A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON THE NATURE OF TEACHERS’ AWARENESS OF THE IMPACT OF THEIR WORDS ON STUDENTS

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We are submitting a dissertation by Sharon Patenaude entitled, *A Qualitative Case Study on the Nature of Teacher’ Awareness of the Impact of Their Words on Students*. We recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with concentration in Secondary Education.

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The time has come to thank the people who made this adventure into the world of education possible for me. Thank you to my husband, Michael and to Jesus, who together hold me up and support me through everything. Thank you to all of my many students who have taught and influenced me through the years. Finally, thank you to my advisor, Dr. John Mark Hunter, and my dissertation committee, Dr. Beth Morton Christian, Dr. Mary Ann Pangle and Dr. Denise Dunbar.
ABSTRACT

SHARON PATENAUBE, A Qualitative Case Study on the Nature of Teachers’ Awareness of the Impact of Their Words on Students (under the direction of DR. JOHN MARK HUNTER).

This study examined the nature of teacher awareness with regard to how their own words impact students. This case study involved two elementary school teachers. Teacher interviews, classroom observations and communication artifacts were analyzed through discourse analysis and the constant comparative method. The discourse analysis was guided by the examples of analysis and recommendations of Huckins (2004), Rex and Schiller (2009) and Hanrahan (2004). A theory was generated by applying the constant comparative method proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1968).

The theory generated by this study is that teachers who have not received teacher training in the subject of effective teacher discourse will have less confidence and fewer developed skills to employ effective teacher discourse strategies. Further, teachers who lack this teacher training may have learned effective teacher discourse intuitively or from others, but they will nonetheless lack the more comprehensive knowledge, skills and confidence a formal education can provide.

The participating teachers in this study are aware that their discourse impacts their students. They are aware to the extent that they continually search for more effective teacher discourse to use in their classrooms. The teachers in this study were significantly influenced by their own teachers. Additionally, neither of the participating teachers learned their teacher
discourse through pre-service or in-service teacher training, but on their own from other more experienced teachers, trial and error, teacher manuals, on-line sources and educational journals. Finally, the teachers in this study lacked confidence in their teacher discourse.

Recommendations for further research included examining the nature of teacher discourse in large and urban schools, in male teachers and in middle and high schools as well as kindergarten and first grade.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Speech is a necessary tool for teaching, and how teachers choose to speak has the potential to create different student outcomes (Johnston, 2004). Moreover, the shared interaction between teacher and student, according to Vygotsky (1978), profoundly influences student learning. According to Bandura’s (1997) theory on self-efficacy, a teacher may cause students to believe that they can be academically successful or believe that they cannot be academically successful. For example, a teacher can tell a student that his spelling is wrong or conversely, that the student spelled the first half of the word correctly (Johnston, 2004). With this latter approach, teachers can build student self-efficacy by helping students recognize their success. This approach is relevant to future student success if we accept Bandura’s theory that students who experience success will likely pursue new challenges they encounter. The opposite is true as well; the student who experiences failure will likely avoid challenge and give up (Bandura, 1997). The aim of this research study is to examine teacher awareness of the influence of their words on students.

Speech is a necessary tool for managing the classroom (Denton, 2008; Diffily & Sassman, 2006; Moorman & Weber, 1989). Teachers must negotiate situations that have nothing to do with academic content such as conflicts that occur between students in the class, students who come late to class or students who do not do their work. Teachers are constantly challenged with classroom dynamics that require attention and verbal intervention.
Many of these situations are more complicated than they may initially seem and the teacher’s word choice in these situations can have more impact on future student academic performance than one may realize (Bandura, 1997).

A teacher’s words affect the students who hear those words. For the purposes of this study, what is communicated to students by the teacher through words, phrases, and interactions is referred to as “teacher discourse” and in some cases “teacher talk.” Teacher discourse constitutes the focus of this study. Teachers do 80% of the talking in the classroom (Asby, 1986). Teachers talk as they lecture, give instructions, answer questions and solve problems throughout their workday. When one considers the role teacher word choice plays in influencing student self-efficacy (Johnston, 2004), one should also consider the preparation some teachers receive for communicating with their students.

Evidence of the positive power wielded by teachers and their words is not difficult to locate (Gale, Robbins, & Tollin, 2005; Musca, 1988; Norblit, 1993; Paul & Smith, 2000; Twain & Avildsen, 1989). There are stories of how teacher interactions with students actually changed lives (Gale et al., 2005; Musca, 1988; Twain & Avildsen, 1989). Teachers have inspired students to stay in school and helped their wounds to heal (Paul & Smith, 2000). They have even inspired fact-based movies depicting extraordinary teachers affecting their students in positive ways through their words and actions (Gale et al., 2005; Musca, 1988; Twain & Avildsen, 1989). A few articles and books (Benbenishty, Zeira, & Astor, 2002; Gabrino & DeLara, 2002; Krugman & Krugman, 1984; Nesbit & Philpott, 2002; Paul & Smith, 2000; Whitted & Dupper, 2008) discuss the negative power of teacher words. Some teachers choose words that can negatively affect student self-efficacy and some teachers emotionally abuse or bully students with no awareness of their wrongdoing (Nesbit &
Philpott, 2002; McEachern, Aleude, & Kenny, 2008; Wragg, Haynes, Wragg, & Chamberlin, 2000). Teacher words and actions can influence student self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study builds upon self-efficacy and social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy is a personal perception of what a person can and cannot do (Bandura 1997; Pajares 2002). Social cognitive theory is the framework that forms the foundation for self-efficacy. The social cognitive theory holds that student achievement is contingent on the interaction of behavior, thoughts or beliefs and the environment (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Students continuously reconstruct their self-efficacy through performance, vicarious experiences, outside persuasion and physiological reaction. Teachers are in a position to influence student performance, vicarious experiences, outside persuasion and physiological environment (Johnston, 2004). Further, self-efficacy beliefs sway decisions of task choice, effort and persistence (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Consequently, students who have a high self-efficacy for learning achieve at a higher level because they choose the more difficult task, work harder and stay with it longer (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

One way for students to assess self-efficacy is to question whether or not they can perform the task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). When students answer this question positively, then they are likely to take the steps necessary to accomplish the task. Self-efficacy influences student academic motivation and learning (Pajares, 2002; Schunk, 1995). When students calculate their capability to produce results through their actions, they perceive their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 1986).
An individual’s self-efficacy plays a powerful role in that person’s life by enhancing or impeding motivation, according to Bandura (1997). Self-efficacy influences the level of accomplishment a student attains, as well as influencing life choices themselves (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Pajares 2002; Schunk & Cutshall, 1997). It helps determine whether a student pursues challenges, how many difficulties a student is willing to overcome to reach a goal and how much stress a student will experience in the struggle (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Dweck, 1986). In other words, a student with strong self-efficacy will likely seek challenges and pursue them in the face of adversity until the goal is reached. A student with a weak self-efficacy will likely avoid challenges, quit pursuits that present adversity and experience substantial stress in the process. Increased self-efficacy can become a self-perpetuating cycle. Increased self-efficacy encourages more effort and persistence and in turn produces improved performance and success, which leads to increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Conversely, lower self-efficacy leads to less effort and giving up, leading to poor performance, and decreased self-efficacy. Teachers who are aware of their influence on student self-efficacy can use that awareness to promote academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher word choice can affect student self-efficacy and academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). In some cases teachers may be unaware that their teacher discourse can constitute bullying or other emotional abuse (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002). Conversely, literature indicates that the words teachers choose when talking to their students can positively affect student self-efficacy and ultimately academic achievement (Denton, 2008; Diffily & Sassman, 2006; Dweck, 2006). Because teachers’ words and phrases can significantly affect student achievement both positively and negatively, the problem addressed in this study is
the nature of teacher awareness regarding the influence of the words and phrases they use in the classroom (Diffily & Sassman, 2006; Dweck, 2006; Nesbit & Philpott, 2002).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher discourse in the classroom and explore the nature of teacher awareness pertaining to the impact teacher discourse; including words, phrases and interactions; can have on their students. Teacher discourse can significantly influence student achievement (Johnston, 2004). A teacher’s words affect the students who hear those words. Teacher discourse constitutes the focus of this study. Teachers use teacher discourse to create and shape the classroom learning environment. Studying teacher discourse will provide teachers with additional knowledge to increase the effectiveness of their discourse.

**Significance of the Study**

The immediate goal of this study is to bring increased awareness to the subject of teacher discourse and to encourage teachers and education leaders to practice effective teacher discourse. It will serve to inform teachers, administrators and state education officials who are not aware of the impact a teacher’s words can have on students. It will remind those who are already aware and provide additional information to inform their efforts toward improving teacher awareness regarding the impact of their words for improved student performance. This study will add to the body of knowledge in the area of teacher discourse.

**Guiding Research Questions**

1. What is the nature of teacher awareness of the impact their words have on students?
2. How do background experiences, prior academic experiences, and education influence teacher discourse?
Limitations

The participants in this case study are volunteers, selected from a convenience sample; not randomly selected. As in most case studies, this research is limited to a small number of participants, in this case at the elementary school level. Consequently, the results will not be predictive, but aim to provide a deeper understanding for examining teacher discourse in future research (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Conclusions drawn from two elementary school teachers from the same school district cannot be generalized to the entire teacher population.

The researcher’s biases or sensitivities may limit the reliability of this study (Bacon, 1620; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) and the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in this study. Consequently, the data will be filtered through the values and views of a human being. Triangulation will verify findings. The resulting final product will reflect the views of the participants from the perspective of the researcher (Merriam, 1998).

Definitions of Terms

Bad teachers are uninspiring, incompetent and unfeeling (Cambor, 1999). Bad teachers lack knowledge about subject matter, have poor class management skills, do not behave professionally, do not diagnose learning problems, are inflexible about methods and have poor prioritization of goals or lack goals (Strickland, 1998). Additional descriptors of bad teachers include unprofessional teachers who have poor interaction with students and lack interest in students, present disorganized and unclear lessons in an unenthusiastic manner, and show little understanding of students or teaching strategies (Foote, Vermette, Wisniewski, Agnello & Pagano, 1999).
Bullying occurs when a person with power exercises that power over a person who is powerless (Besag, 1989). A study examining teacher behaviors detrimental to student development and destructive to students, described bullying as situations where students were physically maltreated, psychologically maltreated, publicly humiliated, ridiculed, mistreated, verbally or physically attacked or ignored (Whitted & Dupper, 2008).

Discourse in this study refers to written and verbal communications between teachers and students. “A discourse is a way a particular group of people interact with one another. Think of a discourse as socially communicative practices. How do we talk, look, gesture? How do we think? How do we write? What we know or do or say is constrained by the numerous discourse groups that influence and are influenced by our participation” (Rex & Schiller, 2009, p. 5).

Discourse analysis for this study is, “an examination of language in use, the study of actually occurring language in specific communicative context” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 72). The researcher examined words and phrases in the context of the classroom to explore the nature of teacher awareness with regard to the influence their words had on their students.

Discourse Analysis is further defined as “the study of spoken, naturally occurring speech or communication” (Rex & Schiller, 2009, p. 6).

Emic Perspective is “the research participants’ perceptions and understanding of their social reality” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 639).

Etic Perspective refers to “the researcher’s conceptual and theoretical understanding of the research participants’ social reality” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 639).

Ineffective Teachers are not defined as simply the opposite of effective teachers (Wall, Nardi, von Minden, & Hoffman, 2002). The ineffective techniques used by Larson
(2006) describing her lapse into ineffectiveness included frequently keeping students in for recess, changing from group work to individual work, placing student desks in rows, and frequently marking a discipline chart. She felt that she was not in control of the classroom and she spoke louder but was not communicating with her students.

*Student agency* is the belief by a student that her actions can change her environment, and agency is a basic human need (Johnston, 2004). Bandura sees personal efficacy as a major component of personal agency and he describes personal agency as the ability to initiate actions for a specific goal (Bandura, 1997).

*Student self-efficacy* refers to student judgments of their ability to plan and take the necessary actions for performing specific tasks (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

*Teacher talk* is the way teachers use language (Johnston, 2004). It is the language teachers use to teach and model for students the proper way to behave or solve a problem (Diffily & Sassman, 2006). Teacher talk is composed of the words and phrases a teacher uses to communicate and direct students in the context of the school and classroom (Moorman & Weber, 1989). It is the mightiest instrument teachers have in their teaching arsenal, according to Denton (2007).

**Summary**

A teacher’s awareness of the impact of her words contributes to that teacher’s effectiveness. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction is critical to learning and he believed that children reflect their learning environment. The best vantage point from which to view teacher awareness of the impact of words can be found in the classroom. The classroom is where the teacher converts awareness into action. Chapter II provides a review
of literature reflecting views and research regarding the positive and negative effects teacher communications can have on students.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines research and writings that address teacher discourse and teacher awareness regarding the impact their words can have on students. Many authors have stated how powerful teacher language can be in the classroom (Denton, 2007; Diffily & Sassman, 2006; Johnston, 2004; Nguyen, 2007; Rubin, 2001). In related writings, some authors have speculated that there are teachers who lack awareness of the impact of their words on student outcomes (Hanrahan, 2004; Nesbit & Philpot, 2002; Rex and Schiller 2009; Roskos & Boehlen, 2001).

This literature review began as an online search using the Tennessee State University (TSU) library. The initial search utilized the terms teacher talk and self-efficacy. However, the volume of terms ultimately used while searching for the literature for this specific study is too extensive to list in this space.

This review is divided into three sections. The first section explains the term self-efficacy, the impact of self-efficacy and what influences self-efficacy. The second section includes discourse analysis research and gives examples of effective teacher discourse. The third section discusses research that provides background on ineffective teacher discourse.
What is Self-Efficacy?

Self-efficacy is a personal perception of what a person can and cannot do (Bandura 1997; Pajares 2002). Social cognitive theory is the framework that forms the foundation for self-efficacy. The social cognitive theory says that student achievement is contingent on the interaction of behavior, thoughts or beliefs and the environment (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Students continuously reconstruct their self-efficacy through performance, vicarious experiences, outside persuasion and physiological reaction. Further, self-efficacy beliefs sway decisions of task choice, effort and persistence (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Consequently, students who have a high self-efficacy for learning achieve at a higher level because they choose the more difficult task, work harder and stay with it longer (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

One way for students to assess self-efficacy is to question whether or not they can perform the task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). When students answer this question positively, then they are likely to take the steps necessary to accomplish the task. Self-efficacy influences student academic motivation and learning (Pajares, 2002; Schunk, 1995). When students calculate their capability to produce results through their actions, they perceive their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

Although conceptually similar, the topics of perceived control, outcome expectations, self-concept and effectance motivation are not the same as self-efficacy (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Perceived control is only one aspect of self-efficacy. For example perceived control beliefs do not include such elements as beliefs about ones ability. The subject of outcome expectations is similar to self-efficacy; however, self-efficacy includes a more complete picture of the situation. Outcome expectations are the beliefs a student has in relation to the
student’s behavior. Outcome expectations deal more with a student’s belief that if the student does the math problem correctly he will receive a chocolate candy reward. Conversely, in the construct of self-efficacy, the student’s beliefs would have efficacy judgments of their capabilities, skills, and knowledge to complete the problem in addition to expectations of receiving a chocolate candy (Bandura, 1986; Pintrich & Struck, 1996). Self-concept beliefs also differ from self-efficacy in that they are concerned with the feelings of self-worth (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). The effectance motivation construct is the broader motivation to interact effectively with the environment while self-efficacy focuses on specifics (Bandura, 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

The Impact of Self-efficacy

An individual’s self-efficacy plays a powerful role in that person’s life by enhancing or impeding motivation, according to Bandura (1997). Self-efficacy influences the level of accomplishment a student attains, as well as influencing life choices themselves (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Pajares 2002; Schunk & Cutshall, 1997). It helps determine whether a student pursues challenges, how many difficulties a student is willing to overcome to reach a goal and how much stress a student will experience in the struggle (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Dweck, 1986). In other words, a student with strong self-efficacy will likely seek challenges and pursue them in the face of adversity until the goal is reached. A student with a weak self-efficacy will likely avoid challenges, quit pursuits that present adversity and experience substantial stress in the process. Increased self-efficacy can become a self-perpetuating cycle. Increased self-efficacy encourages more effort and persistence and in turn produces improved performance and success, which leads to increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Conversely, lower self-efficacy leads to less effort and giving up, which
leads to poor performance, which then produces decreased self-efficacy. Self-efficacy plays a key role in self-regulating learners (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

How is Self-Efficacy Influenced?

Personal experience. Personal experience is one of four sources of influence on our self-efficacy described by Bandura (1997), and he believes it has the greatest influence on our self-efficacy beliefs. Further, we judge our present experiences against previous experiences. Some experiences are going to reinforce previous performance against the efficacy scale while other experiences will elevate or lower our self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002). An individual fixes his or her self-knowledge through repeated experiences. Consequently, that individual will be more accepting of repeated successes or failures and discount the experiences that do not fit pre-existing self-schema. Because we cognitively process each experience against our self-knowledge and other factors surrounding the experience, a successful experience does not necessarily increase self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). For example, if someone does not apply much effort to an activity and is not successful, it is likely that the activity will not enter into a self-efficacy evaluation. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to attribute failure to lack of effort or poor conditions while individuals with lower efficacy tend to attribute failure to lack of ability. A person’s bias toward reviewing his or her experiences will also affect his or her self-efficacy. If a person dwells upon poor past performances his or her self-efficacy will be lower than the person who dwells on his or her best performances (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, 2006).

The best way to promote self-efficacy is by providing personal experiences through skills that can be built upon for further achievement and future success (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002). Learning strategies and knowledge provide students with tools to organize
their mastery experiences. Further, Bandura advises that complex skills be broken down into more easily-mastered sub-skills.

Many factors affect self-efficacy judgments such as assistance, resources, equipment, and situation. A person’s efficacy belief, whether it is high or low will not change with a good performance or two because they can always be explained away (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002). For instance, a great performance might be of little efficacy value because the performer believed that it was caused by the assistance he received.

**Vicarious experiences and modeling.** The second source of influence is vicarious experiences or modeling, according to Bandura (1997). Modeling, and the effects of modeling on efficacy, are as constant as the life around us. Because we are unable to measure our adequacy in certain activities, we depend on the modeling of others for comparison. As we compare our performance to others, the social component is a major factor. People seek role models who are skilled examples and exhibit the ability which they strive to master for themselves (Bandura, 1997). It is these models to which we aspire that can guide and motivate our development.

The more closely we identify with the model, the stronger the impact on our self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Students associate most strongly with models that are the same age and gender, and they are affected most strongly by peer modeling. Students view these peer models as more credible (Bandura, 1997). Even when skill levels are not comparable, these peer associations can lead students to achieve accomplishments that are seemingly above their capabilities. Conversely, students viewing models that are not similar to themselves, tend not to be affected by the model’s success or failure (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy can be destroyed by witnessing the failure of a model that is perceived to be equal in capability to
the viewer and students who view such a failure may quickly give up on an assigned task. However, if a student observes a peer model in failure, and the observer-student is able to identify an alternative strategy to success, self-efficacy is likely to increase (Bandura, 1997).

Learners who are unsure of themselves tend to identify more closely with models who demonstrate coping skills. Consequently, models who display coping skills can have a positive effect on those learners’ self-efficacy. If a student views a failure as evidence of effective perseverance or hears models express faith in their own capabilities, this can also have a positive affect (Bandura, 1997). Models who demonstrate coping skills can also benefit self-doubting students and models who demonstrate mastery skills in an easy step-by-step method can be equally valuable (Bandura, 1997).

**Verbal and social persuasion.** The third source of influence, verbal or social persuasion, is the influence that others have on our self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002). Although social persuasion is believed to have a limited impact, it can cause us to avoid a challenge or encourage us through adversity. Bandura stated that social persuasion is conveyed to students in the form of feedback. He said feedback can be communicated in a variety of ways that might weaken self-efficacy or promote self-efficacy and feedback in the classroom can be framed in many different ways. Feedback that acknowledges progress and partial success will likely promote efficacy whereas feedback that focuses on deficiencies will likely undermine efficacy. Feedback that is depreciative does not simply cause social discord; it also undermines belief in one’s self. When a student receives devaluative feedback, self-efficacy likely declines. Conversely, constructive criticism given to the same student for the same performance inspires stronger self-efficacy. What a student believes about his skills and talents can be powerful enough to inspire accomplishments far beyond
the believer’s true skill and talent set (Bandura, 1997). Bandura indicated that verbal persuasion alone can hardly be expected to create a high sense of self-efficacy; however, verbal persuasion alone might readily weaken self-efficacy.

**Physiological and emotional status.** The fourth source of self-efficacy is physiological and emotional status (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002). The cognitive processing of stress level, stamina and mood contributes to our self-evaluations. Generally, students who are not active tend to focus on physical and emotional status, which can exacerbate any perceived weakness. Different explanations of the same experience can change the perceived self-efficacy. For example, the agitation a student feels while waiting to take the ACT can be perceived as excitement that energizes the performance or fear that stifles the performance. Too much agitation can disrupt a complex higher-level performance. On the other hand, a certain amount of anxiety activates memory (Bandura, 1997).

**Family influences on self-efficacy.** Home is where most children find the first influences on their self-efficacy (Pajares & Shrunk, 2001) and parents are the initial source of self-efficacy information. Parents who provide activities and materials can positively influence self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Meece, 1997). Homes with materials such as books, games or computers tend to arouse curiosity and allow for mastery experiences. Parents who provide an environment that is safe, responsive and supportive will accelerate intellectual development in their children (Bandura, 1997; Meece, 1997).

Parents are also the initial source of vicarious experience. Parents have the opportunity to model persistence and effort under difficult conditions or alternatively, the inability to persist under difficult conditions (Pajares & Schrunk, 2001). Either model will
influence their children’s self-efficacy. Following their vicarious learning from parents, children’s next vicarious experience is likely to be peers.

Home and parents usually provide the first and strongest source of persuasion. Homes where children are encouraged to attempt new activities and are supported as they meet different challenges will produce children with higher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The opposite is also true. Homes where children are not encouraged to attempt new activities and are not supported in their challenges will likely produce children with lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

**School influences on self-efficacy.** As students progress through school, self-efficacy beliefs usually decline (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). The decline has been ascribed to a number of factors such as ability grouping, social comparisons, greater competition and less individual teacher attention. These school experiences can weaken self-efficacy particularly for students who are less prepared academically (Bandura, 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Every student has a unique self-efficacy for learning and their self-efficacy is the result of experiences, personal qualities and support. The support includes things such as parent and teacher encouragement to learn, availability of resources and acquisition of self-regulatory strategies (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Student self-efficacy about learning is also influenced by parent expectations. Learning self-efficacy is increased when students receive cues that they are performing well or are becoming more skillful (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprata, & Pastorelli, 1996). Conversely, student self-efficacy could be decreased by cues that they are not performing well unless they perceive that if they work harder or use a better strategy they could perform well (Schunk, 1995).
Similarities to other students make peers the most effective model (Bandura, 1997). School provides a concentration of peer models. Observing peers succeed is a powerful self-efficacy enhancer and motivator. Students who see peers succeed begin to believe that they too can succeed and they are motivated to attempt the activity (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1987). Students affected most by peer models are those with low self-efficacy or those who are unfamiliar with the task (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1987).

Mood and environment affect self-efficacy beliefs. A positive environment inspires self-efficacy, whereas a negative environment will diminish self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Ergo, classrooms with warm positive environments promote positive efficacy beliefs. Conversely, classrooms with cold negative environments can elicit negative efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

**Discourse Analysis to Examine Classroom Interactions**

Discourse analysis includes a variety of methods used to examine communication events (Edward & Westgate, 1994). Classroom interaction can be analyzed using discourse analysis. By analyzing classroom interactions researchers and teachers can look at the discursive choices they have made and discover discursive patterns. In this way researchers or teachers can consciously make decisions about discursive options that are available to them (Rex & Schiller, 2009).

Several research studies using discourse analysis have been conducted in the classroom setting in the past 20 years. Many of them address student discourse in an attempt to decipher a learning process, according to Rubin (2001). Discourse analyses have been conducted in an attempt to help teachers who are teaching students English as a second language (Anton, 1999; Cook-Gumperz, & Szymanski, 2001; Gardener, 2006; Hansan, 2006;
Peets, 2009; Wells, 1996;), math (Huang, Normandi, & Greer, 2005; Meyer & Turner, 2002; Nathan, Eilam, & Kim, 2006; Nathan & Knuth, 2003; Wagner & Herbel-Eisenmann, 2007) and science (Brown & Spang, 2008; Hanrahan, 2004). Some discourse analysis studies were conducted to evaluate new mandates such as the whole class mandate in the United Kingdom (Myhill, 2006), and others were used to evaluate the effects of No Child Left Behind mandates on teaching (Rex, 2003). Articles and books have also been written to encourage teachers to analyze their own discourse in an effort to make teaching more effective (Leung & Mohan, 2004; Rex & Schiller, 2009; Roskos & Boehlen, 2001; Thwaite & Rivalland, 2009).

**Discourse analysis to evaluate mandates.** A two-year study was conducted to investigate the teacher discourse used as teachers applied a whole class approach to instruction in the United Kingdom (Myhill, 2006). The study focused on the quality of learning during these whole class instruction events. Interviews with the participating teachers in this study found that the teachers believed that they had asked appropriate questions and made the appropriate connections with their students. The researcher found that teacher questions were at times unhelpful and occasionally hindered student learning. Additionally, teachers sometimes left out connections to the concepts being taught (Myhill, 2006).

**Discourse analysis used for teacher self-analysis.** Several researchers suggested that teachers examine their words through discourse analysis (Christenson, 2004; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Leung & Mohan, 2004; Roskos & Boehlen, 2001; Thwaite & Rivalland, 2009; ). Recognizing the need for new teachers to have explicit knowledge concerning teacher discourse, Thwaite and Rivalland (2009) set up a course for pre-service teachers to
learn the analysis of classroom discourse. Another study focused on teacher awareness of talk strategies and proposed self-assessment as a means to answer this need (Roskos & Boehlen, 2001). According to Roskos and Boehlen (2001), “teachers’ conscious awareness of their talk strategies is the forerunner of professional mastery of classroom discourse that assures student learning and achievement” (p. 69). They further posited that teachers can learn to change if they can see a more effective approach. Leung and Mohan (2004) proposed a discourse analytical self-analysis approach as preparation for teachers who were to perform in-class teacher assessment of students. In this study (Christenson, 2004), a writing instructor admonished teachers to admit that comments they write on student work are not always what the teacher wants to communicate. Further, he advised teachers to examine their words through discourse analysis.

Still another researcher advocated teacher self-analysis through discourse analysis. Manke (1997) observed three elementary school teachers’ interaction with students focusing on the power relationships created in this situation. According to Manke, placing full responsibility for student learning on the teacher has caused part of the problems found in classrooms today. She proposed that if teachers did not feel the need to maintain total control they could focus more on the relationship between student learning and their own actions. This in turn would take the focus off student resistance and both parties could then be in a more relaxed learning environment (Manke, 1997).

**Discourse analysis to examine instruction.** In a study of classroom discourse focusing on new teachers, Lam and Law (2009) concluded that the multitude of components involved in effective instruction complicates the evaluation of effective instruction. They found that new teachers making higher cognitive demands and using motivational strategies
produced higher performing students. Further they found that the new teachers employed the traditional direct instruction style, even though student-centered instruction was recommended (Lam & Law, 2009).

A study conducted in Israel categorized teachers into two groups (Peled-Elhanan & Blum-Kulka, 2006). Teachers who teach monologic lessons, or lessons where the teacher is the lecturer, made up one group. Teachers who teach dialogic lessons, or lessons where the teacher encourages dialogue, made up the second group. This study concluded that teachers who encourage dialog understand their students better (Peled-Elhanan & Blum-Kulka, 2006).

**Discourse analysis to examine professional communication.** Two studies focused on professional communication, specifically, on teachers talking to teachers. Vaughan (2007) and Smith (2005) both emphasized the importance of what teachers say outside the classroom. Vaughan believes that examining teacher’s professional communications reveals a true picture of what teachers actually do. Smith pointed out that many new teachers lack the ability to communicate effectively in the “community of practice,” for example a new teacher must learn how to talk effectively about lesson plans.

Testing demands compete with student learning according to Rex (2003). In a study to assess the effects of test pressures on student learning, Rex found teachers having to choose between inclusive classroom talk that invited students to engage in dialogue and non-inclusive classroom talk that focused student attention on testable information. Unfortunately, Rex found that the teachers she studied felt obligated to focus on the test.

**Discourse analysis used to examine new methods.** Teachers’ ability to incorporate innovative methods in their teaching comes with pedagogical content knowledge. Seymore and Lehrer (2006) observed a teacher for two years as she taught a new math unit. Generally,
teachers check for understanding periodically during a lesson. The teacher was teaching a unit with which she was unfamiliar. Teaching this unit for the first time the teacher checked for understanding by repeating correct concepts or asking questions meant to help students understand. As time passed and the teacher became more familiar with the new unit, the teacher used more varied and innovative methods for checking understanding to help students understand (Seymore & Lehrer, 2006). In a similar study, Childs and McNicholl (2007) concluded that teachers must have content knowledge to teach science effectively.

Real learning takes place in classrooms where students are allowed to interact with the teacher and each other (Mohr, 1998). The teachers in this study, according to Mohr (1998), actually inspired students to be intrinsically motivated. The teachers focused on promoting student interaction. Consequently, because students control learning internally and construct learning socially, according to Mohr, promoting student interaction motivated these students to learn. In a similar study, Maloch (2005) found productive students inspired by classroom interaction patterns. She felt that it was through these interaction patterns that students learned a way of thinking about learning that increased student success and positive attitude.

In another study looking at patterns in the classroom, teachers analyzed their own teaching patterns (Hennings, 2004). In this study, Hennings (2004) concluded that teachers who asked higher-level questions tended to elicit further responses; student discussion became more thoughtful and prevalent.

Interactional awareness, according to Rex and Schiller (2009), promotes effective teacher discourse and student learning. Raising teacher awareness of classroom interaction and providing guidelines to collect and analyze classroom interaction were the aims set by
Rex and Schiller in their book. The authors posited that sustained learning communities are necessary for learning to take place.

Teachers can learn how to create and maintain learning communities through discourse analysis (Rex & Schiller, 2009). The classroom is a community where students and teachers continually recreate identities and social relationships. Students are more willing to participate in classrooms where they feel valued and feel that they can have some influence. According to Rex and Schiller (2009), one interaction in the classroom can affect student participation and mood throughout the classroom. Students and teachers are both positioned through classroom discourse. When teachers examine classroom interactions they are better able to use the power of their discourse to help students position themselves as valued learners in the classroom (Rex & Schiller, 2009).

Student and teacher discourse show perceived self-identification as to how each individual wants to been seen. Teacher discourse does not continually change, according to Rex and Schiller (2009); it replays in a reoccurring pattern. Through discourse analysis teachers can identify more effective discourse and work to change patterns that are ineffective (Rex & Schiller, 2009).

A year-long study into classroom interaction was conducted by Mehan (1979). He observed fellow researcher Cazden as she taught a second grade class. At the beginning of this book as he was justifying his research, Mehan said that to find the truth for questions such as whether one teaching method or another is better or whether lower student-teacher ratios are more effective, researchers must go inside the classroom and investigate classroom interactions. Questions like these too many times are answered through enormous impersonal interviews or surveys (Mehan, 1979).
In his study Mehan (1979) looked at the social organization of classroom interaction. Specifically, he looked at the structure of lessons and membership in the learning community. He described the organization and the structure of lessons as being co-constructed by both teacher and students, but guided by the teacher. Further, the structure of lessons was in reoccurring patterns. The teacher organized the lessons hierarchically and guided students in the acceptable ways to participate through such things as turn-taking (Mehan, 1979).

The teacher provided three ways for students to have a turn. Students could gain the floor either by hand raising and waiting to be called on by the teacher, by participating in chorus elicitations when the teacher asked, or the teacher might call on them at any time. This activity was selected and controlled by the teacher (Mehan, 1979).

Securing membership into the learning community was dependent upon not only academic competence but appropriate interactional skills in the classroom (Mehan, 1979). First a student must be able to participate knowledgably. Second, a student must understand and be able to participate in the student management system used by the teacher successfully (Mehan, 1979).

Another study investigated two teachers attempting to apply critical pedagogy in a writing class (Mayes, 2010). The teachers believed that if they took on identities that were non-dominating, then they could share power with their students. Unfortunately, as Mayes (2010) pointed out, the school had set goals and selected specific materials for the class. Because the goals and materials to be used in this class were so specific, the teachers had little recourse but to direct the students specifically to what they must read and specifically the form their writing must take. Mayes pointed out that power is not an object that can
simply be given from one person to another; it is a complex and continual negotiation in a micro setting (Mayes, 2010).

**Discourse analysis used to examine science students’ motivation.** Many countries have experienced a lack of student engagement in science, according to Hanrahan (2004). She used critical discourse analysis to search out the reasons students were turned off by science. Hanrahan focused on student motivation and participation in middle school classes. She discovered that there were classrooms where students were motivated and participated in science class. She found that the difference between these classrooms and classrooms where students were not motivated and did not participate was the implicit messages conveyed by the teacher. According to Hanrahan, successful teachers had a positive attitude toward science and conveyed a message that informed their students that they were valued as people and learners. In this way the successful teachers created an access-enhancing class. An access-enhancing class is a class where students feel that they are valued and can participate (Hanrahan, 2004).

Access-limiting classes could be at least partially the result of differing cultures, according to Hanrahan (2004). The solution to this difference could be overcome by teachers who value different cultures and scaffold learning in an access-enhancing manner. Hanrahan said that some teachers need to get to know their students better, promote more student interaction and recognize that all science is not accepted as truth in all cultures.

Teachers who created access-enhancing classrooms used what Hanrahan (2004) called hybrid discourse. This discourse included speaking as if sharing instead of lecturing and guiding students through seemingly friendly dialogue. Hybrid discourse also includes showing students the connection between their lives and science and using multiple-
strategies to include all students. Teachers using hybrid discourse focus on the learning process and not just supplying information. They mix discourse forms, which is using vernacular terms as well as scientific terms, to make science as accessible as possible. They inspire student interest through the use of details and allowing students to share the power in the classroom (Hanrahan, 2004).

Teaching science to minorities is the equivalent of teaching a second language, according to Brown and Spang (2008). These researchers, like Hanrahan (2004), believe that science teachers must be able to move between the local language and scientific language to communicate to minority students.

**Discourse analysis used to examine math class discourse.** Like science educators, math educators struggle with discourse in the classroom. For two years a math teacher worked to make class discussions become more student-oriented (Nathan & Knuth, 2003). The teacher was successful; students carried on the discussions. The result was lower-level and longer math discussions. Huang et al. (2005) was also concerned with math discussion, but more focused on the knowledge structures created in that discussion. Meyer and Turner (2002) proposed that math teachers can work on their scaffolding skills by analyzing their own discourse.

The word “just” is a problem for some math students (Wagner & Herbel-Eisenmann, 2007). “The effects of any individual utterance is related to a complex series of classroom interactions” (Wagner & Herbel-Eisenmann, 2007, p. 155). Upon investigating the word just the researchers found that it undermined student agency. They compared it to the statement, “Don’t think about [something]” (Wagner & Herbel-Eisenmann, 2007, p. 156). Both the afore mentioned statement and the word just have a subtle power.
In a math class study Nathan et al. (2006) proposed that student discussion that included disagreements promoted learning better than discussion with no disagreement. They noted that to have intersubjectivity or shared meaning students need to have some give and take in their discussions to clarify their understanding (Nathan et al.).

**Discourse analysis used to examine English as a second language.** Discourse analysis studies have also been conducted in classes where educators teach students English as a second language (ESL). Discussions in ESL classrooms are too artificial, according to Hasan (2006). However, ESL teachers can make themselves more aware of the effect of the language in the classroom and what language options they have by studying their own teacher discourse (Wells, 1996). Anton (1999) advocated a more student-centered ESL classroom after conducting a study inside diverse classrooms. Gender discourse and ethnic identities were the focus in the ESL classrooms studied by Cook-Gumperz and Szymanski (2001). Gardner (2006) posited that having two teachers in an ESL classroom works well if given the time to work out a system. In another study with linguistically diverse students, Creese (2006) also suggested that one of the biggest improvements would be to have two teachers in the classroom. The diverse classrooms are too complex for one teacher to manage. Creese (2006) also suggested that more knowledge is needed about the different discourses teachers use.

**Other Teacher Discourse Research**

Classroom environments that allow students to feel safe and respected enough to risk participation do exist (Johnston, 2004). According to Johnston (2004), teachers can create this climate through the words they choose to use with their classes. He described how teachers give students identities and fix relationships between students and teachers, students
to other students and students to the focus of study. Further, he discussed how teachers create student agency, teach the use of strategies and help students make generalizations. He ascribed the same kind of power to teachers’ words as to a minister’s words when declaring a couple to be man and wife (Johnston, 2004).

The book, Choice Words (Johnston, 2004) was based primarily on observations and interviews of the best teachers, the kind of teacher whose students excel. Johnston (2004) realized that these extremely successful teachers used the same materials and curriculum as other teachers. He concluded that it was what these teachers said that made the difference. He believes that what teachers say to their students teaches more than just the subject matter. Additionally, what teachers say profoundly affects student beliefs about themselves and the world around them (Johnston, 2004).

As a point of departure for this book, Johnston (2004) used Vygotsky’s quote, “children grow into the intellectual life around them” (p. 2). He further stated that accomplished teachers have a way of inspiring emotionally and socially wholesome learning communities that yield caring educated students. Although Johnston’s book is about which words a teacher chooses to communicate to students, the message is much weightier and complex. Johnston showed how a few words from a teacher can speak volumes to a student. A few words will inform each student how they relate to each other, how the teacher relates to each of them, whether their thoughts and comments are worthwhile, and whether they are capable of doing things for themselves (Johnston).

What teachers say and how they say it answers key questions for students. Johnston (2004) used the example of a teacher saying, “That group, get back to work or you’ll be
staying in at lunch” (p. 5). Johnston analyzed this statement in a chart, according to which, the teacher’s statement answers the following questions for the students:

1. What are we doing here?
2. Who are we?
3. How do we relate to one another?
4. How do we relate to what we are studying (p. 4)?

According to Johnston’s chart, the teacher’s statement “That group, get back to work or you’ll be staying in at lunch” (p. 5) answers the questions this way:

1. We are laboring.
2. We are slaves.
3. The teacher has authoritarian control.
4. We are laboring under duress (p. 4).

Through this example one can see that Johnston (2004) views language as a complex and powerful tool. He also believes that students interpret the underlying meanings teachers deliver knowingly and the meanings teachers deliver unknowingly through their words. Johnston pointed out that a teacher’s words are the primary tool of their business. With their words, teachers mediate students’ behaviors, work and experiences, helping them gain a sense of themselves, of learning and of the world around them.

One can organize the teacher talk Johnston (2004) prescribed into six categories. He described noticing and naming; building student identity; building strategies; flexibility, transfer or generalizing; knowing; and learning community. In each of these categories, Johnston promotes language that builds self-efficacy.
Noticing and Naming

The ability to notice and name is a crucial part of what people do everyday in order to communicate (Johnston, 2004). By learning to notice, we can recognize patterns. Doctors recognize patterns of symptoms in order to diagnose an illness. Beginning a discussion with, “Did anyone notice…?” helps children to find patterns for themselves (Johnston, 2004).

Teachers should be noticing and helping the student to notice when that student has a partially correct answer. Johnston (2004) said in this way we help students recognize their competence, thereby gaining the confidence to continue to engage in new learning. Bandura (1997) indicated that providing informative feedback that focuses on progress can affect self-efficacy in a positive way whereas providing feedback that highlights deficiencies is likely to undermine self-efficacy.

Identities

The words teachers use can significantly influence the self-identity a student constructs, according to Johnston (2004). He said that students live each day in a way that is consistent with whom they believe themselves to be. The way the teacher communicates to students helps them create that self-identification. Correcting a student’s poor behavior with the words, “That’s not like you” (Johnston, 2004, p. 24) provides the student with an alternative to the poor decision he has made. He does not have to be the misbehaving student; he now knows that the teacher sees him as a better person. Referring to students as researchers, writers, or mathematicians provides a link and associations with the world of researchers, writers or mathematicians that helps students get into character and identify with researchers, writers and mathematicians. It also connects the students’ work to the real world. “I wonder if, as a writer, you’re ready for this” (Johnston, 2004, p. 25), is a challenge that not
only encourages students to work hard and takes away the risk of not understanding or asking for help, it encourages students to act as writers and work like a writer. Acting like a writer and doing work like a writer in fact makes that student a writer (Johnston, 2004).

Strategies

“How did you figure that out?” encourages students to reflect on how they solved the problem (Johnston, 2004). As students reflect on how they figured out the problem, they can see that they are in control of the process, which promotes positive recognition of control. It further reflects to the student their personal ability to be strategic. Teaching strategies is a useless endeavor unless the students can identify and implement those strategies (Johnston, 2004).

Asking the question, “What problems did you come across today?” (Johnston, 2004, p. 32) helps students realize that everyone encounters problems and, again takes away the risk in not understanding or asking for help. This question also creates an avenue to strategies that can be used to solve the problem. Following up with, “How did you solve this problem?” or “What is another way to solve this problem?” are inquiries that lead to alternative strategies. Johnston believes that students need to recognize that we all expect to encounter problems and that those encounters can be useful. If student comfort level is not such that a student is not making mistakes, they are not learning as much as they could (Johnston, 2004).

Agency

A sense of agency is invaluable and in Johnston’s (2004) view, a sense of agency should be learned at school. He said when students complete their schooling experience they should have the confidence that they can act strategically and they can accomplish goals. He further explained that this sense of agency is imperative for a student to succeed. Teachers
guide students to this sense of agency by identifying their successful use of strategies and the accomplishments these strategies generate. Additionally, teachers arrange for students to be successful. Johnston said that there are three parts to maximize student agency. To maximize student success and student agency, students must believe that their world can be influenced. They also must believe that they have the ability to influence their world. Finally, students must believe that the knowledge and ability to influence their world defines literacy.

Sounding very much like Bandura’s (1997) description of self-efficacy, Johnston said that agency is important because of its influence on student beliefs and actions. Students with a negative agentic belief are unsure of their abilities. They set lower goals and attempt lower level challenges. When they encounter challenges, concentration fails and confusion takes control. Under these circumstances, students then begin to think of themselves as incapable (Johnston, 2004).

Self-efficacy directs people’s choices of action, how much energy they will expend in an activity and how much persistence they put forth when adversity strikes (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy also determines whether their mindset is detrimental or helpful in stressful situations, how much pressure and self-doubt they experience as they manage difficulties, as well as the success they achieve. Bandura (1997) believes that self-efficacy and human agency are not the same, rather that self-efficacy is a mechanism of human agency, whereas Johnston views them as the same.

Choice is imperative to agency (Johnston, 2004). Whether in classroom behavior or academic endeavors, reminding students that they have a choice gives students a modicum of control that can build self-efficacy. Many students do not recognize choice because they have
never experienced it. Further, students who can visualize themselves applying strategies successfully believe that they can apply strategies successfully in real life (Bandura, 1997).

**Generalization, Transfer and Flexibility**

Generalizing and transferring knowledge from one content area to another is a widespread problem for students (Johnston, 2004). Johnston proposed that students be encouraged to begin each problem by thinking about what they already know. Also encouraging students to make connections with terms such as, “that’s like” “…provides anchors and retrieval routes” (Johnston, 2004, p. 46) that help students access that knowledge. Johnston (2004) believes that using metaphors not only increases transfer, it causes deeper understanding. He quoted one teacher who taught parallel circuits by comparing them to a traffic jam. Both the car and the electricity find alternate routes when they cannot move forward (Johnston, 2004).

Teachers can use “What if” questions to encourage transfer. They spur imagination, hypothetical talk and abstract thinking. The imagination can take students safely to other worlds to explore situations and behaviors that real life cannot provide (Johnston, 2004). Johnston (2004) said “what if” questions give students the opportunity to experience different views of reality.

**Knowing**

There is a pattern to the way teachers and students communicate (Johnston, 2004). The pattern is sometimes called IRE or Initiate, Respond and Evaluate. The teacher initiates classroom talk, the student responds and the teacher evaluates the response. An underlying tenet of this pattern is that the teacher is the one who “knows”. Johnston (2004) proposes that teachers share this position as the one who knows with the students. Using statements such
as, “Let’s see if I have this right” followed by a summary of the student’s answer shows that the teacher is really listening, creates possibilities for reflection and validates the student’s answer (Johnston, 2004). This method also engages the student as the one who knows.

The IRE model perpetuates the idea that teachers are the source and the keeper of all worldly knowledge and have the authority to give that knowledge to students (Johnston, 2004). Conversely, Johnston (2004) believes that what teachers say should promote conversations because one of the underlying tenants of conversation is that each participant is a thinker and has something of value to say. Involving students in conversation informs the students that what they think and say is valuable (Johnston, 2004).

When students are allowed to talk, they can participate as the one who knows. Teacher silence is one way to encourage more student talking. Johnston (2004) relayed that silence has been shown to stimulate higher-order thinking and student contribution to the discussion. He also suggested listing student questions instead of answering them so that the class might discuss and answer them together. Questions such as “How did you know? How could we check? Would you agree to that?” (Johnston, 2004, p. 55) provide students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowing. The use of the word “you” validates student responses and implies respect. The use of the word “we” here allows the student help from the class with no loss of respect.

**Learning Communities**

Classrooms by design are learning communities. However, Johnston (2004) believes that the words teachers use can nurture a learning environment where students can take risks and participate more freely. When teachers use the word “we” it encourages students to be a part of something bigger than themselves and allows them to share. “I wonder…” can be
used to create a statement that allows students to participate in “thinking together” and share possibilities (Johnston, 2004).

Questions like “Are there any other ways to think about that?”, “Any other opinions?” or “What are you thinking? Stop and talk to your neighbor about it” (Johnston, 2004, p. 70), help students to develop logic and independent thinking as well as deal with conflicting views. These questions help students to be drawn into and participate in the conversation. The ability to participate is vital in the professional world even though it is not as widely valued in the education world (Johnston, 2004).

In her book *Mindsets*, Dweck (2006) shared Johnston’s (2004) concern about what teachers say to students. Like Johnston (2004), Dweck (2006) described the teacher’s language as a tool for creating a situation where students seek out a challenge and enjoy the learning process. Dweck believes that the words teachers use can create a mindset in students that allows them to participate in this way, calling it the growth mindset. Dweck concluded from years of study and research that there are two mindsets: fixed and growth. Students with a fixed mindset believe that their intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed. Further, students with fixed mindsets believe that someone with a high intelligence level does not have to work at being intelligent, but because they are intelligent, they will know answers and solve problems with little effort. Students with a growth mindset believe that by working hard they can accomplish many tasks and become more intelligent (Dweck, 2006).

Students build self-narratives and identities from their teacher’s words (Dweck, 2006; Johnston, 2004). According to Dweck (2006), students view themselves in the way that our words and actions direct their belief. Our words could be in the form of a fixed mindset message that informs the student, “you have permanent traits and I am judging them,” or they
could be in the form of a growth mindset message that says: “you are a developing person and I am interested in your development” (Dweck, 2006, p. 169). Dweck believes that children easily interpret these messages and are greatly concerned about them.

In an attempt to help fellow teachers, Moorman and Weber (1989) produced a book that is less involved than Johnston’s work. They believe that what teachers say can affect their students’ lives beyond the classroom. This book is a user-friendly collection of commonly-used teacher phrases, with recommendations and explanations of those phrases. The authors told why or why not to use a particular phrase; they offered alternative phrases and explained student developmental issues or other pertinent concerns that might be causing misunderstandings (Moorman & Weber, 1989).

“Why did you do that?” (p. 37) is one of the phrases Moorman and Weber (1989) discussed. They recommended that this phrase be carefully timed. This phrase can be interpreted as criticism or an accusation. They recommended that teachers use this phrase after they have thought about the incident and they feel that they may gain some insight from the answer. Teachers should also be mindful that students many times do not know why they did something (Moorman & Weber, 1989).

Another pair of teachers wrote a book attempting to help their teacher colleagues with word choice. Diffily and Sassman’s (2006) concern was that educators spend little time thinking about the effect their words have on students. According to Diffily and Sassman, what teachers say can be encouraging and promote positive developmental student attributes that can be used now and in the future to further learning. Conversely, what teachers say can also be discouraging, causing student development to take a less positive direction (Diffily & Sassman, 2006).
To facilitate deeper thinking, Diffily and Sassman (2006) recommended “pondering and wondering aloud” (p. 69). In this way, the teacher can guide the students toward a topic and let the students discuss ideas without the teacher being the knower. They recommended many similar phrases such as; “How could we do that?” and “What are our options?” (Diffily & Sassman, 2006, p. 69).

Teacher language is one of the most influential devices used by teachers, according to Denton (2007), who places more emphasis on exactly what is said in the classroom. She further contends that the information students render from the teacher’s communication has great influence on student action, thought and learning. Denton advised teachers always to show confidence in student abilities and intentions, be straightforward, genuine, concise and be silent whenever possible. In Denton’s section on open-ended questions, she shared examples of when not to use open-ended questions, for instance, when a teacher wants to confirm an agreement like, “Are you ready to begin?” (p. 58). To limit the scope of open-ended questions, she recommended questions like, “How could you use the globe to discover facts about continents?” instead of “How could you use the globe?” (p. 60). She also provided examples of how to limit competition in open-ended questions such as, “Who has a different idea?” instead of “Who has a better idea?” and “What good ideas do you see in the different ways people did their drawings?” instead of “Whose drawing do you think is best?” (Denton, 2007, p. 63).

The most in-depth work examining teacher talk was Cazden’s (1988) excellent book about classroom discourse. She examined several studies such as Allington’s (cite year) research on who and when teachers interrupt readers, studies on cultural differences, Mehan’s (cite) analysis of lesson structure and Merritt’s (cite) study on students getting
teacher assistance. Her focus is on how the language patterns affect learning, equality, and what they assume students already know. Cazden was concerned that teachers do not think much about the things they say. She believes that teachers must think about communication in the classroom because as she says, communication is the instrument used to achieve the basic purpose to which schools aspire. Further, she said that teachers have control of all communications that take place in the classroom. Cazden’s aim with this book was to address language used in the classroom that is not consciously planned.

Teacher discourse was different in the 1970s (Heath, 1973). According to Heath (1973), teachers used polite conversation language to communicate specific directions. For example, “Could you please put away the art supplies?” really meant “put the art supplies away.” This kind of indirect instruction tended to work well with middle class students who were accustomed to this kind of directive. However, students who were not accustomed to indirect directives had difficulties understanding. Heath recommended more research on the topic as well as more explicit directions for students.

The power that administrator and teacher word choice can have over the expectations of all teachers within a school building was the topic of Fennimore’s (2000) book. He wrote about the power of a teacher’s and an administrator’s words and how they affect the expectations of teachers and students. A major concern voiced by Fennimore was how simply making negative or demeaning remarks can create social divisions and stratifications. Additionally, words can make these separations appear to be the proper alignment of human affairs. She further spoke of language as action and behavior. Fennimore’s work was concerned with how teacher language affects school climate.
Considering all of the components of teaching and learning in the classroom, the effectiveness of the teacher’s communication is one of the most crucial (Seiler, Schuelke, & Lieb-Brilhart, 1984). Seiler et al. (1984) recognized the significance of teacher discourse. Without communication, learning is not possible. Seiler et al.’s focus on communication attended more to teachers communicating the lesson rather than how teacher discourse affects student learning.

**Teacher Discourse Feedback**

Although feedback addresses only one part of teacher communications, it plays a critical role. Hattie and Timperley (2008) provided a meta-analysis of feedback. They said that feedback can only result in learning when students understand the context of the feedback. However, they concluded that not all feedback is powerful. Praise, extrinsic rewards and punishments were not effective. The authors said that feedback concerning inaccurate answers is not as effective as informative feedback that builds on changes and on accurate responses. Further, feedback is most effective when it is challenging, has clear objectives, and is not complicated (Hattie & Timperley, 2008).

Four levels of feedback were categorized by Hattie and Timperley (2008). The first level attends to whether answers are right or wrong. The second level of feedback addresses using strategies that students already possess. The third level promotes student self-regulation as in checking their own work and determining what they should do next. The fourth level has nothing to do with the work but addresses the student’s personal attributes such as “you are very smart.” The authors warned that too much feedback keeps students from developing problem-solving strategies and building hypotheses (Hattie & Timperley, 2008).
In a short book on effective feedback, Brookhart (2008) cited Hattie and Timperley’s (2008) work. She agreed that clarity regarding where students are in their work and where they are to go is imperative for effective feedback. Her focus, however, was on what she called “double-barreled” feedback, which is feedback that is both cognitive and motivational. Brookhart believes that when students fully understand what they are to do they gain a confidence that in itself is motivational.

The words and phrases teachers’ say can be readily counted and measured. Unfortunately, as Cazden (1988) stated, most communications are multifunctional. Consequently, it is more difficult to apply measurements to the effectiveness of teacher discourse.

Antithesis of Effective Teacher Discourse

Thus far, this literature review has focused on effective teacher discourse that creates a positive learning environment and promotes self-efficacy. Logically, the next section should review the antithesis of effective teacher discourse. Reason informs us that the antithesis would be ineffective teacher discourse or teacher discourse that effectively creates a negative learning environment.

Because this literature review found no research or information that is labeled ineffective teacher discourse or the antithesis of effective teacher discourse, this review will include several related issues. The issues of incompetent teachers, challenging teachers, student maltreatment, teachers as bullies, emotional abuse, bad teachers, ineffective teachers and failing teachers will all be discussed as areas that can contribute to understanding what effective teacher discourse is not. The researcher is using the above terms because these terms were used by the authors when writing about these subjects. Whereas consensus on the
definitions for each of these terms vary, it is not difficult to conclude that these topics are antithetical to the topic of effective teacher discourse.

**Incompetent or Bad Teachers**

A few works address the removal of incompetent teachers and enumerate the reasons that it does not happen often (Bridges, 1986; Downey, 1978; Weele, 1994). Also, there were a few authors who advise parents on what to do when their child has an incompetent teacher (Cambor, 1999; Shellenbarger, 2005; “When Johnny,” 1968). A seemingly disgruntled educator wrote a complete book advising parents on how to deal with an incompetent teacher (Strickland, 1998). An educator of over 30 years, Strickland provided a list of bad teacher attributes from a parent’s point of view: (a) Teachers who have little or no knowledge of the subject, (b) Teachers with poor classroom control, (c) Teachers who behave unprofessionally, (d) Teachers who cannot diagnose learning problems, (e) Teacher who are obsessive about method, (f) Teachers who focus on the wrong goals, (g) Teachers who have no goals at all (p. 126).

One aspect under the topic of bad teachers is the inability of a teacher to understand and teach students with learning differences. Darling-Hammond (2006) reasoned that until recently teachers have not been expected to concern themselves with learning differences or even the elements and issues of learning itself. She further stated that putting a teacher in the classroom today without the benefit of training in the areas of learning differences and learning issues is like putting a surgeon in the operating room without knowledge of human anatomy (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Perhaps there is truth to Darling-Hammond’s (2006) thought. A 1968 article addressed the problem of what to do if you think your child has a bad teacher. The article
(“When Johnny,” 1968) clarified that usually a teacher is neither all good nor all bad. A
teacher that works well for one student may be awful for another. Whereas the article may
have been correct in 1968, today’s teachers are expected to know how to be a good teacher
for all students (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

In a study of incompetent teachers in Israel, the researcher, Yavir (2004), discovered
that very little has been written about incompetent teachers. He found that 7% of the teachers
in his study were considered incompetent. He also found that incompetent teachers tend to be
the older teachers. Yavir’s research said little about what teachers say. However, he did find
that parents were most concerned that their child’s school experience would be with a caring
teacher (Yavir, 2004).

**Ineffective Teacher Discourse**

Literature that more closely aligns with the phenomena of ineffective teacher
discourse includes a longitudinal study (Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts & Morrison,
2008). This study’s objective was to explore the extent to which students’ actual experience
with instruction and teacher-student interaction in elementary school adds value to
achievement over time. Although the study could not account for some variables the
conclusion was that academic achievement correlated with the “quality of emotional and
instructional interaction” (Pianta et al., 2008). Achievement is related to the quality of
teacher-student relationship, ergo, the teacher-student relationship is important (Pianta et al.,
2008). Further, the researchers submitted that studying emotional and instructional
interaction is a cumbersome and difficult endeavor (Pianta et al., 2008).
**Student Maltreatment and Emotional Abuse**

Definitions are a problem when trying to discuss the maltreatment of students (Wragg et al., 2000). Regardless of whether it is called emotional abuse, psychological abuse, or bullying, this activity involves communicating to students. Students experience maltreatment at all levels (Conlee, 1986). One study (Hyman & Snook, 1999) revealed that more than 50% of Americans have experienced a school-related incident causing them emotional trauma. According to Nesbit and Philpott (2002) emotional trauma may be the result of one or more of the many ways teachers communicate to students.

Younger students are at the highest risk of experiencing maltreatment (Benbenishty et al., 2002; Brendgen, Wanner, & Vitaro, 2007; Nesbit & Philpott, 2002). As children leave home and enter the world of school, teachers replace the nurturing parent. If young students are fortunate enough to have a home life that is not abusive, school may then be the first place where they experience maltreatment (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002). Fortunately, there are only a small percentage of teachers who maltreat their students (Doyle, 1997; McEachern et al., 2008; Nesbit & Philpott, 2002) and many of these teachers are unaware that their action would be considered maltreatment (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002). The majority of teachers are nurturing and develop healthy relationships with their students (Doyle, 1997; McEachern et al., 2008; Nesbit & Philpot, 2002).

In one study, teachers were identified as emotionally abusive for shouting at students, calling students names, making other debasing comments and assigning homework as a reprimand (Krugman & Krugman, 1984). As a result of this abuse, students showed signs of physical illness such as headaches and stomachaches. They also became depressed, cried,
withdrew and had difficulty sleeping. These students became afraid of school and teachers and worried about their academic performance (Krugman & Krugman, 1984).

Any parent or teacher might say or do something that is hurtful toward a student. Most adults experience enough stress at some point in their lives that they do or say something to a student that is potentially harmful. Teachers under stress are at risk of behavior that if repeated could be considered abusive (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002). Emotional abuse occurs when maltreatment is ongoing, according Nesbit and Philpot (2002).

Student maltreatment can also be the result of teacher shortcomings such as teachers who are poorly trained in classroom management (Benbenishty et al., 2002; Nesbit & Philpot, 2002). Maltreatment may result from fear of losing control of the classroom or anger at the child’s behavior (Brendgen et al., 2007). Maltreatment may also occur if a teacher feels a need to be powerful. Teachers seeking power and control may be prone to using inappropriate means of classroom management (Brendgen et al., 2007).

Research by Nesbit and Philpott (2002) defined emotional abuse more clearly by establishing a list of six behaviors that constitute emotional abuse: “demeaning, discriminating, dominating, destabilizing, distancing and diverse” (p. 33). They defined “diverse” behaviors as teacher behaviors that make the classroom environment uncomfortable. They further established seven broad areas of subtle emotional abuse: “body language, discrimination, grading practices, time utilization, treatment of exceptional children, verbal interactions/questioning techniques and random behavior” (p. 34). Teachers are even more susceptible to subtle abuse and it is even more difficult to identify (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002).
The list of subtle emotional abuse areas helped counselors define emotional abuse and was used to create the Scale of Subtle Emotional Abuse (SSEA, Nesbit & Philpott, 2002). This scale is used to help teachers become aware of any tendencies they may have toward subtle abuse. Nesbit and Philpott charged counselors with identifying teachers who are at risk of subtle abuse and recommended using the SSEA. Like Benbenishty et al. (2002), Nesbit and Philpott (2002) assigned a substantial component of the blame for emotional abuse of students on the issue of ignoring teacher welfare. They believe that when the welfare of teachers is not provided for, student emotional development can be critically impacted.

This review did not reveal consensus around a definition for bullying. However, a significant tenant of bullying is defined as the powerful using their power against the vulnerable (Besag, 1989). There is evidence that teachers bully students. Principals indicated that they are aware that some teachers are tough on students (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, & Brethour, 2006). Many of these same principals take measures to ensure that the more vulnerable students are assigned to other teachers. Several teachers admitted to power struggles with students (Twemlow et al., 2006).

Although sexual harassment cases involving teachers and students have been prosecuted, other types of bullying by teachers tend to be less defined and less evident (McEvoy, 2005). According to McEvoy (2005), no national studies have reviewed the phenomenon of teachers bullying students in the United States. A few smaller studies have been conducted such as the Whitted and Dupper (2008) study, in which a small alternative school employed a survey to collect information on adults physically or psychologically bullying students. The researchers were looking specifically at the importance of the student-
teacher relationship. The survey showed that 88% of the students experienced psychological maltreatment (Whitted & Dupper, 2008).

In addition to being a bullying teacher, teachers can also create student bullies (Gabarino & DeLara, 2002). Gabarino and DeLara (2002) described a student named Sean who started school with enthusiasm and curiosity about everything but had a difficult time staying in one place. Unfortunately, his enthusiasm and curiosity was just too much for his early teachers, so little by little they squelched it. At first, he only got in trouble with the teacher. Eventually the students began to tease him. In second grade, he began to take medication, which helped him sit in one place for a longer period of time. By that time he had a reputation and became a good scapegoat. But Sean was smart, he knew how he had been hurt and he knew how to hurt others without hitting them. Sean learned how to tease, torment and annoy others. Sean became a bully (Gabarino & DeLara, 2002).

**Ineffective Teachers**

A school assigned one pre-service teacher to observe a model teacher (Treiber, 1984). This model teacher had served as a model teacher for pre-service teachers many times before with no complaints. The pre-service teacher was shocked when she realized how ineffective the model teacher was. She described the model teacher as being unaware of student activity during class, not giving clear instructions for the homework, shouting at and saying demeaning things to the students. Fortunately, this future teacher was able recognize the model teacher’s shortcomings for what they were. For the previously-assigned pre-service teachers who observed this model teacher, unless they recognized his ineffectiveness, their education was not only inadequate, it was probably detrimental (Treiber, 1984).
Some teachers become so overwhelmed that they fall into ineffective teaching behaviors. Larson (2006), an experienced head teacher, described her fall into this downward spiral. Having taught in many difficult schools and situations Larson was comfortable that she could make a difference in the low performing southern school. The day came in the second semester when Larson realized that she had become a punitive and ineffective teacher. Lying awake at night she reviewed her day and felt that she was doing all the things she had done in the past to succeed. First of all, she cared for her students and took responsibility for their learning. She set realistic goals and developed realistic lesson plans with her fellow teachers. She felt that she was doing everything that she could but she was seeing no success. Larson wanted more time to think, but she had so much to do just to keep up every day. She looked at the prevailing research and collaborated with colleagues. Soon she went against her own philosophies and arranged her class in rows, kept students in from recess, kept behavior charts with many marks and spoke louder to communicate with her class. She also cried every night (Larson, 2006).

At last the day came when as she listened to some of her students, she realized she did not know her students. She began to listen harder for what they were really saying and what they really meant. She realized also that she had to go back to her teaching philosophy. Happily, she recovered. On reflecting what had happened, she found that she had not understood her students. She was not aware of how they felt about school or looked at their future (Larson, 2006).

Teachers receive an inadequate pre-service education, are inadequately supervised and are inadequately supported (Troen & Boles, 2003). Further, Troen and Boles (2003) say that ineffective teachers are more numerous than ever before and that most parents recognize
that their children’s teachers are not as good as the teachers they had when they were in school (Troen & Boles, 2003). In 1983 A Nation at Risk was published (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The major concerns at that time were:

1. Not enough academically able students are being attracted to teaching.
2. Teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement.
3. The professional life of teachers is on the whole unacceptable (Troen & Boles, 2003, p. 21).

Troen and Boles voiced the same concerns again in 2003 in their book Who’s Teaching Your Children?

Failing Teachers (Wragg et al., 2000) is an in-depth study attempting to identify incompetent teachers. The book tells the story of the Teaching Competence Project. This project took place in the United Kingdom and was financed by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation. The Teaching Competence Project investigated teachers who were alleged to be incompetent and the steps used to alleviate the problem. This investigation was carried out through surveys of the alleged incompetent teachers, fellow teachers, head teachers, school governors, school union officials, parents and students (Wragg et al., 2000).

This research (Wragg et al., 2000) showed that parents describing a bad teacher most often cited a poor relationship with pupils in their description. The second most often cited characteristic parents used to describe bad teachers was a lack of classroom discipline, followed by personal characteristics and poor teaching methods (Wragg et al., 2000). Only 46% of parents surveyed indicated that they had concerns about their child’s education. Interestingly, parents with the most experience with school-age children had the most concerns.
In the Teaching Competence Project students most commonly described a bad teacher as one who was too strict and disciplined too harshly and sometimes unfairly. Students also used descriptors such as bossy, shouting, cross, assigned work that was too difficult and does not help students. Younger students more often cited teachers who were uncaring (Wragg et al., 2000).

Older students saw good teachers as explaining clearly, providing good exam preparation, fair treatment of all students and keeping control of the class. These were the four top characteristics students used when describing good teachers in that order. Students were asked what teacher characteristics they would complain about. Of the 473 older students surveyed, 65% cited unfair treatment, then unclear explanations, too much homework or homework that is too hard, in that order (Wragg et al., 2000).

Most of the 70 teachers alleged to be incompetent were either the oldest teachers or first-year teachers (Wragg et al., 2000). Local Education Authority (LEA) officers suggested that incompetent older teachers were a result of burnout. Interestingly, each case of alleged incompetence was said to be shockingly different. However, over half of the teachers cited as incompetent indicated that classroom discipline was a major factor in the allegation of their incompetence (Wragg et al., 2000).

The Teaching Competence Project also surveyed teachers who were not cited as incompetent but worked with teachers who were cited as incompetent (Wragg et al., 2000). These teachers viewed incompetent teachers as a detriment to the entire school. They also indicated that the area of greatest weakness for incompetent teachers was not meeting the expectations of pupils and the second greatest weakness cited was classroom discipline. The
surveys showed that in most of the 70 cases of alleged incompetent teachers a combination of weaknesses lead to the allegations (Wragg et al., 2000).

In the United Kingdom, the school governors are analogous to school boards in the United States (“School of Governors,” 2009) In cases where the chair of governors was involved with allegations of incompetent teachers, the six most frequently cited weaknesses were found in discipline, planning and preparation, pupil progress, student-teacher relationships, expectations and inability to change (Wragg et al., 2000).

Many of the alleged incompetent teachers agreed with the allegations of their incompetence. Wragg et al. (2000) found however, that inadequate support, less than accurate assessments and hostility led to some teachers being deemed incompetent. Finally, to minimize the incidence of incompetent teachers Wragg et al. advised that hiring teachers should be a selective process, teachers should get the support they need and they should be supervised.

The message Paul and Smith (2000) imparted in their book, *Stories out of School*, was clear; teachers are extremely powerful in the lives of children. Students tend to believe that teachers are all-knowing. The power of teachers is incredible and can affect children for their entire lives (Paul & Smith, 2000).

A collection of letters written by teachers to their former teachers was used to write *Stories out of School* (Paul & Smith, 2000). Some of the letters were written to teachers who had a positive impact on the student while others were to teachers who had a negative impact on the student. All of these letters reflected the power teachers hold (Paul & Smith, 2000).

In one instance of recalling negative impact, a teacher in a doctoral class sobbed as she relayed the story of a cruel middle school teacher she had 25 years earlier. She
remembered the teacher saying demeaning things about her heritage and hinted that she had a bad reputation with the boys (Paul & Smith, 2000). In another letter, a caring teacher made a home visit to a student whose mother had abandoned the family. The student was so inspired by that teacher that she became a teacher too (Paul & Smith, 2000).

Many teachers today can remember their worst experiences with their own teachers. One teacher wrote about a fifth grade teacher making a low academic student stand on one foot and harassing him until he cried (Colucci, 2000). Another teacher wrote about a 10th grade teacher making her feel stupid when she asked questions (Colucci, 2000). Yet another teacher remembered a remedial math teacher who made students feel that the teacher was wasting his time trying to teach them and embarrassed students who did not do well (Colucci, 2000).

Although today’s focus on academic outcomes overshadows student experience in the classroom, in reality simply focusing on academic outcomes does not make a good education system (Paul & Colucci, 2000). We know that student experiences, whatever those experiences are, shape and control what and how a student learns (Paul & Colucci, 2000). The relationship between ‘a student’ and ‘learning’ is too complex to separate (Paul & Colucci, 2000).

Not only do teachers hold incredible power, they hold incredible responsibility as well (Houck, 2000). “Bad teaching” of any sort has a moral element (Clark, 1991). The same is true with “good teaching” (Clark, 1991). No matter if the curriculum and the teaching method are of the highest quality, if the moral element is bad, the result for the student will be bad (Clark, 1991).
Effective Teachers

Literature concerning ineffective teacher discourse and ineffective teachers is in short supply (Benbenishty, Zeira & Astor, 2002; Benbenishty Zeira, Astor & Khoury-Kassabri, 2002; Brendgen et al., 2007; Foote et al., 1999; Nesbit & Philpot, 2002). Perhaps a look at what is thought makes an effective teacher will help define ineffective teachers. Keep in mind that the measure of a teacher is a difficult task (Dugan, 1961).

Ensuring that classrooms are manned with effective teachers is both a national and local goal. One of the most influential components to student success is the effectiveness of the teacher (Kaplan & Owings, 2004). Students placed in an effective teacher’s classroom show significant academic progress over the unfortunate students of the ineffective teacher (Kaplan & Owings, 2004). The effectiveness of a teacher not only makes the difference between a student passing or failing (Sherwood, 2008), but also can affect the dropout rate (Mendleson, 2009). The teacher is responsible for implementing most educational practices that directly influence student achievement (Good, 1979).

An article examining reading instruction named four teaching elements as essential. All four of these elements are clearly teacher discourse: clear learning goals, questions to determine understanding, feedback and a coaching style of interaction as oppose to a telling style (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002).

In a study to determine what a “bad high school teacher” is, perceptions of students, teachers, parents and administrators were compared (Foote et al., 1999). These perceptions were gathered through interviews. The following list of tips was compiled to help novice teachers avoid being a “bad teacher” (Foote et al., 1999).

1. Teach beyond the textbook.
2. Teach to the student’s current level.

3. In lesson planning, be sure to (a) connect daily teaching activities to the Standards and to the curriculum (b) relate one lesson to the next, and (c) establish clear objectives.

4. Revise lessons often (sometimes during the lesson itself).

5. Keep students active throughout lessons.

6. Involve students in establishing rules and consequences.

7. Be professional in dress, speech and attendance.

8. Stay healthy; show vigor, enthusiasm and confidence.

9. Dedicate yourself to continual professional growth; model adult-like development.

10. Interact professionally with colleagues and administration. (Foote et al., p. 133)

Many studies, books, and articles (Foote et al., 1999; Tuckman, Steber, & Hyman, 1979; Wragg, et al., 2000) attempt to establish the elements of an effective teacher. In a review of the research (Doyle, 1978) concerning teacher variables leading to effective teaching, one commonality prevailed; namely, that these teacher variables are not consistent (Doyle, 1978). However, this literature review often identifies communication as a critical component of effective teaching. Chapter III proposes an approach for examining teachers’ awareness of the impact of their words.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the procedures and methods used in this qualitative case study investigating elementary school teachers’ awareness of the impact of the language they use to create and shape classroom learning environments. Further, this chapter includes the research design, information about participants, data sources, triangulation, procedures and data analysis used in this study.

Research Design

This qualitative case study required the researcher to collect data from the natural setting of a classroom since the problem addressed is the nature of teacher awareness regarding the influence of their words in the classroom. In order to explore teacher language that shapes a learning environment without interfering with the natural setting (Merriam, 1998), this research employed methods that build from discourse analysis (Huckins, 2004; Rex & Schiller, 2009) and constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The guiding theory was Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory on self-efficacy.

In this investigation, the case study format is appropriate for obtaining information and gathering data in context. The concept of a qualitative case study design for research enables researchers to gain insight and information about the participants by probing into the natural setting (Merriam, 1998). Participants in this study were two classroom teachers and their students. Audiotapes of interviews with the teachers, videotapes of classroom
observations, written artifacts and field notes provided the raw data to analyze within the context of the classroom.

**Participants**

The researcher selected a rural public school with which she is familiar to provide emic knowledge from an etic position (Gall et al., 2007). As a teacher and parent within the same community, the researcher has worked in the local schools and is familiar with the culture of the schools, which provides an emic perspective. The researcher has not recently been involved with the local schools and is currently not involved with them which provides an etic perspective. The researcher solicited teachers to volunteer as participants from a local elementary school. After receiving a presentation by the researcher, the principal convened a meeting with all teachers to ask for volunteers. Two teachers volunteered. According to Gall et al. (2007), the identification of the participants should be limited to as few people as possible; therefore, the privacy of the participants requires that the identity of the schools, teachers and students be unnamed.

**Data Sources**

Data sources for this study include audiotapes of interviews with the teachers, videotapes of observations of teacher and students in the classroom setting, field notes taken during the observations and during interviews, along with artifacts containing communications from the teachers. The following sections provide descriptions of the methods for collecting data.

**Interviews**

Two teachers participated in three tape-recorded interviews each. The first interview explored each teacher’s own student experiences with regard to their teacher’s use of words
from the position of a student. Specifically, what kinds of teacher discourse did each teacher experience as a student? For example, when Mary was in second grade her teacher felt that Mary did not read loud enough. When Mary was reading, her teacher would tell her to read louder and slap Mary’s hand with a ruler. The second interview continued to expand on the teacher’s experiences with teacher word use by illuminating the teacher’s education in the use of words and phrases used in the classroom. These teachers were asked to discuss the teacher discourse they were taught to manage a classroom, the instruction the teacher has had concerning feedback to students, any changes the teacher has made in the classroom in terms of teacher discourse methods and strategies the teacher applies in the present classroom situation. The third and final interview expanded upon teacher contributions from the two earlier interviews to assess more fully each teacher’s awareness and understanding of the impact of their words and phrases. The researcher encouraged each teacher to analyze their past, current and future use of teacher discourse in the classroom. During this third interview, the researcher shared small segments of classroom observation videotapes when the taped communication event seemed appropriate. For example, the researcher shared a small videotaped segment during which Mary was questioning her students. Sharing these segments allowed the interviewer to inquire where and why the teacher used a specific teacher discourse strategy.

**Classroom Observations**

Video-recorded classroom observations of teacher-student interaction focused on the participating teachers and students throughout the school day. Field notes included descriptions of the classroom, students, activities, conversations, classroom discussions and observer comments. These field notes provided a context for the teachers’ words and phrases
as well as the setting and conditions for a more accurate representation of meaning (Merriam, 1998). The researcher followed note-taking guidelines outlined by Gall et al. (2007) recommending that notes are descriptive, reflective, concrete and detailed.

**Artifacts**

The artifact collection focused on documents containing teacher-student interaction. Artifacts included copies of report cards, corrected papers and newsletters from the teachers. All personal identifying information was redacted from each artifact to protect the participants’ identity.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is a procedure used to validate a study (Schwandt, 2007) by providing the investigator multiple views from which to examine the data. The concept of triangulation presumes that data from different sources converge to prove or disprove inferences drawn from other sources. The sources of data that serve to triangulate and validate this investigation included classroom observations, six teacher interviews, and the artifacts that contained communication between the teacher and the students. The data collected provided the information from which the researcher discovered patterns and trends of teacher discourse. An example within this study involved one of the subject teachers employing a questioning technique as a component of her teacher discourse in the classroom. Mary used a questioning technique several times during her video-recorded classroom observations. She also used the questioning technique in her artifacts when she wrote comments to students on their corrected work. When she was asked during one of her interviews where she learned the questioning technique, she reflected that she was not aware that she was using it. In a
separate interview, Mary said that she learned some of her teacher discourse through trial and error.

**Procedures**

This qualitative study included five phases. The phases of inquiry are listed in Appendix A of this study. The first phase called for obtaining a letter of consent from the public school system and approval from the Tennessee State University institutional review board (IRB). Obtaining consent from school district leaders began by meeting with the director of schools for a local school district. The director received an explanation of the research along with a written brief and a letter requesting permission to observe and interview two teachers in one of the district’s elementary schools. Once permission was gained from the director of schools, the IRB proposal was submitted. When IRB approval was acquired, the study proceeded with the second phase, gaining access.

The second phase involved meeting with the principal of the elementary school. The principal received an explanation of the research along with a written brief of the research and a letter requesting permission to observe and interview two teachers. Upon receiving the principal’s permission, the researcher asked permission to speak at a faculty meeting to inform the teachers of the study and ask for volunteers.

Two teachers volunteered to participate and received letters of informed consent. The volunteer teachers also received letters of informed consent to be agreed to and signed by the parents of their students. The letters of informed consent explained the purpose and duration of the study, described the procedure, risks and benefits, confidentiality, whom to contact with questions and their right to withdraw from the study (Gall et al., 2007).
The researcher met with the teachers and set dates for the observations. Each observation day included video recordings of classroom activities along with supporting notes recorded during the classroom observation. The video recordings lasted one hour each on each of the three observation days. The researcher reviewed the classroom observation videotapes at the end of each day (Seidman, 2006).

In addition to videotapes and observation notes, this study required the collection of artifacts from participating teachers that contained teacher-student communication (see Appendix C). These included report cards, corrected papers, and newsletters from the teacher to represent different perspectives of the teacher-student communication system (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). The researcher requested these artifacts from the participating teachers. All identifying information was redacted from the artifacts and kept in a locked file cabinet for the purpose of protecting participant privacy (Gall et al., 2007).

The researcher met with the teachers and scheduled their three interviews at three-day intervals in accordance with Seidman’s (2006) guidelines. Seidman suggested that interviews follow teacher observations to prevent interviews from influencing the teacher’s words or actions during classroom observations. The researcher audio-recorded each interview in addition to taking notes. Guiding questions focused each interview on teacher awareness of the impact of their words (see Appendix B). Small segments of the classroom observations were shared with the teacher for clarification.

**Data Analysis**

Discourse analysis as described by Rex and Schiller (2009) and Huckins (2004) was used in conjunction with the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to provide the framework and analysis in this study. Recommendations for specific elements of effective teacher discourse gleaned from Denton (2006), Diffily and Sassman, (2006),
Dweck, (2006), Hanrahan (2004), and Johnston, (2004) provided guidelines for assessing teacher discourse as being effective or ineffective. The elements for effective teacher discourse to be examined included elements such as student decision making, responsibility or initiative, teamwork, autonomy, self-control, student identity, generalization techniques and strategies taught to the students, students as the knower and access-enhancing or limiting elements in the classroom. As the analysis progressed it became clear that the elements for effective teacher discourse analyzed from the classroom video recordings and the artifacts provided examples that further developed the major themes within the nature of teacher awareness of the impact their words have on students. Specifically, where teachers learned their teacher discourse, that teachers are aware and concerned about their teacher discourse, teachers continue to search for more effective teacher discourse, teachers lack confidence in their teacher discourse capability, and teachers have been influenced by the those who taught them during their own student years.

Discourse analysis of transcripts from teacher interviews, video-recorded observations and collected artifacts of teacher communications provided the texts to be analyzed in this investigation. Specifically, the teachers’ words and phrases were examined following descriptions and examples found in Rex and Schiller (2009) and Huckins (2004) for discourse analysis. Field notes provided clarification of the discursive events as they were recorded. The discourse analysis model consists of three levels of analysis: text, discursive practices and social context (Huckins, 2004).

The three levels of discourse analysis that were used in this study overlap and intertwine (Huckins, 2004). The first level was the text, which refers to a communication event and is a record of that event. The events on which this study focused were the
communications of two elementary school teachers to their students and the stories of the teachers’ past experience and teacher training. The text communicated facts in the form of a presentation. It provided identities for the person giving the text, the person receiving the text and the audience. The second level was the discursive practices; the guidelines for the event. These are the roles, rules and norms of the relationships of the producer, the receiver, and the audience. The discursive practices provided the guidelines for interpreting the text. The third level, the social context, was the setting in which these communication events took place. In this study, the setting was the two classrooms with all of the conventions that each particular classroom encompasses. The conventions of the classrooms include rights, expectations and obligations (Huckins, 2004).

**Transcription.** The interview audio recordings and the classroom video recordings had to be transcribed into a written text for analysis. The researcher listened to the audio recordings of the transcripts and listened and watched the video recordings from the classroom and, using a word processor, typed the text. Transcribing in each case included describing linguistic cues, discursive practices, and social context. The teacher comments were typed out in lists from artifacts, report card comments, corrected student work and notes home.

During the transcription of the interviews and the classroom observations the researcher listened to the recordings multiple times in order to capture the details of the recordings accurately. When all transcripts were written in text form, the researcher added information to the texts from the field notes taken during each event. For example, in one of Amy’s interviews she talked about how her words influence her students. As she talked her
face and voice showed that she was very serious and concerned about how her words could influence her students. The researcher wrote these linguistic cues onto the text.

Following the guidelines of Rex and Schiller (2009) and Huckins (2004) the researcher read the transcript three more times. In the first reading the researcher read the entire transcript with the goal of seeing uncritically the whole event. In the second reading, the researcher focused on the genres that framed the event. For example, during the first interview Amy talked about her experience in public elementary school which was one framing element. Using framing events in this way enabled the interview to be divided into larger chunks. In the third reading the researcher examined specific exchanges between the teacher and the student which were then appropriately coded as described below.

**Coding.** The researcher began by categorizing each exchange between the teacher and students with the appropriate code; one such code was “identifying the student.” This meant that the researcher wrote the code “identifying student” onto the observation transcript indicating that in that particular interchange the teacher identified the student. For example, Amy identified some of her students as good thinkers. This process was followed for the transcripts of the all classroom observations.

The interview transcripts were coded in the same way as the classroom observations, but with a different set of coding. The coding for the interview transcripts was: where teachers learned their teacher discourse, teachers are aware and concerned about their teacher discourse, teachers continue to search for more effective teacher discourse, teachers lack confidence in their teacher discourse, and teachers were influenced by their own teachers.

Again, following the guidelines of Rex and Schiller (2009) and Huckins (2004), in the first reading the researcher read the entire transcript with the goal of seeing uncritically
the whole event. In the second reading, the researcher focused on the genres that framed the event. For example, during the first interview Amy talked about her experience in public elementary school. Her experience in public elementary school was one framing element. In this way the interview was divided into larger chunks.

In the third reading, the researcher focused on specific sentences or thoughts. For example within Amy’s public elementary school experience her first grade teacher placed her desk under a pencil sharpener. This more specific experience within her public school experience was then considered, analyzed and labeled through the lens of teacher discourse as created by Chapter II in this study.

Once these experiences were labeled through the process described above, the researcher applied the constant comparative method as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Using the same transcripts with analysis included the researcher coded by noting key points directly on the transcripts. Categories and subcategories then emerged from the concept groupings. These categories were noted and trends and patterns were found and a theory developed.

Artifacts. The artifacts collected from Amy’s class, corrected papers, report card comments and information notes home do not lend themselves to the same analysis categories as the classroom observation and the teacher interview transcripts. They can be more clearly viewed through the lens of feedback as described by Hattie and Timperley (2008). Consequently, the artifacts from Amy’s class were categorized into the four levels of feedback as described by Hattie and Timperley. Level one feedback focuses on the accuracy or inaccuracy of student answers. The second level of feedback encourages students to use what they already know. The third level of feedback promotes students self-checking and
directing. Finally, the fourth level of feedback addresses the student personally as opposed to addressing the student’s work.

Amy’s artifacts fit only in level one and two. When providing comments to her students, she indicated accurate and inaccurate answers and her comments promoted student use of the skills and knowledge they already had. Mary used levels one, two and three. Mary not only indicated accurate and inaccurate answers and promoted student use of skills and knowledge they already had she also promoted student self-regulation and self-direction. Both teachers attempted to reach out to their students in a positive way by using unspecific praise, smiley faces and stickers.

Amy’s Artifact Categories
1. Indicate accurate and inaccurate answers
2. Comments promote using skills and knowledge already attained
3. Attempt at touching base with her students

Mary’s Artifact Categories
1. Indicate accurate and inaccurate answers
2. Comments promote using skills and knowledge already attained
3. Comments promote student self-regulation and self-direction
4. Attempt at touching base with her students

The researcher created a category that is not described by Hattie and Timperley (2008). Both teachers placed smiley faces or words such as Good, Great, and Fantastic on students’ papers. When they were asked about this practice both teachers indicated that they were simply trying to reach out to the students in a positive way.
**Constant comparative method.** Analysis using the constant comparative method is a search for patterns and trends in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An initial set of data was coded to indicate key points and then became the first data set to which subsequent data were compared. For example the initial set of data came from field notes. As the researcher met with the teachers to schedule observation interview dates, notes were made describing the classrooms. One of the codes that fit the classroom description concerned how welcoming the classroom was. This is known as accessibility. Both classrooms were labeled accessible to the students because the classrooms were welcoming in terms of discourse, lighting and temperature. Consequently, when these portions of data were compared they were grouped together. In each case the data were coded and then categorized with like data. As the data analysis progressed, new data from observations, the artifact collection, and interviews were organized in relation to all previously collected data.

During the data analysis, similar concepts emerged that were grouped together through coding. For example Mary used a questioning technique several times over the three days her class was video-recorded as well as in her comments to students from her artifacts. Each of those instances was compared and grouped together. Later when they were compared to instances in Mary’s interview the instances of questioning became examples of Mary’s teacher discourse techniques that she had developed by trial and error over time.

As categories and subcategories emerged from the concept groupings, the researcher annotated these categories looking for the trends and patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The final list of concepts includes: teachers are aware and concerned about the power their words have on students; teacher concern leads teachers to search for more effective teacher discourse; teachers learned their teacher discourse primarily from fellow teachers, teacher
manuals, trial and error experiences, on-line sources and professional journals; teachers have been influenced by their teachers; and teachers lack confidence in some of their teacher discourse strategies.

**Summary**

This study investigated two elementary school teachers’ awareness of the impact of the discourse they used to create and shape classroom learning environments. This chapter proposed a qualitative case study using the constant comparative method and discourse analysis. Bandura’s self-efficacy theory provided the guiding theories. Participants included two elementary school teachers and their students. Triangulation and validation occurred through the combination of three sources: teacher interviews, classroom observations and artifacts that provided linguistic cues through teacher discourse with the students.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter contains the findings from teacher interviews, videotaped classroom instruction and classroom artifacts as they relate to the nature of teacher awareness regarding the power their words have on students. The findings are categorized into five themes: teacher concern regarding the power of their words, teachers searching for more effective teacher discourse, where teachers learn teacher discourse strategies, teachers have been influenced by the their own teachers’ discourse and teachers’ lack of confidence. Overall findings from this study suggest that teachers are aware and concerned about how their teacher discourse impacts students so much so that they search for new strategies to use. It further suggests that teachers who lack specific training in teacher discourse lack confidence in the teacher discourse they use. This lack of confidence can create anxiety in the teacher as well as open the possibility for problematic use of teacher discourse.

The names used for the two participating teachers in this study are pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Within the transcribed classroom observations, the letter T represents a teacher, the letter S represents a student and the letters Ss represent two or more students.

Participating Teachers: Background and Context

Two fourth-grade school teachers participated in this study. Amy, one of the subject teachers, is 47 years old and has been teaching in elementary school for 11 years. She attended an out-of-state private college but received her Tennessee elementary teaching
certificate after attending a local college. She teaches science and language arts and is currently enrolled in a master’s degree course of study. Amy’s personal education experience evolved from hating school and almost dropping out to ultimately embracing education and becoming a school teacher. Amy’s teachers modeled behaviors that ranged from strict to critical and she learned nothing about teacher discourse from her pre-service college classes. She learned most about effective teacher discourse strategies while working as an Outward Bound leader in the wilderness with at-risk students. She uses some teacher discourse methods from teachers’ manuals and on-line resources, but mostly, she uses common sense and depends on trial and error to determine effective methods of teacher discourse. She is very concerned about the influence of her words on her students; perhaps because her teachers influenced her so negatively. Fortunately for Amy, the words and actions of a horticulture teacher kept her in school, and later on, a professor recommended that she take education classes. Those experiences reinforced the positive experience of her third-grade teacher helping her recognize her writing strength. She wishes she knew more about teacher discourse and feels that observing other teachers would be helpful.

Amy is small in stature with a calm demeanor. Her teacher voice is calm and patient. Her classroom was well-lighted warm and comfortable. The classroom was not large and it was full. Not uncomfortably full, but full the way a space is that is expecting lots of activities to occur. The door opened into a hallway and one medium-sized window faced the front of the school. The students’ desks were in groups of four, all facing each other to form large four-part tables. A separate large table in the corner of the classroom held many shoe boxes containing plant experiments that the students were conducting. A tall shelf stood next to it containing a number of small boxes and assorted materials. From this shelf, the teacher
retrieved two of the games they played as the class was being video recorded. The back of
the classroom had a row of small square cubby holes where students placed materials such as
books or lunch boxes. There were hooks for jackets under the cubby holes. A table was
positioned in front of the cubby holes where papers were turned in and work books were
stacked. The teacher’s desk stood in the front corner. The other two walls were whiteboards
and bulletin boards and the bulletin boards were covered with posters displaying such things
as the parts of plants, mind-mapping models and types of sentences. Finally, one section of
the classroom was crowded with a couple of computers and a TV monitor on a high mobile
stand.

Students seemed to feel free to move around the classroom for anything that they
needed to do including discussions with other students. Each class that was video-recorded
was comprised of what appeared to be Caucasian students. One dark-skinned student was in
one of the three video-recorded classes. There were no apparent socio-economic differences
among the students or between the students and the teacher.

Mary, the second participating teacher, is 54 years old and teaches social studies and
language arts in fourth grade. She attended and obtained her Tennessee K-9 teaching
certificate from a local college. She has been teaching 31 years and currently teaches
Language Arts and Social Studies. Mary is the picture of the master teacher. It is not her
looks, but more her demeanor that conveys the poise of an experienced teacher. Mary is
accustomed to answering questions from younger teachers. In fact, during one of the
videotaped sessions a student-teacher was also observing the class. Mary’s credibility is also
evident as she has been a member of the state in-service team for many years.
When Mary recounted memories of her own education experience, she spoke slowly and deliberately. Mary has lived and worked in a close-knit community all her life. Her teachers were strict and mostly unsmiling. As with Amy, Mary did not learn her teacher discourse strategies through her pre-service education. She learned most of her teacher discourse strategies from fellow teachers in this close-knit community, through self-study, and through trial and error. She is afraid of the power she holds to influence her own students and she would like to be less strict and more nurturing. She was greatly influenced by her own teachers. Her teacher voice is strong, she likes to teach through the medium of stories, she worries sometimes that she does not teach as well as other teachers, and she is unusually anxious anytime she is out of school while school is in session.

The students in Mary’s classroom closely resembled the students in Amy’s class. The students seemed to feel free to move around the classroom to take care of anything that they needed to include discussing something with other students. Each class that was video-recorded was comprised of what appeared to be Caucasian students. One dark skinned student was in all three of the classes that were video-recorded. There were no apparent socio-economic differences among the students or between the students and teacher.

Mary’s classroom was a little bigger than Amy’s. Her door also opens into a hallway, with a medium-sized window on the opposite wall from the door. The student desks are arranged in two rows of desks. Each row is made up of a double row of desks facing each other. The front wall is covered with a white board and with a newer screen-like board used in conjunction with a computer. The teacher’s desk is in the front corner and that corner is filled with shelves full of binders and books. The wall with the window is lined with three computers and a large TV monitor on a high mobile cart. The back of the room holds a
couple of tables and a wall of cubbies with hooks underneath to hang jackets. There are bookcases full of books in that area as well. The wall with the door has a large bulletin board covered in social studies content and there are two small child-sized bean bag chairs.

**Constant Comparative Analysis: Emerging Themes**

**Teacher Concern Regarding the Power of Their Words**

In this study both teachers were concerned about the power their words could have on their students. The most concrete evidence of this concern is found in their own words. Both Mary and Amy stated very clearly that they were concerned about how their words influenced their students. Their concerns were also evident in the way they used praise, both specific and unspecific praise. Amy praised students frequently throughout her classes while Mary praised students at less frequent intervals. Specific evidence of their concern is found in the following sections where these two teachers describe searching for more effective teacher discourse and describe their lack of confidence in the teacher discourse they use. In an interview discussion, Amy expressed her concern this way:

Well, we are such an influence on our children. Sometimes I don’t think that I am but (pause to think). Some people say well no, no their family comes first but that is not all of them. (Amy was very serious.) There are times when they come to you and they really want some advice and they want you to talk to them and they are gonna take what you say and they are gonna use what you say. It really hits home; we really need to think. We really influence them in more ways than we think sometimes.

Later in the discussion Amy said,
Well, and we are only human too. Sometimes we say things. There are things that I wish I hadn’t said when I see the look on their face, their self-esteem. I try. I try hard ‘cause I know that affected me. When a teacher would put me down when I would try my best to do. So I really try to be careful with that but sometimes it’s hard. I mean when you think a child is not working to their potential too. And you know, how do you put that to them without putting them down (Amy looked as though she was feeling resigned). So. That’s a hard thing. Sometimes I am good at it and sometimes I am just terrible. Sometimes I just say the wrong thing and oh it is like oh why don’t you (I) just shut up.

In Amy’s third interview, she expressed concern that perhaps some of the things that she does to aid her students will harm them in the future.

They learn a lot during class, but they cannot get the answers if they have to write them down. But is that the real world thing? But, but am I doing them an injustice? I had another boy who could hardly read above first grade level but he made A’s because he could listen. And he was interested and I would read the test to him. So he didn’t have to worry about reading as long as he listened during discussion and I guess he watched television. And picked up on stuff like that too.

Mary also expressed her concern about how much influence her words have on her students. Mary said,

It (her influence over her students) scares me to think about it. I know teachers influence their students. Just like I said, my teachers influenced me even when I
started teaching. Now that worries me because of things that I have said. You know it can be the most innocent thing. You just don’t think about it.

Mary and Amy both show their awareness and concern regarding the influence their words have on students through their explanations of why they use unspecific praise. Unspecific praise was used both in class and in the artifacts collected from both Mary and Amy. Both teachers wrote unspecific praise as comments on corrected homework papers to give back to the students. Mary and Amy used words such as Good, Great, and Fantastic. When each teacher was asked what purpose these words served, both teachers indicated that they were simply trying to reach out to their students in a positive way.

In one of Amy’s science classes they were discussing the aftermath of a volcano eruption. The teacher wanted the students to think about what might happen to the environment in the years following the volcano eruption. As the discussion progressed, Amy used many generic words of praise directed at the students in general. She also praised specific students and specific contributions to the discussion. Amy applied this teacher discourse strategy throughout her teaching day as did Mary although somewhat less frequently.

In Mary’s class, the students and teacher were finding paragraphs that contained the answers to their questions.

T – No, now read the whole paragraph

S – Oh, okay.

T – Very good.

In the above example it may not be clear what the teacher is talking about when she says, “very good.” However, it is most likely that the teacher was simply reaching out to the
student in a positive way. The next example is also unspecific praise; Mary was trying to be positive with her students. The teacher was moving around the room. She patted one student on the shoulder.

T – Good job.

**Searching for More Effective Teacher Discourse**

Another element in the nature of Mary’s and Amy’s awareness of the power of their teacher discourse appears in their ongoing search for strategies to make their teacher discourse more effective. Mary’s and Amy’s concern about the power their words have on students led both teachers to search for more effective teacher discourse. Amy was searching for teacher discourse strategies that promote student participation; particularly by those students who are shy or intimidated in some other way. In one class she was searching for a way to manage student participation and sharing fairly while still accomplishing her teaching objectives. Amy struggles because she lacks teacher discourse strategies that aid her in helping her students focus without Amy’s constant verbal direction. In addition, she needs strategies to help her mediate and solve student arguing during group work, to build student confidence that allows them to work independently of the teacher’s constant assistance, and to guide the timing of when to address undesirable student behaviors. In the following excerpt Amy talked about her search for more effective discourse.

I am searching for a strategy to use with this group that talks all of the time. I feel like a broken record when I tell them to stop talking. And it is the same when they come into the classroom. It takes five or 10 minutes for them to get into the class and settle in and to get their agendas done. It is like why can’t they just do it? It is like I am searching for what is the trick. What is the thing here that is going to get this done
without me standing out there nagging? You know (when) we’re out in the hallway it is the same thing. Well there has got to be something that we can pull on them that oh yeah this is…I don’t know. Some leverage or some reward or something that is going to be worth it for them to do it (stop talking and focus on their agendas).

Mary’s search for teacher discourse strategies is similar to Amy’s in some ways but very different in other ways. Mary enjoys creating a new strategy and trying it out. She was searching for strategies that would enable her to be more nurturing. She was also searching for a teacher discourse strategy that would empower her to be less strict and still be comfortable in the process. She would like to be less strict and still accomplish the teaching objectives she set for her class. When she tries to be less strict, she does not feel that the students accomplish all that they should. Mary regularly tries new strategies that she devises herself to modify student behavior.

In Amy’s third interview she was asked to describe a problem that she wished she could find a teacher discourse strategy to solve. The following is one of the problems she described.

I have two little boys; they’re twins. And they are at a great loss for words and I know that in their little minds they’ve got it in there somewhere. But I guess I would like to learn the gift of asking the right question to get them to come up with what they know best, what they want to say.

Amy was trying the following strategy. She has a particular student who regularly comes to her desk to talk when he should be listening or working. She tells him that he knows the procedure of raising his hand and waiting for her to help him and that if he comes up to her desk she will have to ignore him.
And I tell Jon and he knows it; I am pretty honest with Jon, the way I treat him. I like the boy but I can only handle him coming up to me 20,000 times. I tell him that I am going to ignore him. (She tells him) “This is not an appropriate time to come and talk to me. You know the procedure. You stay at your seat and you raise your hand and if you keep popping up out of that seat and coming over to my desk when you are supposed to be doing something at your seat I am going to ignore you.” And so I guess that is a strategy.

Amy wants her students to participate in class and share their ideas and experiences. However, she has one class that enjoys sharing so much that Amy has difficulty managing a balance between the sharing and all the other classroom activities that need to take place.

Well I am thinking too about our high group; they will talk. They could talk the whole period. You would not get in a word. They have so many stories to tell. And their thing is they will raise their hand and wait to be called on and then say, ‘okay I have three things to say.’ So now my rule with them is now you have one thing to say and then you will raise your hand again and wait your turn and I’ll come back to you if we have time. So that is a strategy that I have to use with them.

Amy has a firm belief that when students are allowed to work with other students in a group setting they learn more than when they work alone. In one of her classes she is looking for a teacher discourse strategy to help her manage student conflicts. In the following excerpt Amy described her frustration with student arguing.

But I think that if you’re doing group activities and they are working in small groups (it should not be so difficult). That one rotation (pause) my reading group, they argue, they argue so much. I have tried different combinations and
there is always one group where they are not going to get anything done ‘cause they are just going to argue with each other and if I don’t go over there and work it out with them and it is every time. And I am supposed to be doing centers. I am supposed to be doing you know, differentiated learning and all of that. There was a big emphasis on centers last year; I haven’t heard anything about it this year but I know we’re suppose to keep that up.

Amy was also searching for a strategy to help her students calm down and focus on the intended classroom activities. She feels like she is nagging them too much.

I have two boys who can’t stop talking. I just have a couple extra desks and they have to go. I just point and you don’t even have to say anything and they know who it is.

Mary continually searches for new teacher discourse strategies to use in her class as well. Mary described a specific strategy she created herself and now uses with one of her students.

I have this child and every time some student says something, he has to come up to say something. He started that today, coming up to my desk to say something. I came up with this idea. I put a tally mark on sticky note. And I told him that he could talk to me three times an hour; any more than that and he would have to go out in the hall and sit on the bench. I said, ‘it is eight-thirty now, you can talk to me two more times before nine-thirty.’ I said, ‘any more than that and you’ll have to sit on the bench. Now that doesn’t count when you answer a question in class. That includes just talking.’ He didn’t push it.

At this point in the interview the researcher shared the video with Amy that showed Amy allowing the student to be the “knower.” Amy was excited when she watched this
A student has just read aloud to the class about endangered fish.

T – Okay pigmy means, like a small version of that animal and I don’t know what a magnum is. Does anybody know about magnums?

S – Yes, they had a magnum on the uh oh on Animal Planet it is like a, this green fish; it is grayish bluish.

T – You learn a lot watching Animal Planet.

In the following excerpt Amy described one of the strategies she uses intuitively to help her students.

There are certain times like yeah I could stop helping everybody else and go help this one child. She (Amy’s student) doesn’t think she can do anything. She’ll come and sit up at my desk; her and another boy. They’ll come and sit up at my desk they think they can’t do it by themselves. But yet they can sit there and read those questions to me and answer ‘em and make an A. Get that. It is just the fact that they are sitting there next to me and if they don’t get something they can ask me and they know that I am going to talk to them about it.

Although Mary would like to be less strict, she finds that she is uncomfortable with the things that happen when she is less strict and cannot accomplish as much as when she is stricter. She described her frustration and disappointment during a project she assigned.
Everyday I was asking what have you got done and where are you now and you need to hurry up and all this stuff. And now I find out that some of them were marking progress (on their cards) that they weren’t doing. And they’re in study hall now. Like Bobby had only done one thing because he is such a socialite and I said, ‘well your card says you were doing this. It wasn’t supposed to be on your card if you didn’t do it.’ That’s the way he was getting out of it. I had several do me that way and I was really surprised. But you know Lynn (another fourth grade teacher) does work with them like that all the time and she gets work out of them but I mean I am like how does she do that. We’ll do this again. But I know now who I don’t have to watch as much and who I have to not just ask, but have them show me their work.

The following is an excerpt from the class where Mary was directing students who were in different stages of the project discussed above.

T – Okay those of you who are not finished with your flow maps and have things to turn in to me go get your cards and line up at my desk.

T – Carl you go to the office. (The teacher had been asked to send this student to the office at an earlier time)

T – The rest of you get what you need.

The following excerpt comes from Mary’s interview and shows her frustration with a student that she feels she cannot reach verbally.

Just to be more nurturing because some times I think, I say “you shouldn’t do that” and I should be saying “tell me about the situation; what’s happening?” Except there are a couple I don’t do that with. They are going to lie to me anyway so. Yesterday, I was so frustrated I let Joe push me to the point that I had to send him to the office.
instead of just sending him to sit on the bench. And so I, that’s how I treat Joe now. I had Joe the year I taught third grade and I held him back. Now we have him in fourth grade. When I have Joe in social studies the first uh (sign of trouble) I just send him out.

Some kids you can just talk to ‘till and they understand and they get it and then some of them have to have a punishment or they don’t get it.

Some of the strategies that Mary uses in her classroom were discovered unexpectedly because she was trying to employ a more nurturing teaching method. Mary is now consciously trying to be even more nurturing.

I never pushed those (shy) children to speak up in class ‘cause I knew how I felt. And it was oh it had to be the first year I was teaching fourth grade with a concept board. (The concept board required that every student answer one of the assigned questions) But I thought man you know, I would always call on her first. So she could pick something (the question she wanted to answer) cause she was one of the lower ones and finally she got where she volunteered. Her mother could not believe it. And I thought now I should have nurtured more. Sometimes I think I wish instead of being too strict I wish I had nurtured more. You know and I try to do that more. To think about it more. Just a gentle nudge.

In Mary’s search for teacher discourse strategies she used a type of feedback not included in Hattie and Timperley’s (2008) feedback levels. She used general words of praise with no specific identification to engender goodwill with her students. Mary wrote Good, Great, Great, Good Job, Fantastic, Excellent and Better.
Amy also used a type of feedback that could be labeled “unspecific praise” and does not fit into a feedback level as prescribed by Hattie and Timperley (2008). This is the feedback referred to earlier as an attempt at reaching out to her students in a positive way. She drew smiley faces and used stickers, as well as writing words such as Good Job, Good, and Great.

I do pull from the teacher’s manual. I prefer to do like we’ve done this novel study. I have made up my own stuff to use along the way. I didn’t learn it from somebody; it’s trial and error…a lot of times I get up in front of the classroom I get an idea and I change the whole way that I am doing things. I do it all the time. I realize that some things are boring so I just change it.

In their searches for teacher discourse strategies to solve specific needs as well as their search for more effective teacher discourse, Mary and Amy tried different strategies. Some of those strategies worked and some did not. Most good teachers will always search for a more effective teacher discourse strategy; however, if those strategies are readily available the teacher can find the best strategy for the situation, use it and move on. If teacher discourse strategies are not readily available to the teacher, it may take longer to find a strategy or worse, the problem may remain unsolved.

**Teachers Lack Confidence**

Mary and Amy both lack confidence in their teacher discourse strategies and both teachers feel that their teacher training did not prepare them for teaching. Mary seemed particularly frustrated that her teacher training did not provide the guidance and experiences that she feels would have given her confidence as she worked in her early teaching years. Both teachers expressed the opinion that they believed other teachers taught better than they
did. Mary has resolved this feeling somewhat over the years. Both of these teachers apply some very effective teacher discourse strategies in their classrooms, specifically Mary’s questioning techniques and Amy’s focus on encouraging student participation. In both of these cases the teacher did not realize that she was using a recognized teacher discourse strategy. The danger is that if the teachers began using these strategies without realizing their value, they may just as easily stop using them. In this case, the lack of teacher awareness can result in previously effective instruction becoming less effective over time.

Amy uses strategies in her classroom to help her students with their immediate learning needs but she is not sure whether these strategies will aid or hinder the students’ learning in the long run. The following is an example of Amy’s concern.

You know the tests now have the critical thinking questions. They (the students) have to make predictions and make inferences. All of that is on our test now. Well somebody that doesn’t know this child could read an answer and say that it is wrong. But I know the child and I know what they are trying to say and then I’ll give them some credit for it. If you talked to the child they could give you the answer if they were allowed to tell you. And that is what I do. They’ll sit back there at that table with me and we will talk about that science test instead of making them write some of those answers. Because then I’ll know whether they really do understand it or not.

And, but is that the real world thing, you know is that doing them an injustice? ‘Cause not every teacher is going to sit down and do it that way.

Amy described another student that she had had in the past who could only read at first grade level. But because he was interested in learning science, he participated in class and listened to the discussions. She read the tests to him and graded him on what he knew
separate from his lack of reading skills. Using this method, the student achieved good grades in science. But, again she questioned whether she was doing the right thing.

Amy intuitively does what she feels is best for her students but she is not always confident in the strategies she uses. In the following excerpt, Amy’s defense of using threats to manage students illustrates her lack of confidence in that strategy.

They (Amy’s students) enjoy the projects and the experiments a lot of that fun learning. They have given me that feedback. They like our class because they (classes) are fun. They tell me, “You make learning fun for us.” But there is that fine balance. Here this week we are doing stuff with electricity and we’re doing stuff with static electricity. They can lose it; they can get real out of hand real fast with stuff. And so you gotta bring them back in. And so sometimes it is like, okay if you all can’t stop talking when I start talking, we won’t do this kind of stuff. I use threats and I don’t necessarily like that kind of stuff because I can’t just let them do what they want.

Mary was frustrated because she felt that while her pre-service teacher training provided her with content knowledge, the training failed to provide the classroom skills for teaching that knowledge to the students; there was no teacher discourse training. Mary wanted to know how to teach; what to say to her students. She talked about her lack of confidence this way, ...

...did we do experiments or talk about how to teach science? No, we just did science projects. You know, nothing and no one said “now you’re going to get this book and you’re going to have to teach this.” I didn’t even see a teacher’s manual until I student taught. For awhile I thought that I had to be like everybody else. But then I
realized that I could do things my way. And I still worry that others (other teachers) do so much better than I do.

When Mary was student teaching her supervising teacher lacked confidence in her own social standing. This kind of situation does not inspire confidence in a new teacher. My teacher (an African-American) was a good teacher, but you could tell she was scared of the white people. She was afraid that she would do or say something that would make somebody mad and I could tell it.

Mary’s lack of confidence in her student teacher training contributes to a lack of confidence today. Because Mary feels her learning was limited during her student teacher experience, she works to ensure her own student teachers do not suffer the same shortcomings. She now hosts many student teachers and uses her first-hand knowledge about their requirements and experiences. Mary’s student teachers encounter an experience different from her own.

...like my student teacher, was sent out to do an observation for two weeks. And she got to do a little class with the students this semester before her student teaching begins. So she has gotten her feet wet and the kids know her. We’ve gotten used to each other instead of her coming in a week and then start teaching my class. And I admire that. And they have to keep portfolios now and all that. We didn’t have to do any of that. I can remember we had the block which you took the end of junior year and part of that was three days a week you went to the school. But you didn’t get to observe the teacher. You were more like the teacher’s slave you had to grade all the papers and took students who couldn’t do anything and work with them. And that was good but what would have benefitted me was to sit there and watch the teacher.
Where Teachers Learn Teacher Discourse

Examining the nature of teacher awareness regarding the power of their words includes examining where teachers learned the teacher discourse they currently use with their students. The teachers in this study learned teacher discourse primarily from other teachers, teacher manuals, journals, on-line resources, and trial and error. Neither of the two teachers in this study remembered being taught teacher discourse during their pre-service training in college.

Amy learned some teacher discourse strategies from workshops and through trial and error. She uses group work because she experienced it herself as a student in some of her college classes. She believes that it is easier to learn from peers in a group rather than traditional lecture or reading a book. In the following example, Amy talked about where she learned the teacher discourse she uses today.

I didn’t get anything on classroom management or anything about how to speak with kids in college. I think there have been some workshops that I’ve gotten to learn a few tools or tricks to use but I would just say trial and error; learned the hard way. And I think they (colleges) can do better than that. We never studied any of the things you said. No student identity, no anything.

Amy credited her college professors with requiring that the pre-service teachers work in groups. She felt that she learned more during group work because they shared their ideas and solutions. Amy is adamant about having her students work in groups.

Amy also learned some teacher discourse strategies on-line. The classes she is taking for her master’s in education degree have inspired her to use on-line resources more frequently.
And Mailbox magazine has some real good ideas for teaching. It isn’t a magazine; it’s on-line; but you can get extra stuff off that where teachers share. And then you can talk to somebody back and forth too on-line.

Although Amy felt that she did not learn about teacher discourse in her college classes, she did learn from her summer job with Outward Bound and her experience with those students.

So the type of classes I took were curriculum, and you know just the, the core classes you take as an undergraduate not a lot of practical stuff that I could use in the classroom. Maybe how to write a lesson plan. It might have helped with that. It did not help with how to handle kids; nothing about what to say. I got more of that from going and working with Outward Bound; I was a leader with Outward Bound. Of course I gained much more knowledge doing it (working with students) out there with 12 kids. In Outward Bound there was more emphasis on people skills. So I was working with these kids out of their element, you know.

When Amy taught in Santa Fe she was allowed to design some of the curriculum herself. This allowed Amy to gain more knowledge and experience with the trial and error method.

So then I get into a program in Santa Fe in a little school called (school name). (It was) A small private school (and I) had my own little classroom of about 10 kids. No textbooks; it was all like arts and whatever you wanted it to be. You kinda developed your own curriculum. You had to teach reading and math but you could do other stuff too. We did, I did a lot of like theater stuff with them like music and arts and puppets and things.
In one of Amy’s interviews she was asked whether she had had any in-service training or other training that addressed teacher discourse. The following is her reply.

I guess as far as in-services or trainings, it is hit or miss. Half of the in-services that I have been to have been worth going to. If I paid to go to something like a hundred bucks or a hundred and fifty bucks for an all day workshop, now those are good. ‘Cause usually I get a lot out of those. Like I’ve been to differentiated classroom instruction class cause I felt like that’s where I need to get better. But I haven’t had anything like that (teacher discourse) in all of my college and in-service. That’s something I had to learn on my own. So I think there should be more student teaching at different grade levels. I feel like even now I, I am still learning.

When Amy was asked where she learned the strategy she shared with her class during one segment in the video-recording of her classroom, she said the following.

Oh yes, I reminded them to look back at what they had read and scan it. I got that from the teacher’s manual. You know the curriculum we use, I think our textbooks there are good. There are some really good ones out now and I have really gotten some good ideas from the manuals.

Sharing notes from Amy’s video-recording transcript, the interviewer pointed out that Amy identified students as good thinkers. Amy was unaware that identifying her students in a positive role was a teaching strategy. Amy evidently identified her students as good thinkers in the following excerpt intuitively. The teacher had been telling the class how they must think critically and the class was discussing what might happen after a volcanic eruption.

T- What might we see 10 years after a volcano erupted?
Ss- (Many students called out) It would be black. Scary. etc.

S- Some um plants could um grow back.

T- See you are critical thinkers. Good thinking, Jon. Why do you think that plants might grow back?

Intuitively, Amy allows students to be the knower. Amy had no idea that this was a recognized teaching strategy. When the teacher allows a student to share something in the role of being the authority of that knowledge, that student is the knower. In the following example, Amy allowed each of these students to be the knower. They told her the solution that they had used before and they could use again in this situation.

At this point during the class, the teacher had some pens that tell the student if their answer is correct when used with a set of cards. However, the teacher did not have enough pens for each student to have a pen to themselves.

T – Now you know that I don’t have enough pens. I’ve almost have enough but I haven’t collected enough for the whole class. (Students volunteered solutions).

S – You have to set one at each table (other students chimed in with the same or similar solutions).

T – That is what we did last time isn’t it?

S – (Generally made noises of agreement) yeah, etc.

T – Alright then. A couple of directions before we start: (At this time, the teacher passed out the pens one to each table or group of four desks).

Amy lets her students work in groups, allows them to share in class, paraphrases their answers, plays academic games and shares her personal experiences because she thinks these
methods promote learning in her class. These methods developed primarily from the normal adult human reactions to children and from recommendations in teacher’s manuals.

Another strategy Amy learned from the teacher manual was shared with the students concerning their impending science test. The teacher explained that it is better to study a little each day before a big test rather than trying to learn all of the information in one sitting.

T – Okay. So hopefully you know where that study guide is and you have already started studying. ‘Cause we know that when we have a big test, a chapter test, we can’t learn it all in one night. Right? We can’t remember all that in one night. So you, that is why I tell you on Monday that we are having a test on Thursday so that gives you Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; three days to start your studying so hopefully you have already started studying for it at night.

Teachers also learn teacher discourse from new programs implemented by the school district. Both Amy and Mary used feedback they learned from the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) program that their school participated in this year (Hall, Schmidt, & Wood, 1999). The new ICU program being implemented in the school district in 2010-2011 has affected the feedback on returned student work. The teacher also may give the feedback verbally in the class. The other change that has occurred is that teachers write comments like, “ICU” or “Correct in ICU” meaning that they should get some help from the designated ICU helper. Amy and Mary both used “Correct and return,” “Do over,” “Correct in ICU” and “ICU.”

In Mary’s third interview she was asked where she learned the teacher discourse she uses today.
…I was surrounded by good teachers. They helped me and taught me how to teach. I taught Title One at the time and then third grade and then first. That principal liked to move teachers around a lot. At the end of every year you had to ask where you were going to be the next year. There were so many people (teachers) that were really good and reached out to me and helped me. And then when I came here I was with a good teacher who really helped me. And then I felt like I was developing my own style.

When Mary graduated from college she felt that she was not prepared to teach school. As a student in the teacher training program she was able to practice what she would be teaching; however, she was not able to practice how she would be teaching.

I don’t think I was prepared because we took math for the elementary school teacher. So what did we do? We sat and worked problems. Science for the elementary school teacher, did we do experiments or talk about how to teach science? No we just did science projects. You know, nothing and no one said “now you’re going to get this book and you’re going to have to teach this.” I didn’t even see a teacher’s manual until I student taught.

Mary has also worked for the state for the last 10 years as a State In-service Provider and they work mostly on the weekend and during the summer. In this role, Mary could not think of a time that they actually talked about teacher discourse or anything of a similar nature.

I do get good ideas from the state work but no I don’t think we talked about those things (teacher discourse).

In reviewing the video-recording of Mary’s classroom activities, Mary was asked where she learned her questioning technique. Mary replied,
Really, I didn’t realize that. I did not realize that. I must have just developed it because I didn’t even know I do it. I never studied it.

Mary’s questioning technique empowers the students to assume responsibility for their own learning. The students find the answers and consequently build their self-efficacy. The following is an example of Mary’s questioning.

T – (The teacher read aloud from the student’s paper) French, English, Spanish explorers. Are there more?

S – (Mumbling) I don’t know.

T – Where will you find out?

S – Our book (Teacher nodded and handed the paper back.)

Mary also used questioning in her feedback on student work. This kind of feedback challenges students to figure out why their work was not properly completed. She wrote: (a) “Why isn’t this written in cursive?” (b) “Why is it so sloppy?” (c) “Why is this not in paragraph form or written in cursive?” (d) “Why didn’t you correct all the questions?”

When asked where she learned most about what to say to her students, this was Mary’s response:

(In her first year of teaching) I reverted back to what my teachers did. I had good teachers. Then teacher’s I worked with. And there weren’t any such thing as mentor teachers. They just put you (new teachers) in there (the classroom). You know we didn’t have mentor teachers. They were all mentor teachers, you just went and asked them something and they told you how. For a while I thought that I had to be like everybody else. But then I realized that I could do things my way. And I still worry
that others do so much better than I did. I don’t think that a teacher can be prepared just from college classes to be a teacher.

As an experienced teacher, Mary has come to prefer creating her own methods and strategies to communicate with her students. Many of her teacher discourse strategies came from trial and error experimentation.

I do pull from the teacher’s manual. I prefer to do like we’ve done this novel study. I have made up my own stuff to use along the way. I didn’t learn it from somebody; it’s trial and error…a lot of times I get up in front of the classroom I get an idea and I change the whole way that I am doing things. I do it all the time. I realize that some things are boring so I just change it.

Trial and error and experience guides Mary’s teacher discourse. Mary believes that different students respond differently to disciplinary action. She has one student who frequently misbehaves. When he begins to misbehave, she just sends him to the hallway bench because her past experience with him is that none of her other strategies work. She said that,

Some kids you can talk to and they understand and they get it and then some of them have to have a punishment or they don’t get it. I have one poor child I have worked with for three years. I just have to set him out when he gets started. He doesn’t respond well to talking.

Intuition and experience have led Mary to make the following change in her class. She no longer stops class to discipline a student.

But you know I have gotten to where and I have done this for the last couple of years (when a student is causing a disruption) I don’t want to have to stop class entirely
because I think it punishes the rest of the kids. But if it’s you warn them and they keep doing it or something I just sit them facing the wall or sometimes I just tell them go over there and stand for a few minutes. And that way there’re still hearing what I am teaching and I can deal with it in a reasonable length of time but I can put a stop to it now. Oh they hate standing over by the wall. There was a time I, for a long time I just took care of it right then.

A strategy that Mary used back in her early years was learned through the experience and is described in the next example. When asked about changes she may have made over time in her approach to teaching, Mary’s response provided evidence of the changing times but it also provided evidence of the risk of negative results developing from trial and error or accidental learning.

I think you do (change). I can’t remember specifically, but I am sure I have. I have gotten less strict. A lot less. But that (Mary’s strict years) was a different time. There was no taking playtime. If you were that bad you got a whopping. Of course, you had to have a witness. Here’s a funny story. So I inherited a room with a broken paddle. The paddle was broken; it was split right in two. So I just shoved it in a drawer. This was my first year there with all those little first graders. So I was looking for something one day and I laid that paddle out on the desk. Well those kids thought that I had broken the paddle on somebody. Honey that was when you had 38 first graders. I didn’t have to use that paddle all year after I laid that paddle out. Those kids were afraid to get out of their seats. I learned. I did it every year after that. I just laid the paddle out.
Mary is good at preparing her students for transitions from one place to another. The following is a strategy Mary said she learned from one of her former teachers. In this situation, the students were lined up at the door.

T - Jon, do we talk in the hallway?
S – (Loudly) No!
T – Jack, do we talk in the hallway?
S – No
T – Alright, let’s go without talking.

Although she has not gone back to school, Mary has continued to work on her teaching skills and knowledge.

I do not have my master’s. I like to say if being there and actual experience counted toward your master’s I would have mine. But I read a lot of educational journals. I do a lot of the in-service for the state. I have learned a lot from all of that.

Teacher discourse learned and developed by the teacher over time or through trial and error can be very effective, just as Mary’s questioning technique is very effective. However, some teacher discourse can appear effective but actually be detrimental, like laying out the broken paddle to improve discipline.

**Experiencing Teacher Discourse from a Student Perspective**

Another element in the nature of teacher awareness of the power of their words that came to light in this study was that today’s teachers were influenced by the teacher discourse of their own teachers. Amy and Mary were very much influenced by the teacher discourse used by their teachers. According to Amy, she hated school. Surprisingly, it was positive teacher influence that has guided her to where she is today.
My third grade teacher thought I was the most creative writer there ever was. She would put my work on the wall and she would brag about me and I’d get to read my stories out loud. That was awesome.

Amy also said that having her writing skills identified by her third grade teacher provides confidence today as she uses those skills in her masters’ classes.

Amy learned to love science in her seventh grade science class. She still loves science and is a science teacher. The teacher made it fun and interesting without letting the class get out of control. Instead of memorization he helped Amy make sense of what she was learning.

The teachers I remember took interest in the students and in what the students had to say. They created a fun learning environment. Like I had Mr. C., my seventh grade science teacher; he was in a portable. His room looked like the zoo or one of the, uh like Ms. Frizzle, you know the book. He was that kind of teacher. And that was probably where I started loving science was about that time. ‘Cause he was so interesting and he made it so fun and interesting to learn science. Now that was seventh grade; science is getting kind of hard then. He wouldn’t let kids mess around and stuff, but he just sparked the learning and just made school make a lot more sense instead of just memorize stuff and taking tests. Those kinds of days I don’t really remember much about. I can’t remember like what he did or said that made it so interesting, except that he was interested in the students and listened to us.

Amy was also influenced in a positive way by a horticulture teacher who recognized Amy’s interest in the subject. He introduced her to Future Farmers of America (FFA), advised her to get into the vocational program and helped her to find a job. Amy believes that
she would have dropped out of school if the horticulture teacher had not provided her with an alternative avenue to graduation.

Amy hated school so much she never considered being a teacher until her professor identified to her that she would be a good teacher. In the next example, Amy tells how another teacher guided her into the field of teaching.

I never even thought about teaching until I had gone through all of my college. I had gotten almost to a horticulture degree and had all that behind me and then I went toward environmental sciences and I, there was a professor who said to me that he thought I would be a good teacher and asked me to take some classes and so that’s what I did. So my last year in college that’s where I went.

Mary still feels the influence of her third grade teacher. In third grade, Mary’s class was moved to the basement of an old building and Mary was afraid of the seventh and eighth graders who also attended class in the basement. Mary was further terrified of the strict third-grade teacher to whom she had been assigned. Mary said,

In third grade we were in the old building. It was built in 1913. Well we were in the basement. And so third grade I had Ms. Jackie. She was just a trip. Everybody was scared of her. What I remember about that year was we were in the basement with the seventh and eighth graders because they had added a teacher that year and somebody had to move downstairs. So it was scary enough! Then I had her (Miss Jackie); it is a wonder I didn’t have a nervous breakdown. I remember for one thing she had fun things set up for us to do. That is one thing they did. They didn’t call them centers or anything like that but they had fun stuff set up for us to do. She had us oil painting. Well in the basement and the fumes, I passed out and they sent me home. They didn’t
do that; I mean send children home back then either. You were there, you know. She (Ms. Jackie) came by my house after school. Well by then I was feeling okay. I was up watching television. She got all over Momma for not taking me back to school. I was like ‘dang’. I still (worry about missing school) even to this day.

Mary was sincerely affected by her teacher’s words. She is anxious today if she is not in the school building when school is in session.

I took a personal leave day last spring and I saw one of my students’ moms and she said something about me being out of school. I am still afraid I’ll run into somebody.

I am 54 years old. I can be here and not in school. I have five personal days. You know.

Mary likes to use stories to teach history. She learned this technique from her seventh grade history teacher. Mary remembered his stories were so interesting that even the students who did not like history listened. The history teacher told stories in such a way that the students felt that he was just talking with them. Consequently, Mary is continuously searching for more stories to use in her class.

Mary had some early success using this story-telling strategy. In her early years teaching first grade she was aware that there would likely be a question about Martin Luther King Jr. on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). So she told her students about the experiences that her father had in Memphis the day that Dr. King died. She also told them of her experiences as a child in the Nashville stores. As a result of employing this story-telling strategy, Mary’s students knew the answers to the TCAP questions about Martin Luther King Jr.
**Research Questions Answered**

The research questions for this study are, what is the nature of teacher awareness of the impact their words have on students? How do background experiences, prior academic experiences, and education influence teacher discourse? This study reveals that teachers are aware and concerned about the impact their words have on students. The concern teachers feel about the impact their words have on students has led these two teachers to search for strategies to improve their teacher discourse. The two participating teachers did not learn teacher discourse strategies in their pre-service teacher training but from other teachers, teacher manuals, educational journals, on-line resources, and through trial and error. They were also influenced by their own teachers. And finally, because these teachers are aware and concerned about the impact their words have on students despite their limited training, they lack confidence in their teacher discourse.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of the Findings

This chapter provides a summary of the study, followed by conclusions and recommendations for future research. The subject, teacher discourse, demands to be studied because of its dominant role in classroom instruction and its potential impact on student achievement. Several authors agree that teacher discourse is a significant influence in the lives of students (Denton, 2007; Diffily & Sassman, 2006; Dweck, 2006; Hanrahan, 2004; Johnston, 2004; McEachern et al., 2008; Moorman & Weber, 1989; Nesbit & Philpott, 2002; Paul & Colucci, 2000; ). Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory provided the theoretical framework for this study.

The social cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (1997) describes student self-efficacy similar to Johnston’s (2004) description of student agency. In both cases the authors proposed the kinds of experiences that affect student self-efficacy and student agency. Bandura (1997) stated that a student’s self-efficacy is influenced by personal experiences; vicarious experiences, particularly modeling by peers; verbal and social persuasion; and physiological and emotional status. In the classroom a teacher can control student experiences, student relationships with their peers, the conversations that take place between students, and the environment of the classroom (Johnston, 2004). In other words, teachers,
through the power of their teacher discourse, can significantly influence a student’s self-efficacy.

In order to study teacher discourse a qualitative case study was used. This approach required the researcher to collect data on teacher discourse within the natural setting of a classroom. In order to explore teacher discourse that shapes a learning environment without interfering with the natural setting (Merriam, 1998), this research employed methods that build from discourse analysis (Huckins, 2004; Rex & Schiller, 2009) and constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In this investigation, the case study format was appropriate to obtain information and gather data in context. The concept of a qualitative case study design for research enables researchers to gain insight and information about the participants by probing into the natural setting (Merriam, 1998). Participants in this study were two classroom teachers and their students. The pseudonyms Mary and Amy were used in place of the teachers’ names to ensure that the teachers’ privacy was maintained. Audio recordings of interviews with the teachers, video recordings of classroom observations, written artifacts and field notes provided the raw data to analyze within the context of the classroom.

The questions designed to examine teacher discourse in this study was: what is the nature of teacher awareness of the impact their words have on students? how do background experiences, prior academic experiences, and education influence teacher discourse? The major themes evolving from these questions were:

1. Are teachers aware of the impact their words have on students?

2. What actions result from teacher awareness of the impact their words have on students?
3. Where do teachers learn the teacher discourse they use in the classroom?
4. What are the consequences for teachers when they have not studied teacher discourse?
5. Were these teachers influenced by their own teachers?

**Awareness and Concern about Teacher Discourse**

Both teachers in this study were aware of the power of their words in the classroom and routinely searched for strategies to ensure their words influenced students in a positive way. They were both motivated by the new awareness they gained through this study and would clearly welcome specific training regarding strategies for employing effective teacher discourse while reducing the incidence of ineffective teacher discourse. Their level of motivation and related frustration with their lack of training in this area cannot be discounted in recognizing the potential they see for improving student performance. Awareness of the power of teacher discourse is the first step in being an effective teacher (Rex & Schiller, 2009; Roskos & Boehlen, 2001).

Several researchers have recommended that all teachers should investigate their own teacher discourse in order to improve student achievement (Christenson, 2004; Manke, 1997; Rex & Schiller, 2009; Rosko & Boehlen, 2001; Wells, 1996;). According to Cazden (1988), teachers must think about communicating in the classroom because that is the basic purpose of schools. She advocates that teachers think more about communications that are not consciously planned. Denton (2008) also expressed concern that teachers are not aware of the power their discourse has on students. Teachers who use discourse in a negative manner are many times unaware of the potential affect their words and actions might have on students (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002).
According to Kaplan and Owings (2004), Mary’s and Amy’s concern about their influence on their students is warranted. The effectiveness of teachers influences the dropout rate as well as passing or failing grades. Teachers also control the educational practices in their classroom that lead to learning (Kaplan & Owings, 2004). Further, Paul and Colucci (2000) indicated that a person’s experiences as a student will shape and control what one learns and whether one learns. Further, teachers are susceptible to employing subtle emotional abuse, particularly when they feel overwhelmed (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002).

**Searching for more Effective Teacher Discourse**

It would seem a reasonable assumption that teachers want to teach their students effectively and will employ the most effective teacher discourse skills they possess. The more they know about effective teacher discourse, the more they can use. The teachers in this study were both searching for effective teacher discourse approaches to use in the various situations they encounter in their classrooms.

Amy was concerned about how her words affected her students in various difficult situations so she was searching for more effective teacher discourse. She felt that she lacked the ability to communicate effectively to students who were not performing to their potential without resorting to demeaning language. At times Amy felt she had to threaten her students to prevent them from disrupting class. Another challenge was when she arranged for her students to work in groups. In one class, she said it didn’t matter who worked with whom; it was a constant argument. She said that she is searching for a strategy to solve this problem. She also felt the time pressure of not completing everything that she thought should be accomplished in a day. The third challenge for which Amy needs a strategy is motivating her students to listen and get busy. At times she has felt like a broken record repeating directions.
She said it takes them 5-10 minutes to get into the classroom and get their agendas done and she worries that she nags them too much.

Amy’s fourth significant challenge concerns a set of twins in her class. They are very quiet and rarely share or speak at all in class. Amy would like some effective strategies to help these boys open up and share their stories as does the rest of the class. Amy’s final challenge is that she uses some oral testing with a couple of her students. She worries that by doing this she is in someway doing them an “injustice” because other teachers and “the real world” may not give them this advantage.

Mary has taught in public elementary school for a long time and through her continued self-education has become more comfortable and confident in her teacher discourse strategies and solutions for problems. But she too expressed a concern and searches for more effective teacher discourse strategies. She is a strict teacher. She would like to be more nurturing and less strict. Unfortunately, in her attempts at being less strict she was uncomfortable and felt that she could not get enough teaching accomplished in a day. She worried at times that she was not as good a teacher as others.

**Where Teachers Learn Teacher Discourse**

When teachers have limited training in the area of teacher discourse they learn teacher discourse primarily from other teachers, teacher manuals, educational journals, on-line resources, and trial and error. According to Amy, she learned most of her teacher discourse skills through trial and error working with the at-risk students in the Outward Bound program. Currently, she finds suggestions in the teacher manuals and on-line. Mary learned most of her teacher discourse skills from more experienced teachers during her early
years of teaching. She now enjoys trying her own ideas and testing them through trial and error. She also gains insights from her work as a state in-service provider.

Teachers who have not been trained in teacher discourse strategies could unknowingly use teacher discourse that is detrimental to students. In a survey conducted in a small alternative school, 88% of the students responded that they had been psychologically maltreated (Whitted & Dupper, 2008).

**Teachers Influenced by Their Teachers’ Discourse**

Both of the participating teachers expressed concern about the power and influence they possess in their role as the teacher relative to their students. Both teachers were influenced in their student years by their own teachers’ words. Many times students see their teacher as all-knowing; consequently, whatever a teacher says to a student is fact (Paul & Smith, 2000). Amy’s third grade teacher identified her strength as a writer; an identity she claims and is thankful for today. Her seventh grade science teacher sparked Amy’s love of science and her horticulture teacher guided her into a vocational program that Amy believes saved her from dropping out of high school. Additionally, a college professor recommended that she take education classes, something Amy had never considered because she hated school. Today Amy believes she is a good writer and she loves being a science teacher.

Mary’s third grade teacher was critical of Mary missing school and today Mary is unusually anxious about being away from school when it is in session. On a more positive note, her seventh grade history teacher promoted Mary’s love of history and use of stories for learning.
Teacher Lack of Confidence

The two teachers who participated in this study are experienced successful teachers. They both meet the standards for highly qualified as required by national standards. They are good at what they do and yet they both expressed a lack of confidence in their teacher discourse and worry about how they influence their students. They are unsure and searching for strategies to modify undesirable student behaviors as well as encourage positive student behaviors and academic achievement. Amy has made some effective modifications for some of her students yet worries that she is doing them an injustice.

Mary’s and Amy’s Teacher Discourse

Not all teachers teaching today have had training in the most effective way to talk with their students. The two teachers participating in this study had no teacher training concerning how they should communicate with their students. Despite this challenge, they employed effective teacher discourse in a manner that improves student achievement and would employ more if they had guidance as to what effect their words were having on their students.

When Mary’s and Amy’s teacher discourse is compared to the requirements for effective teacher discourse described by the authors and researchers in Chapter II of this research study, both teachers mostly used effective teacher discourse (Denton, 2007; Diffily & Sassman, 2007; Johnston, 2004; Moorman & Weber, 1989). Mary used effective teacher discourse in her classroom. She and her classroom were warm, welcoming and accessible to her students. Her method of questioning was particularly effective. With her questions, Mary was able to lead her students to become responsible for their work and build their self-efficacy. Mary used enhanced access (Hanrahan, 2004), specific praise (Brookhart, 2008;
Hattie & Timperley; Johnston, 2004; Moorman & Weber, 1989), prepared her students for transitions (Denton, 2007; Johnston, 2004), gave clear directions and re-directions (Denton, 2007; Diffily & Sassman, 2007; Johnston, 2004; Moorman & Weber, 1989), generalized strategies (Johnston, 2004) and provided students a modicum of control (Johnston, 2004). She also enabled her students to be problem-solvers (Johnston, 2004). Mary’s method of questioning was particularly strong. Her questions made students responsible for their own learning and made them more independent, which according to Bandura (1997) builds their self-efficacy. The teacher used her questions to guide the students in finding their own answers.

During the video-recorded classroom instruction, Amy used effective teacher talk. She and her classroom resembled Mary’s in that it was warm, welcoming and accessible to her students (Hanrahan, 2004). She was very comfortable letting her students be the knowers, in control of their learning (Johnston, 2004). She routinely paraphrased to help her students clarify their thoughts (Denton, 2008; Johnston, 2004). Amy was comfortable admitting if she made an incorrect statement during classroom discussions and she invited her students to provide corrections (Johnston, 2004; Moorman & Weber, 1989). She connected her students to past learning, identified students as good thinkers, gave clear directions, recognized partial answers, generalized strategies for her students, provided specific praise and used prompting questions.

Amy was particularly effective at access-enhancement and promoting participation through sharing in her class, which builds and strengthens the learning community and promotes student interest and achievement (Hanrahan, 2004; Johnston, 2004; Maloch, 2005; Mohr, 1998; Pianta et al., 2008). Shared humor builds rapport and makes the class enjoyable.
as it builds the learning community and enhances accessibility (Hanrahan, 2004; Johnston, 2004; Maloch, 2005; Mohr, 1998).

**Implications for Educators**

Teacher discourse is a subject that belongs at the forefront of teacher pre-service training, in the repertoire of the curriculum and instructional coach, in the in-service schedules provided within the school districts, as well as teacher workshops. Mary’s and Amy’s lack of confidence in their teacher discourse connects directly to their lack of training in teacher discourse. Amy worried that she was not providing instructional differentiation. She worried that she was unjust to the students she allowed to take tests orally as the students she allowed to sit by her desk to take their tests. Had she studied teacher discourse, she might have realized that she was applying differential instruction and her actions would have been held in high esteem.

The complexity of the classroom, including the chemistry between individual students, their experiences and the teacher. combine to create a complex dynamic. Each day and each group of students have a volatile dynamic that cannot be predicted. Consequently, no teacher can accurately anticipate and prepare for all the possibilities that could occur in a given class. With this unpredictability, teachers who are trained and practiced in the various elements of effective teacher discourse will have the greatest chance of providing what is most appropriate for their students. This speaks to the need for school administrators to maintain an up-to-date professional library and a teacher discourse expert with enhanced accessibility to teachers.

The state of Tennessee is implementing a new evaluation system for teachers. Half of the evaluation is based on student performance. The other half of the evaluation is called
observation. One local Tennessee school system is using a portion of the observation section to provide a reflective element for the teachers. Training teacher evaluators on effective teacher discourse and discourse analysis would be a powerful tool for both the teachers and the evaluators. Video-recorded classes would provide the documentation to help both the evaluator and the teacher identify the strengths of the teacher and opportunities for improving teacher impact on students. The evaluator’s knowledge of effective teacher discourse would provide the support needed by all teachers (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002; Wragg et al., 2000).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research should assess teacher training in the area of teacher discourse. Considering that the participating teachers involved in this study experienced the majority of their teacher training 20 or more years ago, it would be beneficial to study younger teachers’ awareness of the power teacher discourse can have over students. Investigations into pre-service teacher training curricula would be helpful in providing a baseline of what level of teacher discourse to expect from new teachers and guide school administrators to effectively design and plan in-service training in this area.

Since this study examined two female fourth grade teachers in one small rural elementary school, the study should be expanded with further studies examining teacher awareness of the impact of teacher discourse conducted in kindergarten and first grade as well as middle school and high school. Additionally, studies should be conducted in larger and more urban schools and include male teachers.

Finally, schools such as the local school system noted earlier are adding reflective analysis for teachers in their teacher evaluation system. A study comparing the benefits of
teacher discourse analysis to other reflective analysis available to teachers could be beneficial.

Conclusions

The theory generated by this study is that teachers who have not received training in the subject of effective teacher discourse will have less confidence and fewer developed skills to employ effective teacher discourse strategies. Further, teachers who lack this training may have learned effective teacher discourse intuitively or from others, but they will nonetheless lack the more comprehensive knowledge, skills and confidence specific teacher training can provide. Although the conclusions from this study cannot be generalized to all teachers, they provide insight into teacher awareness of their discourse in the classroom and provide a starting point for further research.

The teachers who participated in the study were aware that their words had an impact on their students. This awareness was most clearly evident through their interviews. Mary, for example, expressed that she was “afraid” of the influence she holds over her students. Their awareness was evident too in the way they related to their students; the feedback they gave students, the positive way they reached out to students and in their search for more effective teacher discourse strategies.

The teachers in this study were searching for strategies to improve learning in specific classroom situations. Amy was searching for strategies that would alleviate the constant bickering when her students worked in groups, encourage students to listen and focus on their work without teacher threats, allow student sharing and still meet objectives of the day and encourage students to participate in class who rarely participate. Mary was searching for
teacher discourse strategies that would allow her to be less strict and more nurturing and still accomplish the day’s teaching objectives.

Both teachers in this study were influenced as students by their own teachers’ discourse. Amy’s third grade teacher identified her strength as a writer; an identity she claims and is thankful for today. Her seventh grade science teacher sparked Amy’s love of science and her horticulture teacher guided her into a vocational program that Amy believes saved her from dropping out of school. Mary’s teacher was critical of her missing school and today Mary is unusually anxious about being away from school when it is in session. Her seventh grade history teacher’s use of stories inspired Mary’s love of history and drives her own search for stories to use in her history lessons.

One element in teacher awareness of the impact of their teacher discourse is found in where teachers learn teacher discourse strategies. The participating teachers in this study initiated the development of their own teacher discourse without formal teacher training. Neither of the two teachers in this study remembers learning about teacher discourse in a teacher training setting. These teachers learned their teacher discourse from other more experienced teachers, teacher manuals, educational journals, on-line resources and through trial and error.

Another element in the nature of teacher awareness of the impact of their words is evident in the lack of confidence the teachers in this study express in their own teacher discourse. These two teachers are experienced and successful teachers. They meet the national standards for highly qualified teachers yet they expressed a lack of confidence in their teacher discourse. They both expressed concern about how much influence they have on their students. They are continually searching for strategies to modify undesirable student
behaviors, encourage positive student behaviors and promote academic achievement. In some cases, these teachers employed effective teacher discourse strategies, then expressed concern that perhaps they should have done something else. Finally, both teachers expressed concern that other teachers were better teachers than they.

The conclusions from this research study are:

1. Teachers are aware and concerned about how their words impact students.

2. Teachers are searching for more effective teacher discourse to use with their students.

3. Teachers learn their teacher discourse not from college classes but primarily from other more experienced teachers, trial and error, teacher manuals, on-line sources and educational journals.

4. Teachers lack confidence in their teacher discourse.

5. Teachers have been influenced by their own teachers.
REFERENCES


Aspy, D. N. (1986). *This is school! Sit down and listen!* Amherst, MA: Human Resources Development Press.


Appendix A

Phases of Inquiry

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<td>___Principal permission ___Teacher 1 permission ___Teacher 2 permission ___Parents’ permission ___Parents’ permission</td>
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<td>Phase III</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td>___Teacher 1 Collection ___Teacher 2 Collection ___artifacts ___artifacts ___interviews (audiotape) ___interviews (audiotape) ___observations (video) ___observations (video) ___field notes ___field notes</td>
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<td>Phase IV</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant comparative method, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics applied at every stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>___Teacher 1 Analysis ___Teacher 2 Analysis ___field notes ___field notes ___align with transcripts ___align with transcripts ___artifacts ___artifacts ___compare, annotate, categorize ___compare, annotate, categorize ___audiotape (interviews) ___audiotape (interviews) ___transcribe ___transcribe ___read ___read ___compare, annotate, categorize ___compare, annotate, categorize ___videotape (observations) ___videotape (observations) ___transcribe ___transcribe ___read ___read ___compare, annotate, categorize ___compare, annotate, categorize</td>
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Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview questions were devised to assess the nature of teacher awareness regarding the impact of their words on students. These interviews will take place after the classroom observations. If there are snippets of video that would aid the researcher in collecting information, those snippets will be used to prompt teacher response.

1st Interview: Teacher Language Experienced as a Student

Thinking about when you were a young student in elementary school, there were times when you were interested in class and perhaps even enjoyed class. Can you describe what was happening during some of those times? What kinds of things was the teacher doing or saying during those times? How did what the teacher said affect the situation?

What about times when you hated class, can you describe what was happening during some of those times? What kinds of things was the teacher doing or saying during those times? How did what the teacher said affect the situation?

If responses warrant ask: What about middle school? How did your teachers’ words affect you?
If responses warrant ask: What about high school? How did your teachers’ words affect you?
If responses warrant ask: What about college? How did your teachers’ words affect you?

Describe a teacher you have had who assigned jobs to students. How did that work? How did the students behave? How did you feel about that class?

Describe a teacher you have had who assigned work to groups. How well did your groups work? How do you think group work affected learning?

Describe a teacher you have had or classroom where you felt at home and comfortable. How do you think the teacher made that happen? How do you think that affected learning?

Describe the teacher you had who lectured the most and kept students silent. How do you think that affected learning?

Describe the teacher you had who had the most lenient rules or classroom control. How do you think this leniency affect student attitude? Learning?

2nd Interview: Teachers’ Education Regarding Teacher Talk

Teacher awareness of the impact of words and phrases gained from the teachers’ education.
Describe what you were taught about how to use teacher language. How would you rate that part of your education?

Describe what you have learned about teacher language in in-service.

Describe what you have learned about teacher language in any other way.

Describe what you were taught about:
- student decision making
- giving students responsibilities
- letting students take the initiative
- student teamwork
- student autonomy
- student self-control
- student identity.

Describe what you have learned about:
- teaching generalization techniques and strategies
- allowing the students to be the knower
- access-enhancing classrooms
- growth or fixed mindset.

3rd Interview: Teachers’ Strategies, Methods, and Goals using Teacher Talk

Begin this interview with a summary of the previous interviews.

Considering your experiences as a student and your education with regard to the impact of a teacher’s words on students, describe the strategies you have used in the past to establish effective teacher talk in your classroom. Describe the results you achieved with these strategies.

Describe the changes you have made through the years in regard to effective teacher talk. Describe the strategies that have worked best for you. Describe the strategies you have tried that have not worked so well.

Thinking about today at school, what strategies or methods did you use in regard to effective teacher talk. Describe the kinds of results were you aiming for and describe the results you got.

Thinking now about the future, describe any strategies or methods that you would like to try.

Describe any problems you encounter for which you wish you had teacher talk strategies that would help you mediate those problems.
Appendix C

Artifact Examples
Amy’s feedback reaching out to her student in a positive way.

"Good morning Mrs. Rubin, how has your day been going?" said Caitlin. Mrs. Rubin answered, "Fine, I am picking up forms do you have a farm?" said Mrs. Rubin. "No ma’am, but I have you some fruit from my garden," said Caitlin. "They have lot of these fruits in Florida," said Caitlin. "We have some in my backyard," said Mrs. Rubin.
Amy’s feedback with an ICU message “correct and retake.” This is a level two feedback indicating that the student used prior knowledge to address the problem.
Amy’s level one feedback indicating accurate and inaccurate answers as well as reaching out to her student in a positive way.

1. Which is a good conductor of electricity?
   A. copper
   B. plastic
   C. rubber
   D. wood

2. When charges build up in an object...
   - Positive charge builds up on ground
   - Negative charge builds up on ground
   - Electric shock
   - Lightning strike
   - Thunderstorm
   - When positive and negative charges are equal, the object is...
     A. static
     B. negative
     C. neutral
Mary’s level three feedback, causing her students to think.
Mary’s feedback reaching out to her student in a positive way.

1. I go to Washington School, and my art teacher is Mr. Mori.
2. Our neighborhood doesn’t have a mural, but we think it needs one.
3. Mr. Mori would design it for free, and his students would paint it.
4. We would raise the money for supplies, or maybe a paint store would donate them.
5. People can see art in museums, but art should be part of their everyday life. The students would be proud of their mural, and everyone would enjoy it.
Mary’s level one feedback indicating accurate and inaccurate answers.

6. sheep p
7. oxen p
8. woman &
9. mow p
10. teeth &
11. deer p
Notes home used by all the fourth grade teachers.

We are going on a field trip to Edwin Warner Nature Center on Wednesday, November 3. We are planning to hike, attend a Nature Center Activity and picnic. We will be gone all day. **Your child will need to bring $1.00 (due Monday 11/25) and be dressed according to the weather with comfortable shoes for hiking (approx. 3 miles).**

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

We also need to know whether your child will bring lunch ____ or need to buy a sack lunch ____ in cafeteria. We need to give prior notice to cafeteria for special needs. Please check one and write students name

**MUST BE RETURNED NO LATER THAN WED. OCT. 20 (Report Card Day)**

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

We are going on a field trip to Edwin Warner Nature Center on Wednesday, November 3. We are planning to hike, attend a Nature Center Activity and picnic. We will be gone all day. **Your child will need to bring $1.00 (due Monday 11/25) and be dressed according to the weather with comfortable shoes for hiking (approx. 3 miles).**

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

We also need to know whether your child will bring lunch ____ or need to buy a sack lunch ____ in cafeteria. We need to give prior notice to cafeteria for special needs. Please check one and write students name

**MUST BE RETURNED NO LATER THAN WED. OCT. 20 (Report Card Day)**

Wednesday,
Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Certificate

Protecting Human Subject Research Participants

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Sharon Patenaude successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 07/14/2010
Certification Number: 477292

http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/cert.php?c=476292

9/21/2010
Appendix E

Approval from the Institutional Review Board

To: Sharon Patenaude
patenaude54@bellsouth.net
jmhunter@tnstate.edu
Dept.: Teaching and Learning

From: Dr. G. Pamela Burch-Sims, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Re: Protocol #HS2010-2594

Date: Wednesday, October 13, 2010

The document listed below has been carefully reviewed and found to be in compliance with OPRR document title 45, Code of Federal Regulations part 46, the protection of human subjects, as amended by Federal policy, effective August 19, 1991. This project is approved as it presents minimal or no research risks to the pool of impending human subjects. Please make note, that any deviations in the administration of the protocol, accidental or otherwise should be reported to the IRB as soon as possible. The FWA for Tennessee State University is #FWA00000309, which is effective from September 23, 2008 to September 23, 2011.

"A Qualitative Case Study on the Nature of Teachers' Awareness of the Impact of their Words on Students"

This approval is valid for one year from the date indicated above. Continuation of research beyond that date requires re-approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Please contact me at 963-5661 or e-mail irb@tnstate.edu for additional information.
Appendix F

Letter of Cooperation

Sharon Patenaude  
Department of Teaching and Learning  
Tennessee State University  
Nashville, Tennessee  
September 26, 2010

Dear (DIRECTOR),

I would like to conduct research in your school, NAME Elementary School. The focus of this study is teacher talk, the words and phrases teachers use to communicate to students.

Information concerning this study is provided on the attached sheet. If you have any questions please call me, Sharon Patenaude at 952-3784 or email to me at patenaude54@bellsouth.net. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Hunter 963-5459 or jmhunter@tnstate.edu

Your permission is required for this research to proceed.

Thank you,
Sharon Patenaude

____________________________________
Director of Schools  Signature
Appendix G

School Permission Letters

Principal Letter of Informed Consent

Sharon Patenaude
Department of Teaching and Learning
Tennessee State University
Nashville, Tennessee
September 26, 2010

Dear (PRINCIPAL),

I would like to conduct research in your school, NAME Elementary School. The focus of this study is teacher talk, the words and phrases teachers use to communicate to students.

Information concerning this study is provided on the attached sheet. If you have any questions please call me, Sharon Patenaude at 952-3784 or email to me at patenaude54@bellsouth.net. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Hunter 963-5459 or jmhunter@tnstate.edu

Your permission is required for this research to proceed.

Thank you,
Sharon Patenaude

____________________________________
Principal Signature
Title of Research: Teacher Talk: A Qualitative Case Study on the Nature of Teachers’ Awareness of the Impact of Their Words on Students

Investigator: Sharon Patenaude

Purpose of Study: This qualitative study is designed to examine the nature of teacher awareness of the power of words, specifically the words teachers use that influence student self-identity and learning.

Explanation of Procedures: The three sources of data required for this study are classroom observations, teacher interviews and artifacts.

Classroom observations: Two teachers
- Duration from two to five days
- Video-recorded for clarification of data

Teacher interviews: Two teachers
- Three interviews with each teacher
- Ninety-minute interviews
- Audio-recorded for clarification of data

Artifacts: Documents include report cards, corrected papers, discipline slips, copies of notes home, newsletters from the teacher and any document that may contain communication between the teacher and students

Discomforts: There is minimal risk involved in participating in this study. Students may be distracted with a video camera and an extra adult in the classroom during the classroom observations. Teacher time commitment will be an inconvenience. However, every effort will be made to minimize these inconveniences and distractions.

Benefits: Participating teachers will have the opportunity to discuss and examine personal knowledge about their use of words and how words might affect student learning and behavior in the classroom setting
Confidentiality: Video tapes and audio tapes will be reviewed and transcribed by the researcher alone. No one else will see, hear or have access to the tapes. These tapes will be locked in a filing cabinet at the researcher’s home. No names will be used in writing this research. All teachers and students mentioned will be referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc. All names will be redacted on all artifacts collected during this investigation. All artifacts, video and audio recordings will be destroyed when this study is complete.

Withdrawal

without Prejudice: Participation in this study is voluntary. Any participant is free to withdraw from this study without penalty at any time.

Contact Information: Sharon Patenaude 952-3784
patenaude54@bellsouth.net
Dr. Hunter 963-
jmhunter@tnstate.edu
Department of Teaching and Learning
Tennessee State University
Nashville, Tennessee
Teacher Letter of Informed Consent

Sharon Patenaude
Department of Teaching and Learning
Tennessee State University
Nashville, Tennessee
September 26, 2010

Dear (TEACHER),

I would like to conduct research in your school, NAME Elementary School. The focus of this study is teacher talk, the words and phrases teachers use to communicate to students.

Information concerning this study is provided on the attached sheet. If you have any questions please call me, Sharon Patenaude at 952-3784 or email to me at patenaude54@bellsouth.net. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Hunter 963-5459 or jmhunter@tnstate.edu

Your permission is required for this research to proceed.

Thank you,
Sharon Patenaude

____________________________________
Teacher Signature
Title of Research: Teacher Talk: A Qualitative Case Study on the Nature of Teachers’ Awareness of the Impact of Their Words on Students

Investigator: Sharon Patenaude

Purpose of Study
This qualitative study is designed to examine the nature of teacher awareness of the power of words, specifically the words teachers use that influence student self-identity and learning.

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Withdrawal

without Prejudice: Participation in this study is voluntary. Any participant is free to withdraw from this study without penalty at any time.

Contact Information: Sharon Patenaude  
952-3784  
patenaude54@bellsouth.net
Dr. Hunter  
963-5469  
jmhunter@tnstate.edu
Department of Teaching and Learning
Tennessee State University
Nashville, Tennessee
Parent/Student Letter of Informed Consent

Sharon Patenaude
Department of Teaching and Learning
Tennessee State University
Nashville, Tennessee
September 26, 2010

Dear Parents and Students,

I am conducting research in NAME Elementary School. The focus of this study is teacher talk, the words and phrases teachers use to communicate to students. I would like to video record for between two and five days in the classroom and I must have your permission to do this.

No one will see these videos except me, so that I can better analyze the teacher’s words. I will use the information to write my research paper. If the information requires me to write about any student, that student will be identified as Student 1, Student 2 etc. No student’s name or teacher’s name will be used in this paper. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names when names make more sense. All artifacts, including video and audio recordings will be destroyed when this study has been completed.

Additional information is provided on the attached sheet. If you have any questions please call me, Sharon Patenaude at 952-3784 or email to me at patenaude54@bellsouth.net. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Hunter 963-5459 or jmhunter@tnstate.edu

Your permission is required for this research to proceed. If I have answered your questions to your satisfaction, please sign and return this permission slip to your child’s teacher by (date).

Thank you,
Sharon Patenaude

____________________________________               ____________________________
Student                                                                          Parent Signature
Title of Research: Teacher Talk: A Qualitative Case Study on the Nature of Teachers’ Awareness of the Impact of Their Words on Students

Investigator: Sharon Patenaude

Purpose of Study
This qualitative study is designed to examine the nature of teacher awareness of the power of words, specifically the words teachers use that influence student self-identity and learning.

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Contact Information: Sharon Patenaude 952-3784
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Dr. Hunter 963-
jmhunter@tnstate.edu
Department of Teaching and Learning
Tennessee State University
Nashville, Tennessee