# Global Dialogues: Engaging Prospective Teachers in Exploring Educational Issues

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**Abstract:** In the multicultural world, prospective teachers need to be able to live alongside, work with and relate to students with a wide range of cultures, beliefs, values, and perspectives. The study utilized discourse analysis as tool to analyze the interactions of the participating prospective teachers from three universities (Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and South Africa) in two online dialogue meetings from the Going Global Project in 2019. The findings include (1) cultural background may shape prospective teacher's understanding on educational concepts and perceptions and (2) prospective teachers from English speaking countries are more proactive in topic initiations and questioning within the multi-cultural communication process while those in non-English speaking countries are more active in responding the questions.

**Keywords:** global dialogues, prospective teachers, social interactions, multi-cultural education

## Introduction

Currently, developing soft skills and humanistic concerns of the prospective teachers tends to be side-lined by academic learning and pedagogical performance in constructing teacher's identity and profession. The study utilized discourse analysis as tool to analyze the interactions of the participating prospective teachers from three cultural context (Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and South Africa) in two dialogue meetings from the Going Global Project in 2019. Our first goal in this study was to critically examine the influence of 'cultural context' in shaping prospective teachers' understanding of one and other cultures and educational issues, possibilities of future teaching (Anderson & Holloway, 2020). The second goal of this study was to understand how the prospective teacher engage themselves in global conversation.

## Literature review: Position theory and discourse analysis

Positioning theory was used by the previous scholars to explain the social interactions of how people take up social positions, make their voice be understood by other people (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Building on this idea, some authors have studied how the self-perceptions of own role influence in-service educator's actions. They also suggested that self-perceptions on own role influence the in-service educator in leading the learning process (Wan and Leung, 2021; Dennen, 2011). However, the influence of positioning theory needs to be further understood in multi-cultural context when cultural context further influences one's behavior in cross-cultural interaction.

Besides, previous studies have been using discourse analysis to explored prospective teacher's self-identity in relation to their pedagogy (Mosley and Zoch, 2012; Hufnagel, 2015). There is lack of study on how pre-service teachers perceive their own roles beyond the cultural context. In this study, prospective teachers from multiple cultural contexts discussed educational issues and revealed their self-perceptions on their own identity in the global context. We will analyze the participation patterns within the multicultural interactions to critically examine 'cultural context' in shaping prospective teachers' understanding of one and other cultures and educational issues (Anderson & Holloway, 2020). This also enables a study of how prospective teachers position themselves in cross-cultural discourse and their own stance in teaching.

## Methods

### The project: Going Global

The data collection was based on the global dialogues of two online discussions from the Going Global Project in 2019 to understand various perspectives on educational issues of the participants. Going Global Project piloted international, intercultural dialogue between one University from the United Kingdom (University of UK), one University from Hong Kong (University of HK) and one University from South Africa (University of SA) using

bespoke facilitated video conferencing. The sessions involved groups of prospective teachers from three universities.

## Data collection and analysis

The meetings were video-recorded and transcribed. The researchers compared the transcriptions of the dialogues to identify patterns of communication. The study used the framework of elaborated mode as the grounded framework of communication. Elaborated mode means a pattern of communication where the leader (facilitator) has little intervention in the meeting so that the participants can have greater space for negotiation of meanings and direction of discourse (Law et. al., 2014). Our analysis progresses in three tiers. First, we described the structural features and discursive features of the conversation: how the educational issues are discussed among the participating teams. Secondly, we identified the communication patterns within the meetings. Thirdly, we further used initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) model (Cazden, 2001) to analyze participants' participation styles through their utterances. In the discussion about specific educational topics, participants from one team could initiate a topic discussion (initiation) and another participant from the same team or another team could respond to or challenge the person who initiated the topic discussion (response). Some participants would evaluate the topics by giving additional information (evaluation). We hence categorized participant's participation styles using these three categories. To protect the anonymity of the participants, we have used masking techniques including pseudonyms. Supporting data also includes the distribution of participation time, participation style of the prospective teachers in the meetings.

## Findings

### An overview of the discourse sequence

12 negotiation events (NE) were identified based on the different topics. Table 1 lists the time duration and the topics of the NE. Most of the time, the teams were discussing specific topics. A categorization of the NEs in terms of evolution of the group discussion in different stages: (1) Sharing contextual background of educational issues (NE3, NE7, NE12); (2) Sharing personal thoughts on topics (NE1, NE5, NE6, NE8, NE9, NE12); (3) Following up on other participant's sharing (NE2, NE4, NE6, NE 10,11). These NEs formed the basis of examining what topics the participants discussed. It is found that cultural context may shape prospective teacher's perceptions on educational issues. For instance, in NE7, the understanding towards inclusion varied among different teams: Hong Kong team perceived inclusion as catering student's special educational needs (i.e., Dyslexia, learning disabilities); the UK team perceived it as catering physical disabilities; and South African team viewed it as integration of races. The varied meanings of concept further influenced prospective teacher's evaluation on their own university of catering diversity in NE9. The Hong Kong participants, for example, evaluated how the teacher training in Hong Kong universities enables prospective teachers in handling students' special educational needs.

Table 1. Negotiative events sequence

|  | Negotiative Event (NE) | Duration (mins) | Topics |
|---|---|---|---|
| Meeting 1 | NE1 | 17 | Motivation for pursuing a degree in education |
|  | NE2 | 4 | Why is it so important that a person needs to pass on knowledge of his own culture, language, and traditions? |
|  | NE3 | 1 | Is diversity an issue in your own context? |
|  | NE4 | 9 | What are the meanings of critical thinking? |
|  | NE5 | 34 | What you think is quality education? What are the components of quality education? |
|  | NE6 | 11 | Is there an undertaking of revision of curriculum? |
| Meeting 2 | NE7 | 35 | What does inclusive education mean to you? |
|  | NE8 | 5 | What are the better methods of facilitating inclusion in education? |
|  | NE9 | 14 | How do you perceive the extent of diversity in your university? |
|  | NE10 | 12 | Are pupils being catered according to their ability in classrooms? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| NE11 | 9 | How are teachers getting prepared to handle students with special educational needs? |
| NE12 | 4 | What are the roles of the government in facilitating a more inclusive education system? |

## Establishing the functional patterns of the discourses in meetings

Table 2 shows the time distribution of each participating team. The total initiation from each team was evenly distributed in meeting 1, 2. This phenomenon showed the comparatively free atmosphere in the meeting chaired by the facilitator. Table 3 shows that the communicative pattern is multi-structural and multidimensional among the members. There is a significant amount of communication that the team members, such as such as C_HK and A_SA1, actively respond to other team's sharing in the meeting. Some participants tend to rely on the active members to support the multicultural interaction with other teams. For instance, when the University of HK contributes more than 43% of the participation time in meeting 1. K_HK and C_HK took the most initiations, which are 4 and 5 times respectively. The other members only did one initiation each.

Table 2. Time distribution for the participating team in meeting 1 and 2

| Time distribution of each participating team | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Time contribution of each team (minute) (%) | | | Total amount of time of each meeting (min) |
| | Facilitator | University of HK | University of UK | University of SA | |
| Meeting 1 | 15'38 (16.5) | 40'47 (43.2) | 22'27 (23.7) | 14'35 (15.4) | 93'34 |
| Meeting 2 | 29'53 (32.7） | 18'25 (20.1) | 14' 57 (16.3) | 17'55 (19.6) | 91'17 |

Table 3. Distribution of initiations among members of participating teams in the meetings

| Distribution of initiations among participants in the Global Dialogue Meetings | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Team | Members | Number of initiations | |
| | | Meeting 1 | Meeting 2 |
| Facilitator | / | 18 | 23 |
| University of HK | K_HK | 4 | 5 |
| | C_HK | 5 | 2 |
| | M_HK | 1 | 1 |
| | S_HK | 1 | 1 |
| University of UK | J_UK | 1 | 6 |
| | S_UK | 4 | 3 |
| University of SA | A_SA1 | 6 | 5 |
| | A_SA2 | 3 | 2 |
| | C_SA1 | 0 | 1 |
| | C_SA2 | 0 | 2 |

## Participation styles of the members

Table 4 summarizes how participants interacted with other group members with different interaction categories. The proactiveness of initiation differs among the teams. Members from University of HK tend to make responsive statements to the topics posed by the facilitator or other teams. Some of them support their teammates by making additional statements which we consider as self-talk under evaluating initiations. Members from English speaking universities (i.e., University of UK and University of SA) tend to make invitations through posing open and rhetorical questions to invite members to contribute and respond.

Table 4. Occurrence of interaction category for each team

| | University of HK | | University of UK | | University of SA | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Meeting 1 | Meeting 2 | Meeting 1 | Meeting 2 | Meeting 1 | Meeting 2 |
| Total of Initiations | 11 | 9 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 5 |
| Initiation | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Response | 8 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 3 |
| Evaluation | 3 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

## Significant Contribution

Overall, the outcomes of dialogue experiences can be categorized into: (1) Knowledge: promote mutual understanding of one and other cultures and educational issues (personal) (multiple perspective); enable in-depth understanding of possibilities of future teaching; (2) Skills: effectively express own opinions; (3) Values: promote respectful; embrace diversity; reflective upon own stance in teaching. This study investigated prospective teacher's involvement in the multi-cultural conversation. Our first goal in this study was to critically examine 'cultural context' in shaping prospective teachers' understanding of one and other cultures and educational issues, possibilities of future teaching (Anderson & Holloway, 2020). In the study, it was found that cultural background may shape prospective teacher's understanding and perceptions on educational issues; the second goal of this study was to understand how the prospective teacher engage themselves in global conversation. The language is one of the key factors that influence teacher's engagement in multicultural interaction. Participants from English speaking countries (i.e., the UK, South Africa) are more proactive in topic initiations and questioning within the communication process. Meanwhile, participants in non-English speaking countries (i.e., Hong Kong) are more tentative in responding the questions. The proactiveness, however, also depends on personal character as there are some participants tend to rely on the talkative members to support the multicultural initiations with other teams among all the teams. This study provided implications regarding how discourse analysis can explore prospective teacher's conceptions on their global identity and multi-cultural perspectives on education issues.

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