeing activity and psychology, culture and mind, as integrated phenomena. More so, we came to see pairs of entities such as cultural activity and psychological phenomena as polar inseparable elements of dialectical units that, when contradictions between and within the entities become evident, begin to change and change each other (Ratner, 1996). Here, we are particularly interested in the identity of the human subject in an activity; particularly we are interested in teacher identity and its genesis and evolution in the everyday activity
of teaching. Activity theory provides us with a tool to understand the frustrations new teachers (in training, first appointment) experience as contradictions in what they have learned in their formal training and their knowledgeability required in the praxis of teaching. It also provides us with a tool to understand the difficulties even experienced teachers have to confront when they move into a new school, even when this move involves going from one inner city school to another. The difficulties are more pronounced when the move is from a school with middle-class suburban students to one serving students from inner city neighborhoods where poverty is widespread.

One month later, our proposal for a contribution to a special issue of *Mind, Culture, and Activity* had dropped the Leont’ev quote and replaced the part following the Ratner reference to read as exhibited in the next paragraph. The authorship, rather than including Roth and Tobin, now also listed a teacher, the coordinator of the small learning community, a teacher in training, and a high school student (Roth, Tobin, Carambo, Beers, McKnight, & Tracy Stickney).

*June 4, 2001*

In this article, we are particularly interested in the identities of teachers and students and their genesis and evolution in the everyday activity of teaching. Activity theory provides us with a tool to understand the frustrations new teachers (here, Beers) experience between what they have learned in their formal training and their knowledgeability required in the praxis of teaching. It provides us with a tool to understand the difficulties even experienced teachers (here, Tobin, Carambo) have to confront when they move into a new school—particularly when this move involves going from middle-class suburban to inner-city schools, with students from housing projects (here, McKnight). Activity theory also allows us to frame the struggles of mid-level school administration (here, Stickney), whose responsibility is to provide the academic leadership for a school within a school, where many contradictions emanate from diverse cultural and social histories of the teachers, students and teacher educators involved in interconnected activity systems. Activity theory affords insights into the experiences of a researcher (here, Roth), who learns about teaching and learning by participating with regular teachers in the classroom. Finally, activity theory is a framework that anticipates the changing and blurring of roles of participants within interconnected activity settings as coparticipation occurs in a context of ongoing cogenerative dialogues among the participants.

As indicated in this paragraph, activity theory oriented us to approach identity in a more holistic way rather than only focusing on the individual teacher. Interestingly, an unexpected event again refocused the research orientation in this project. During October of that year, Michael had spent a week in Philadelphia with the intent to collect any data necessary and to work on the projected manuscript. On the day of his arrival, a dramatic event changed the original plans. Two of the participants in the project, the chemistry teacher Cristobal and the student Ya-Meer had an altercation, for which the student nearly got suspended. We used this occa-
sion to come to better understand the role of identity at stake when Ya-Meer challenged the teacher after finding out that he had received a low mark on a test. Our research note entry exhibits the change in focus on teachers’ identity to one in which identity as a continual production.

November 10, 2001
Setting: Environmental Science Lesson (Juniors and Seniors), City High School, Mr. Carambo, Mid-October 2001.

During the previous lesson, the environmental science class had written a test. On this day, the teacher Cristobal told students their grades. A number of students including Ya-Meer noticed that Charles, who normally is a B or C student, had received 93%.

Ya-Meer asked his teacher what his grade was. Cristobal did not remember the grade but thought it was 83. Ya-Meer, “Hey, how I get an eighty-three?” But when Cristobal looked up the grade, Ya-Meer had received 65 on the test. Ya-Meer asked, “How I get a sixty-five for?”

In this class, Ya-Meer thinks about himself, and is considered by his peers to be one of the two best students. Ya-Meer is proud of having been on the honor roll and having selected been recently as student of the month. Cristobal, an experienced teacher who had moved from teaching urban students in Miami to teach at City High, felt that after a turbulent first year characterized by many problematic interactions with his students, gradually he had earned their respect. He was confident that he could resolve the dispute with Ya-Meer without creating an unmanageable classroom situation. Cristobal wanted to resolve the contradictions that were emerging about Ya-Meer’s grade, his expectations, and the discrepancy between this score and his usual performance. He invited Ya-Meer to review the test with him, stating “Let’s see the test. Maybe I made a mistake.”

Together, they looked at the test.

C: You didn’t answer the questions fully.
Y: Damn. I did give the right answer, a paragraph and a third. For each question, yeah.
C: You didn’t answer my questions.
Y (mumbled): Man. I don’t wanna hear that. That’s bullshit.

Ya-Meer stormed out of the classroom. Cristobal followed him into the hallway and called, “Ya-Meer.” However, Ya-Meer continued to walk away. Soon after the coordinator of the small learning community informed Cristobal that Ya-Meer had told her that he would not go back into the classroom. Cristobal then located Ya-Meer and returned with him to the SLC office. The coordinator, teacher and student then tried to resolve the situation. However, during the meeting Ya-Meer exclaimed, “You teachers always want to be
right.” Cristobal endeavored to reason but decided that further attempts would likely be futile. He then announced as he left the office, “I don’t want to talk to him anymore. He’s crazy.”

Later, the coordinator arranged a second meeting in her office. Cristobal announced that after looking over the test again, he felt that 77 was a more appropriate score.

C: If I was wrong, you know me, I have no problems. What did I do wrong to make you go so crazy?
Y: When you told me the grade, you told me the grade incorrectly. You first said it was a 83, then you said it was a 65. That really got me upset.
C: I am sorry if I did that. In the future I’ll try to be clearer about the grades.
Y: OK, I am fine. I will go back to the classroom.

Because of this altercation, we not only introduced activity theory as a productive framework to address identity but also took this dramatic event as a demonstrative site to further develop a better understanding on identity. In the abstract, the purpose of the ultimate published article (i.e., Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight, & Beers, 2004) was articulated in this way: “In cultural historical activity theory, the entities that make a system are not conceived as independent but aspects of mediated relations. Consequently, an individual, a tool, or a community cannot be theorized in an independent manner but must be understood in terms of the historically changing, mediated relations in which they are integral and constitutive parts. Drawing on a case study that focuses on the identities of two of the authors, we show how, by participating in the activity system of schooling, the identities of students and teachers are continuously made and remade. A teacher changes from being “someone unable to control the class” to being respected and successful school staff; a student changes from being a street fighter to being an A student. Identity, we argue, should therefore not be thought of as a stable characteristic of individuals but as a contingent achievement of situated activity. Our case study suggests that cogenerative dialogues involving students and their teachers provide contexts for the reflexive elaboration of mutual understanding of the identities of individuals who occupy different social locations in the activity system.”

Excerpt from the Published Article

Because we allowed our research to follow a salient event, this article emerged into an account and explanation of the emergence of identity in urban students and teachers, here exemplified in and through the lives of Ya-Meer McKnight and Cristobal Carambo. Important life narratives are provided for both for the time preceding their altercation, which is then featured from their mutual perspective, and the ultimate resolution of the conflict that came about in and through a research meeting designed according to the cogenerative dialogue model. Given its focus, the article, perhaps not surprisingly, deviated from the standard narrative forms in being written from the first-person perspectives of various co-authors that are juxtaposed to the third-person narrative that the author collective takes as a
IDENTITY

whole. Preceding the following excerpt, the article featured details from the life of Cristobal, how he became an urban science teacher, how he learned to access resources and creating a space to act, how he managed the division of labor when teachers in training worked in his classroom, rules for acting and interacting that he attempts to foster for his classroom, and his personal schema. The article then proceeds with the early years of Ya-Meer in school, for parts of which he described himself as a troublemaker and “playing games.” He then began to buy into an achievement ideology and become a top achiever in his class. It was at that time that he received a low grade on one of his tests.


Continuing Change
Most of the dialogue involved Cristobal and Ya-Meer discussing issues of salience to their identities as teacher and student respectively. We decided to honor their voices by excluding the dialogue of others and focusing on those issues that shed most light on the vignette that we used to commence this paper.

Etymologically, “identity” derives from the Latin root idem, the same. Our case studies of Cristobal and Ya-Meer show that far from staying the same, our social and personal identities are continuously produced and reproduced in activity. Who we are in relation to others and as we experience ourselves change as part of continued participation within and across activity systems. Our opening vignette shows that even “minor” instances may threaten our social and personal identities, which therefore have to be routinely sustained in the ongoing reflexive activities of each individual (Giddens, 1991). Theorizing identity in terms of continuously produced and reproduced outcomes of activity not only emphasizes its precarious nature but also makes positive change and development plausible. Society has conferred to schools the responsibility for promoting and supervising the development of students. Whereas this responsibility is often conceived only in cognitive terms (teaching content matter), our case studies imply that schools also have ethical and moral responsibilities for fostering the continued development of identity. In our change-related work in urban schools, we have evolved cogenerative dialoguing as a praxis that allows students and teachers to bring about change in a collaborative manner (Roth & Tobin, 2002). Students, new teachers, regular teachers, coordinators, university supervisors, and researchers, all participate in an open dialogue to make sense of and theorize classroom events for the purpose of designing change that is practically possible for these individuals in this classroom that they call

2.9. Focused Participants Having extensive data from a few participants allows researchers to present findings in a deeper and a more thorough manner. Moreover, it gives a clear and easy-to-follow presentation to discuss and explore complicated issues such as identity in our case.
CHAPTER 2

their. Such changes also occurred in the present context involving Ya-Meer, Cristobal, and the other authors through their continued interactions. To illustrate, we use excerpts from the final cogenerative dialogue session concerning this article and involving the authors. Ken and Michael had organized this session to discuss an earlier version of this article. Our discussion focused on the role of “respect” and achievement in the continued making and remaking of identities.

Respect and the Classroom

Cristobal: I realized when we had that conversation that I said to you, “What is it about that I did?” and you said that I wasn’t clear about the grade. And part of me thought, “you know,” and then I realized if that’s where a little bit of disrespect happens because when you first asked me about the grade and I say sixty, fifty, or eighty-one, I didn’t really care, because to me, numbers don’t mean anything. And the grades can be changed to anything. But what was a disrespect of you was not realizing how important numbers are to you as a student. And just because it’s an eighty-three or forty-something to the teacher, who can change to whatever he wants, but some teachers don’t do that. So I didn’t take into account the fact that you might have been shocked by the sixty-five and I should have been more careful. “Because,” I thought, “no matter what happens, I can make it all okay. Because I have all this power I can make it all okay.” And so the fact that you are trying to remake yourself as something, as a student, and you are looking at the grades . . . I don’t care about grades, but that is where the disrespect comes in. Because you don’t realize how important things are to other people. So that is one thing that I realized that I need to respect people find out what their terms are very clearly. Because I think that even if I disrespect someone I can then go back and say, “I am so sorry I didn’t mean to do that.” You can’t risk disrespect at all.

Ya-Meer: From my end of the situation. Like the only reason why, I just got mad because it wasn’t my paper that you read off your sheet. But then when you told me that I had the sixty-five. The reason why it made me mad is this is my last year; I want to get straight A’s. And the sixty-five won’t help me out at all. So I was mad more with myself than with you.

2.10. Different Voices on the Same Issue Presenting different participants’ voices on the same issue helps readers to understand the situation in depth and breadth. It also increases the credibility of data analysis that is grounded in the situation as a whole rather than on researchers’ interpretation or one participant’s opinion.

2.11. Cogenerative Dialogue Various stakeholders get together to debrief and reflect on issues in cogenerative dialogue that allows different participants to learn from previous actions and communicate in a productive and educational manner. These dialogues help participants themselves better understand each other and produce resources to improve practice or achieve better collaborations in the future. The point of this praxis is to come to understand the plurality of experiences rather than establishing Truth by means of triangulation.
And my first reaction was, “How do I get a sixty-five?” I was still mad, I wasn’t really hearing you. I wasn’t listening to you while you was talkin’. But I was listening to you a little bit, like when you say, let’s go over it, you started to read the question, where I had the most points off. And I answered the question the way you wanted it but it wasn’t good enough. And that’s why I left the classroom. Because I could have done more than leave the classroom but that was the best thing I did. Because I could throw a desk, just because I was mad at you. I could have done something. And I leave the classroom. But then I started to know I was right. When I leave the classroom, I walked around, just to cool off a little bit, and I stay in the hallways. And then I realized that maybe the class was not that important. And that is when I asked Miss Smith if can switch out of the class.

Then I started thinking, “I’m not gonna switch out. I am gonna keep going.” Then I started to think. It was the next day when you and Miss Smith called me into the office. I was still mad. And then when we was talking, then, I wasn’t listening to you. And then I was, all right, I mean they are trying to show me respect. And so I got to show them respect. And that is what I got after that conversation ‘cause I actually went to Miss Smith and this one led to the second conversation. I went to Miss Smith and I told her that I was wrong for the whole, that I was dissing you all like that. So I say, “I am done with it. I apologize.” I was thinking, “This is not helping me at all. Me getting mad in the classroom, this is not helping me to do what I want to do.”

Cristobal: Between people nothing happens that is not two ways. So in our circumstance initially when it all happened, I said, you know, “He’s crazy. He’s crazy. What’s wrong with him?” And I needed just a minute and listen to the other person. “What did I do?” Because I always do this, and you are right, I looked at Meagan’s paper first. People hate to have themselves confused with someone else. That’s the worst you can do when you are a teacher. You want to make sure you know people’s names. During the first couple of months, you make a couple of mistakes. But after that, “You don’t know my name? How can you be grading me when you don’t know my name?” So I looked at Meagan and I said, “You get 83” and then, actually you were the one who said to me, “I am not Meagan.” The damage was done.

Ya-Meer: Respect is the most important aspect in what happens here at school. Students would disrespect teachers because they don’t know much about what happened. A lot of times, teachers don’t care about students, they can do one thing that teachers don’t care about. If Carambo didn’t care about wearing hats in a room, everybody wore hats they would just ride in. Certain kind of disrespect, people think differently. Like somebody would think like they show disrespect and others would be laughing about it. So I kind of wanna know what kind of disrespect you don’t wanna hear- but it is probably that they had a bad day that they just show it off the teacher or maybe they just don’t feel like it. And a lot of time students have problem, they are just having problems that they can’t express to teachers that they don’t feel right showing to teachers. And a lot of time, they got to handle so many students at one time. And like one person
got a problem at home. And that is stressing that person out. And the teacher
don’t know that that problem present a problem like that. And that person would
think that the teacher just bothering’ them. Like if I got a problem at home and I
put my head down and you come over to me and tell to put my head up. I would
think that you botherin’ me. And I would just start flippin’. Just because of my
situation at home. So people bring situations outside a school to school and they
just offend the teachers.

Cristobal: That is true. Especially in our community where kids have such terrible
times without us realizing it. And sometimes, a teacher is worried about the les-
son, the objective, and the test. And the students have lives. And a lot of times
kids flip on me, especially in the morning. A lot of times it is in the morning
when they tell me, “Get the f*** out of here.” And all you did was to say, “Put
your coat away.” That response comes from something that they had coming out
of their lives. And a lot of times those teachers don’t have the time, or just don’t
care, to take that little step to find out what is going on with kids. “Oh, yeah.
Let’s go. You are out of here!” It creates an aura in the class that these folks
don’t care, and the kid next to him sees that. And the next time they have a
problem, they just flip right away, because these people, they don’t care. They
don’t care about me. Don’t bother me.

Ya-Meer: I think a lot of time it is also what other students see them as. Like
somebody might flip on a teacher and they want to up the people in the class-
room and they go, “He is big, he is flipping on the teacher.” Don’t listen to him.
Or Craig he talks about the teacher and he is saying something about the teacher
just because he wants other people to laugh. A lot of time, they want people to
see them as, like, “Oh, you cool. Do it again, make me laugh, I wanna laugh
right now.” Especially in my classes, a lot of people just wanna be clowns.

Commentary

In this article, third-person perspectives (and voices) alternate with first-person
descriptions and with conversation. The theoretical parts, inherently generalizing
and general, are written from a third-person perspective. This perspective necessar-
ily deletes the individual voices. It functions as the voice for writing the explana-
tory parts of the text. The first-person narratives and dialogues bring the real-life
persons into the text, allowing their voices to be heard in the way they intended
them for the manuscript as a whole. This narrative procedure is entirely consistent
with the argument that the text itself makes in its entirety. Thus, auto/biographies
are not singular but rather, because constituted by means of a character–plot dialec-
tic, they are inherently intelligible to others. Moreover, in the conversations repre-
sented in the text, the mutual other literally is confronted in the pages of the text.
The authors thereby realize in a concrete manner the agenda outlined in the title of
Ricoeur’s (1990) book Soi-même comme un autre (Oneself as Another), oneself
always accounted for in terms of narratives that have fundamental structures simi-
lar to those of other narratives, biographies, and life experience novels.
Identity issues can be investigated in many ways. To address identity issues, the preceding study chose to focus on a salient event that naturally happened between Cristobal and Ya-Meer. These researchers not only were in the classroom with the participants but also conducted follow-up interviews with key participants. That is, both ethnographic data and interview data were used in this study to support researchers’ analyses and findings. Although the interview itself (individual or focus group) is a great data source to address identity issues, integrating both ethnographic and interview data has three main advantages, because participants in their interviews respond to real events that happened in the presence of researchers. First, researchers can develop a better sense of participants’ talk. As we know, what one says is not always equal to what another person hears—simply think about the times you made a joke and someone else heard an insult and other situations where misunderstandings have occurred in your life. If researchers observe participants’ daily lives and collect ethnographic data sources, the chance to mishear or misinterpret participants’ statements in interviews will be low.

Second, the authentic nature of identity is likely identified. It is not uncommon to notice that sometimes talk about action differs from the actions. This phenomenon is inevitable because talk cannot directly reflect on people’s previous actions but is always mediated by the context of the talk. Moreover, people do not always act consciously or have explanations for their actions. Thus, if researchers encouraged participants to talk about a salient event that is contextualized (rather than abstract), some normally invisible and difficult-to-access identity issues may be brought to the fore for further discussions and investigations. Third, providing an opportunity to reflect daily activities is beneficial for participants. Most conventional research takes participants as information providers rather than as information recipients. However, participants can also be informed during their participation in researcher projects. For instance, inviting participants together to discuss and reflect issues in their lives not only offers opportunities for participants to be conscious of their actions but also provides a channel for participants to enhance their mutual understanding and communication. It is especially true in this case of Cristobal and Ya-Meer when conflicts or misunderstanding appeared in their previous interaction. Actually, people rarely have a chance to reflect what they had done and to learn lessons from them. This reflective dialogue in follow-up interviews can become a space for participants to interact and serves as a unique benefit for people who are able to participate in the project. In sum, integrating both ethnographic and interview data provides a means to conduct research projects in an ethical manner and to explore new research areas.

IDENTITY AS DIALECTIC

Identity is a complex phenomenon and its theorization in the social sciences is still in development. It is therefore not surprising that a sense could emerge of there being more to identity than what the first article excerpted here had articulated. The opportunity to articulate some newly emerging understandings came with an invitation to contribute to a book on urban education. As in all social science re-
search, articles do not just spring from the data sources nor do they come entirely from out of thin air. There is always the current position of the researcher, which constitutes a horizon within which the research takes place, and which may be transgressed and thereby pushed back in and through the research. In writing, the researcher changes, erasing who s/he was, thereby creating new horizons that provide new contexts for understanding data sources and concepts. Thus, the following orienting paragraph was written in the fall of 2003 as part of the intended chapter contribution.

October 11, 2003
Making and Remaking Self in Urban Schooling: Identity as Dialectic
In traditional theoretical discourses, an individual’s identity has been understood in terms of more or less constant character traits; these discourses focus on stability and constancy related to the physical body of the person. Postmodern discourses focused on the changing nature of identity, its heterogeneity, arising from the many different social interactions; here, identity is understood in terms of a socially mediated notion of Self. Both notions have shortcomings, because they portray only part of the picture. In the present chapter, I will take a theoretical perspective grounded in a critical hermeneutic phenomenology (Ricœur, 1985, 1990, 1991) and critical (Marxist) psychology (Holzkamp, 1991; Lave, 1993), which highlights the fundamentally dialectic nature of identity (i.e., ipse, idem identity). Consequently, an individual, a tool, or a community cannot be theorized in an independent manner but must be understood in terms of the historically changing, mediated relations in which they are integral and constitutive parts. Furthermore, any form of identity is always expressed in narrative form, which not only raises new dialectical tensions but also has consequences for who we are and who we can become as living human beings. Such an approach appears especially necessary, as it implies hope for a situation in which many urban students seem to be condemned to the reproduction not only of their social class (and the forms of identities that it makes possible) but also of their concretely lived identities (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Identity, I argue, should therefore not be thought of as a stable characteristic of individuals but as a contingent achievement of situated, always mediated activity. I draw on materials collected during the collaboration with two African American students (one male, one female) attending an inner-city neighborhood high school. My case study suggests that dialogues involving students and their teachers provide contexts for the reflexive elaboration of the understanding of identities and opens a door for solidarity, hope, and positive change. It also suggests that there is a responsibility on the part of the collective, which provides the cultural tool kits on which urban students draw as part of identity-producing activity.

2.12. Different Insights Generated from the Same Database
When the database is "massive," it is not uncommon for researchers to develop different insights from the same database when the return to it repeatedly. It is especially the case when researchers try to address cutting-edge issues that had not been investigated thoroughly. Drawing on different theories, researchers may also observe and analyze different dimensions of the same database.
The book project took some time so that the chapter developed over a considerable period of time, from conception to its final published (i.e., Roth, 2006a). A fundamental framework for the text emerged from a handwritten entry in the research notebook, which captures, partially in diagrammatic form, various types of dialectical relations, whereby the dialectical nature comes to be expressed either by vertical or horizontal bars, presence or omitted. Each of the resulting dialectics is attributed to a particular theory, either Ricœur (R) or cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT).

April 21, 2004

<table>
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The original note also contains an entry “Befindlichkeit,” which is an old-fashioned term that the philosopher Martin Heidegger used but which does not have an English translation in a standard academic German–English dictionary. “Sich befinden” translates as “to be,” meaning in some location or “to feel.” The noun is often rendered as “mood” or “moodedness.” The entry is followed by the statement “Experience of emotionality [is] result of social mediation (Holzkamp, 1983),” which sets up the tone for the chapter to follow. That is, our focus was on the lifeworld of the person whose identity is described. That is, the abstractness of the diagrammatic form is associated with a term that orients the discussion toward an utterly singular experience of finding oneself in a place and the dominant mood (emotion), which is mediated by the social configuration rather than being radically subjective. For the published text, the dialectic came to be expressed in diagrammatic form using wavy brackets but was published with these in the second of the following two representations:

### 2.13. Diagrammatic Representation

When certain concepts are difficult and complex, it is often useful to use diagrams to represent their semantic relationship at different stages of the research project. It not only helps researchers to organize and reorganize their thinking in field notes, but also assists readers to capture these concepts and their relationship through thoughtful diagrammatic representations in papers.
Here specific relations arose from the crossing of existing dialectical relations same vs. other and material body vs. person. This diagram represents an abstraction, a form of grounded theory that summarizes the data sources and shows how the individual statements can be understood as arising from the dialectical tensions. A few days following what initially was literally a sketch, a first version of the dialectical model was described in textual form. (Shameer was used as a pseudonym for Ya-Meer who appears in the previous sections.)

April 26, 2004

The first contrast articulates the difference between a being caught up in and practically understand its world, from which it is not distinguished, and beings that experience themselves as different, other from the world and its objects that are the targets of their intentional and explanatory actions (Heidegger, 1977). It is a being that does not reflect on its own relation with the world, a being that simply relates to other things and other people. When Shameer in the heat of the moment says to a teacher, “See man this is why I don’t like y’all, I don’t like y’all teachers or y’all school,” he relates to the teacher in an unmediated way. Upon reflection, which objectifies the situation and its participants, he might regret having made the comment or understands it in context and knows that he would not make it with the principal present. When Shameer is mad at his chemistry teacher and walks out of the classroom after hearing he has a sixty-five on his test, Shameer is simply relating to his world, including the teacher. When he later says to the teacher, “I just got mad [at you] because it wasn’t my paper that you read of your sheet,” he is in a mediated relationship to the foregone events and situation. He conceives of the teacher as another person, who became the object of his anger. When anger, grade, and teacher are conscious entities, the relation to the world is no longer direct but mediated, explicated, and objectified (Buber, 1970).

The second contrast opposes the material body of a human being with its personhood. Through the materiality of the human body comes the continuity in, and accumulation of, our experience. The human body continuously changes both as the result of the actions that it brings about and as the recipient of the actions of others. It is because Shameer has a body that others on the street can make him a target of their violence (“Like, yo these bunch of dudes tried to roll on us, they’d be like how many of them was there and what size was they”) and teachers can “screw him” (“I always get screwed by the teachers”). It is this body that is adorned, coiffed, and put in relief by means of special clothing. The body, carrier of emotions, is central to identity, aspirations, and identification of the youth. This body is so important, because it is the “mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and so of foreignness” (Ricœur, 1992, p. 318). The body is not
merely the seat of knowledge—"wet ware" in computer speak—but importantly
the central structure that gives shape to what and how we know (Merleau-Ponty,
1945). At the same time, human beings are more than their bodies; they are per-
sons who relate intentionally to other things and beings.

When the dimension of same is applied to the material body–person contrast
(Figure 1), we arrive at the dialectic of sameness (material body of the human
subject) and selfhood (human being as a person). Thus, Shameer's experience
of his continuity through time, his pointing to a childhood picture is a consequence
of sameness, whereas his changing selfhood is apparent when he asserts being
different (e.g., in different relations, through time). When the concept of other is
applied to the material body–person contrast (Figure 1), we arrive at the other-
ness of things (material objects, signs) and persons (human beings). It is be-
cause they have bodies that are different from mine that we both can understand
others and yet be different from them. It allows Shameer to both understand his
teachers ("I was givin' [the teachers] reasons, I was givin' them more and more
reasons to make 'em do make 'em suspend me and that's probably what they
wanted") and be different from them.

The experience of the otherness of things and people is neither innate nor
does it come by itself: it requires social mediation, as research with very young
and older deaf-blind children has shown (Mikhailov, 1980). That is, the human
capacity for communication and reflection is founded on otherness: both the
signs (language) used in communication and the things signs denote are differ-
ent from (other than) the persons expressing and explaining themselves. Applied
to the material (body), the same–other distinction leads us to a dialect of the ac-
ting subject as distinct from the object of its actions. Applied to the person, the
same distinction leads us to selfhood and otherhood (otherness of other people),
which is at the heart of the dialectical relation between individual and collective
(community).

Different traditions use different elements from this over-determined collec-
tion of relations as the starting point for their reflections. In hermeneutic
phenomenology, the foundational dialectics required in theorizing identity are self-
hood|sameness, selfhood|otherness, and understanding|explaining (Ricœur,
1992). In cultural historical activity theory, the foundational dialectics required
in understanding human activity are subject|object, individual|collective, and
unconscious|conscious, the three dialectics arose together with the division of
labor and the associated societal mediation of activity, each dialectic presuppos-
ing the other two dialectics (Holzkamp, 1983). So, too, the three dialectics arise
in individual development, when children discover themselves and the otherness
of their parents, the otherness and permanence of objects surrounding them, and
cause and effect relationships (explaining), which already require their practical
understanding of how the world works. Common to both approaches is that any
of these relations can only be pondered in relation to concrete material actions
and activities. To understand actions, a closer look at the agency|structure dia-
lectic is required.
Readers should take note of how during the “interpretive” research process there are very different levels of text. It is in the production of text that thinking evolves, just as Vygotsky (1986) articulates it as occurring for speech. Thus, thinking and writing are two processes, each both presupposing and constituting the other. Through writing, thinking realizes itself, but writing creates new resources, externalizations, that thinking can use, thereby expanding its room to maneuver. Thinking and writing are better understood as two developing processes that overlap, crisscross, mutually enhance, and develop each other. Therefore, rather than sitting down to attempt to write an article, readers may begin by making it a habit to write, a few hours every morning or evening or what time of the day they write best. These notes both develop thinking and leave a trail/trace of how thinking has changed confronted with a range of texts, data sources, and so on. Such change in thinking, or better, such change in consciousness has been called “progressive subjectivity” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Documenting progressive subjectivity is an integral part of research and contributes in essential ways to the establishment of the quality of qualitative research. For Bourdieu (1992), too, avoiding to become trapped in the preconstructed concepts means enacting radical doubt. Thus,

[t]o avoid becoming the object of the problems that you take as your object, you must retrace the history of the emergence of these problems, of their progressive constitution, i.e., of the collective work, oftentimes accomplished through competition and struggle, that proved necessary to make such and such issues to be known and recognized as legitimate problems, problems that are avowable, publishable, public, official. (p. 238)

Readers may write notes about anything, some theoretical issues, copying something they have read and then annotating the quote, using a piece of transcript and writing as much about it as they possibly can. It will become apparent that even if a reader-researcher had little to see and say initially about a piece of data source (video, transcript, artifact), as thinking/writing develops, there will be more and more to see. The more one looks, the more one sees. But it is not just cursory looking that will lead to this development. Careful looking and radical listening to the voices that appear in the text is important to the attempt to “find out more about than appears to the eye,” going beyond appearances and finding/establishing connections that might exist at the level of the phenomenon or at the level of the descriptive language.
Excerpt from the Published Article

In the ultimately published text, an argument is made for a conception of identity as a phenomenon at the intersection of multiple dialectics. The following excerpt actually constitutes the beginning of the text, where the key features of the theory to be presented are given in narrative form tied to the concrete details of the life of Ya-Meer who was referred to by the pseudonym Shameer.


Identity as Dialectic: Making and Re/making Self in Urban Schooling

My game is the game of life. And in the game of life I use my tactics to get what I want, to do what I need to want to do. Which is what I need is what I want and what I want is what I need. If I want to need to do something then I do it.

(Shameer, African American, twelfth grade in an urban school)

Good teachers know their students, for to prepare an appropriate curriculum, they have to address their emotional, motivational, and cognitive needs. Knowing students, for example Shameer, the author of the introductory quote, poses questions.

“Who are our students?,” “How can we find out about them and what their needs are?,” and “How do students understand themselves today as compared to yesterday and tomorrow?” To understand her students, Joanne, a white middle-class woman attending a teacher preparation program in a large U.S. metropolitan, interviews students during a yearlong internship in an urban school largely serving a poor neighborhood. Among others, Joanne is interested in the differences between African American and white experiences of schools and schooling.

Joanne: Do you think there’s equal opportunity between Blacks and Whites?
Shameer: No. Cause, I have experienced that when I lived in New Jersey. I lived in Linden Hill, New Jersey. I went to a school that was 99 percent white. It was like I would just get B’s all the time. I would I know the work, and I was just like, I was young and in my state of mind I was like “Oh, they don’t like me.” I had a few white friends and you know, we was cool, they didn’t see the color thing. It was like, it seemed like the teachers– I remember one time, I was in sixth grade and the teacher, he had put us into groups. It was three black people in the classroom and the rest was white. So, all right, he said we could pick the people we want to work with and there was four people to a group. I had picked, it was me, my friend Richard, Mike, and a girl named Kristen. Kristen was black, Mike was white, and Richard was black. We always worked together
good. And the teacher said, “No.” He put me in the group with the other black kids. That wasn’t no problem. I didn’t really see that as a problem. But as I got older I began to see that that wasn’t right.

In this situation, Shameer talks about himself in a school context where there were predominantly whites. In his account, color was not an issue for his white friends, but in his experience, it had been an issue for the teacher, who has segregated them by color. Shameer says that at the time he did not recognize the segregation as a problem, but he now realizes it as lying at the roots of different social opportunities between white and African American students. Here, who Shameer is, who he can relate to in school tasks, and the opportunities he has now and in the future, are accounted for in terms of color (race) differences. Not only is he an African American student, recognizable by his skin color, but also his biographical narrative articulates and reifies these differences as part of and influencing his life trajectory.

There is more to the episode. Shameer has agreed to be interviewed, has shown up on time at the arranged meeting place, and sincerely answers Joanne’s questions. Agreeing, showing up, and answering are actions that have specific outcomes. In acting, however, Shameer does more than achieving these outcomes: he also produces himself as a particular kind amenable to a white teacher’s request, collaborating so that she can complete a university course assignment, and a participant willing to articulate himself extensively, which facilitates Joanne’s task tremendously. That is, in these actions, Shameer also re/produces himself, who he is with respect to others, here his teacher, and perhaps through her, also his school. That is, he re/produces identity, an aspect of human life that has received too little attention in the scholarly literature to the detriment of our understanding what knowing, learning, and schooling is all about.

Identity
Identity (from Lat. idem, same), who we are for ourselves and who we are in relation to others, is a mysterious phenomenon for at least two reasons. First, Shameer can point to a picture and say, “This is me when I was five, and the street I lived on–but don’t nobody be on there but the drug dealers.” In this case, although there are substantial differences between

2.16. Analysis beyond Data Content
After the formulation of the data content, readers are bridged to access more relevant information including theoretical connection, practical implication, or various discussions concerning the data. Here, what is said about identity is described in the first paragraph and how the talk reproduces identity is later discussed in the second paragraph.

2.17. Etymology
Etymology is an important source for assisting researchers in better understanding the sense of words, their origins, and their semantic relations to other concepts. It shows how a word was used and how it set up relations that influence how we hear it today. Drawing on etymology may serve as a resource in support of researchers’ arguments and their analyses in a historical and cultural manner.
Shameer and the child in the picture with respect to the physique and particulars of the body, including size, hair color, and so on, he is making an assertion about the sameness of whoever is depicted and he indexically refers to as “I.” He makes this assertion despite recognizing that he was more aggressive at some time in his life, continuously fighting with other kids, and that “[He] ha[s] mellowed in [his] later years.” Thus, who he is and was is part of a biography, a narrative featuring the same person (character) with both constant and changing character traits in the course of his life (a plot).

Second, as he is moving from situation to situation in his daily life, he is someone different with respect to the others surrounding him. In the episode, he is a student amenable to his teacher’s request for doing an interview; he accedes to her wish and, in a sense, contributes to supporting her development as an urban teacher. But only a few months after the interview, Shameer is involved in an altercation with his chemistry teacher, which escalates to the point that he risks being suspended or even expelled. Shameer’s actions and the rules of his school culture seem to be incompatible. That is, Shameer is a different person in a different situation. Who he is with respect to teachers and school is inherently frail so that a stable identity in interaction with others is the outcome of continuous reproduction.

Shameer: When I’m in the house, I curse. An’ I curse, and when I’m outside I curse more. An I’m more, when I’m outside I’m more, aw’right– Like aw’right, I don’t got to speak to nobody when I’m outside. But I speak to my boys, like “wha’a up” give em a handshake. When I see my friend parents, I say aw’right, “How ya doin’” Ms. Debbie, What’s up Mr. Earl.” Like when I speak to the lady, I say “how ya doin’?” but to the man, “What’s up”? See the difference. I curse in school, just not around the teachers. Or when I do curse and it is around teachers, its probably cursin’ with them. . . . Like when I’m cursin’ when the teacher hear me, its probably like helping the teacher out. . . . The teacher probably say, “Thank you,” or he say, “Don’t curse, but thank you.”

There are therefore at least two aspects to identity. On the one hand, a person appears to have a core identity, which undergoes developments that are articulated in autobiographical narratives of self. In this perspective, events in our lives may provide us with resources to understand ourselves differently, leading to changes in our biographies. This aspect has been articulated in terms of the narrative construction and reconstruction of Self, which is a function of the particular collective with which we identify. Second, in contrast to the contention of identity as a (relatively) stable phenomenon that is constructed in biographical narratives, the experience of the different ways in which we relate to others in the varying contexts of everyday life has led postmodern scholars to conceive of self in society as something frail, brittle, fractured, and fragmented. We have to ask, “How can our identities simultaneously be continuous and discontinuous, context-independent and situated, stable and frail, or adaptive and brittle?” and “Why are there differences between the self in narratives and in ongoing, concrete daily life?”

By drawing on documentary materials from research in urban schools, identity here is articulated as a dialectic phenomenon and concept. As in all dialectical
units, there is an inner contradiction, which expresses itself in antinomies and logical contradictions, such as the ones articulated here. This dialectical perspective on identity leads to a better understanding than other theoretical perspectives on the opportunities and constraints students from poor African American families face in the schools of a predominantly white society. In this perspective, two elements that do not or hardly exist in other approaches take central roles: (a) human beings have physical bodies that mediate between private and public lives; and (b) the individual and collective (society, culture) stand in a mutually constitutive (dialectical) relation.

The two forms identity articulated above, despite their radical difference, nevertheless share one aspect: both are the consequence of actions: telling an autobiographical narrative and doing interviews or telling off a teacher. This makes it appealing to construct a theoretical account that centrally focuses on actions, in which distinct forms of identity are the effects of different forms of actions.

Commentary

In hermeneutics (Gr. ἑρμηνευτική), the art and science of interpretation, it is well understood that explaining and practical understanding presuppose each other and are both enacted during interpretation. Practical understanding always already precedes theory—as other, perhaps strange bedfellows such as Karl Marx and ethnomethodologists point out—but always also accompanies and completes any effort at explanation. In fact, even the physical act of hearing presupposes understanding (Heidegger, 1977), which is an experience transcribers make when they are confronted with tapes from unfamiliar situations and talk content. In this case, though they can hear a person speaking, they may not make out what is said. Yet when someone else proposes a possible hearing, then they begin to hear what is said very clearly. On the other hand, it is through explanation that practical understanding is enhanced. In this chapter, this dialectic is at work not only at the level of theory but also at the level of the writing. The text begins with the description of a practical case to which any reader can relate. By working closely from the text, a reading is proffered that ultimately leads to the theory. Textually, therefore, the same processes as the historical unfolding of practical understanding are reproduced, from understanding to theory (explanation) and back to practical understanding. The position itself has evolved in this manner, between a close reading of Ricoeur (1990), an inherently difficult work, and an equally close reading of many data sources from this and other projects. It is out of the constitutive relation of emergent explanations and the development of practical understanding that the position on identity and the associated analytic methods have evolved.

IDENTITY RESEARCH

Identity research frequently is about who someone is. The Latin word for the English “to be” is “esse,” from which are derived the adjective essential and the nouns essence and essentialism. When research is conducted concerning who someone is,
the research posits some person P, the subject, to be specified in and by a predicate with the English equivalent of esse, for example, “is a scientist.” Together, the subject and predicate produce a proposition, “P is a scientist,” “P has a science identity,” and so on. In such a case, identity research literally becomes an essentialist project, as it attempts to specify the nature of someone, which may but does not have to be the nature of the person with respect to a group or situation.

What researchers might be interested in instead is to focus on becoming, transitions, and development. In such cases, it is impossible to say what or who a person is, if we assume that there is only flux and change. When we talk about a river, we are really talking about a process that never is the same, as Heraclites already articulated it by saying that one could not ever put the foot in the same river twice. If we focus on becoming, then we cannot even assume that the person at the beginning and end of a 1- or 2-hour interview is “the same.” Rather, based on the already used reference to Vygotsky, the (river-) person is changing while talking to the interviewer because speaking develops thinking and thinking develops speaking. But development inherently means the erasure of what was, because the changes substitute for that which was. The microgenetic development stands in a dialectical (mutually constitutive) relation with ontogenetic development. In fact, rather than saying P undergoes development, as if there was something happening to P from the outside, we may be better off to think about P as developmental process. There is nothing but development, and research then focuses on how this process unfolds. There will be no use for specifications of what P is, for it never is the same, because it is always in flux and therefore changing. The constant erasure of the subject in the production of talk, on the part of the subject, that is, the flux itself, may be as close as we can come to anything resembling a (constant) self-identity. Flux is never the same, even to itself, so that self-identity—as contradictory as this sounds—inherently means other-identity, a fact captured in statements such as “autobiography is allo-biography,” the writing of the Self is the writing of the Other.

Once we admit that persons are not but constitute processes of becoming, our analyses themselves change. We no longer can accept the written transcript as “flat,” the way we might look at a novel, short story, or poem. These are composed, written and re-written, and it is only once finished that the novel, short story, or poem constitutes an utterance that receives social evaluation in the manner that the utterance of the interviewer and interviewee constitute mutual social evaluations (Bakhtin, 1986). The interview is a process and the interview text is a protocol of this process. The beginning and end cannot be flattened and analyzed at the same level, as the process is more like a rolling snowball that finds its shape in rolling, integrating itself over, and, in the process, developing as process.

As recognized in social science, identity research is still in a developing and exploratory stage. Researchers therefore need to find relevant frameworks and ground themselves rigorously in empirical data to investigate identity. As demonstrated in this chapter, the first excerpted study draws on a generic framework concerning human beings’ activities (activity theory) to help researchers explore identity issues; the second sample study mobilizes a philosopher’s (Ricoeur) insights to
CHAPTER 2

produce an intelligible model for theorizing the idea of “identity as dialectic.” These are both productive ways to assist researchers examine new and unfamiliar topics. In fact, being able to integrate relevant ideas from other disciplines, such as philosophy, into researchers’ own research field often constitutes a good start for generating innovative perspectives.