Chapter 6

Bridging the Communication Gap through Video Research:
The Preschool in Three Cultures Method

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ABSTRACT

Technology is a valuable tool for researchers of young children for many reasons. This chapter discusses the use of video as an ethnographic research tool for studying preschool education and offers insight into how video can be used to inform researchers, practitioners, and parents of young children. The approach referred to as video-cued multivocal ethnography is intended to highlight differences across cultures, and to reveal continuity and change in preschool education of three countries over the course of a generation. But this approach is also valuable for promoting teacher reflection on, and developing cultural understandings of how teachers' practice embodies the culture in which they live and work.

INTRODUCTION

Technology has changed the depth of research in early childhood classrooms in multiple ways. The use of video as a research tool helps bridge the communication gap between researchers, teachers, and parents in early childhood classrooms. Videos allow multiple viewing of the same interactions which generates meaningful dialogue among the community of teachers and researchers and gives insight into beliefs about educational cultures. This chapter focuses on one innovative approach to using video in early childhood education research, an approach that uses video not as data, but rather as a stimulus or cue for getting teachers and directors in different cultures to reflect on the thinking behind their practices. We have suggested calling this method

"Video-Cued Multivocal Ethnography," but it is better known as the *Preschool in Three Cultures method*, (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). In this chapter we describe the video cued method we used in the two *Preschool in Three Cultures* studies, explain the antecedents we drew on in developing the method, and reflect on some factors that are key to using the method effectively. The conclusion suggests some ways that this method can be adapted for other uses in early childhood education.

Objectives

After reading this chapter the reader will be able to identify and discuss the role video technology plays in comparative early childhood education research, to have an in-depth understanding of how the method helps researchers obtain cultural information of preschool teachers, administrators, and parents of your children. The reader will come to know about how video can be used to inform teachers, administrators, parents and researchers about their cultural beliefs and practices in early childhood education. One important objective in introducing the *Preschool in Three Cultures* method is to shift the focus of the traditional academic educational research from privileging the researchers' voices to privileging teachers' perspectives. This approach not only contextualizes diverse perspectives, but also delves into the depth of implicit cultural meanings. In this chapter, the reader will become acquainted with the Preschool in Three Cultures method: Its major components and processes, the inspiring ideas behind its origin, and the role videos play in generating a multivocal dialogue and research questions. This chapter discusses how we use videos in interviews and how this can help teachers reflect on key issues in their teaching and beliefs about culture. The reader will:

- Develop an understanding of how the technology of video has and can impact research and teaching
- Develop an understanding of how video bridges the communication gap among researchers, teachers, administrators and parents

BACKGROUND: VIDEO TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

The first release of the technology of videotaping was in 1951 and was developed by John T. Mullin and Wayne R. Johnson. The first domestic videocassette recorders were launched in the early 1970s, but it was not until the Japanese systems, Sony's Beta (1975) and JVC's VHS, were launched, that videotape moved into the mass market. It was clear that this technology could be a valuable tool for education but it was unclear as to exactly how to use video tapes to support educational environments. The first use in educational environments was as an instructional tool and later as a tool for self evaluation of teaching. As technology evolved and cameras became easier to use, less expensive, and more common, models of research using videos developed and were accepted by the educational research community. By the 1980s videotaping had begun to be explored as a support tool for research. Collier and Collier (1986, p. 139) comment, "Film and video have become essential for the study of human behavior." One of the early studies which pioneered the use of video and how it has evolved as a research technology is described in this chapter. This narrative explains how this model supports not only research but the development of thoughtful communities of learners and professionals in the field of early childhood education.

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