

Voices of Reason: Adolescents Talk About Their Futures Over Time

Steven B. Sachs

Bergin & Garvey

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To my wife, Maryse,
and our own adolescents
Binford and Jen;
And to my mother, Sally Binford Sachs

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Preface

This book evolved from an academic and professional journey that began twenty-five years ago while I was a psychology major in college and while working on a Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling.

Throughout that period I thought much about how people come to choose their personal and career paths and how education serves to help or hinder their decision-making processes. During the years immediately following receipt of my Master's degree I went to work for a large private institute that served young adults with developmental and psychiatric conditions, as a counselor and diagnostic evaluator. I was asked to establish a testing center that would assist staff counselors with drafting career plans for these individuals. Many of the individuals served by the institute could only be employed in sheltered, workshop settings because of the severity of their disabilities. The few who could consider employment in the workforce faced daunting challenges in adjusting to life made very strange to them by having been previously institutionalized, sometimes for many years. After a time, I moved from Philadelphia to Boston and again established a testing center for a large agency with a similar population and for similar reasons.

Soon thereafter I entered the private sector to begin a private practice serving the personal, social and educational/vocational needs of individuals who became disabled while working, or for those who have never worked. For the next ten years I provided extensive (and sometimes intensive) counseling and testing services to adults, ranging in age from eighteen to sixty-eight, for periods ranging from several months to several years depending on the severity of their disabilities

or injuries. During that time it became increasingly evident to me that many of these adults had had inadequate educational and/or guidance experiences while completing their primary and secondary education. In fact, the recurring theme I heard from them, after they had completed testing and counseling with me, was, "If I had known then what I know now I would have taken a different path." And, too often, I saw that they would have been much better served with respect to their career choices, had they indeed had the guidance services in their early education experience. I found that career choices that did not match interests, aptitude, and ability not only resulted in unfulfilling work but also impacted other facets of their lives. Too many became high school dropouts because school failed to show them what it could do for their futures as adults. In some cases I've been able to help them "correct" their earlier "mistakes" but in many cases it has been a difficult or even impossible task. These hundreds upon hundreds of anecdotes alarmed me enough to try to do something about it. I decided then that I would return to my own education and enter a doctoral program that would give me the training to research this concern.

At Clark University, in the doctoral program in education, I quickly focused my studies around the issue of how children begin making connections between school and their futures as adults. Eventually I gained permission to design an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program that gave me the tools I would need to conduct my dissertation research. Sarah Michaels, who later became my dissertation chair, invited me to conduct a survey of a group of 82 middle school urban students who were participants in a controversial, experimental heterogeneous (i.e., untracked) program to see what they thought about it. I developed a questionnaire for the assignment and then completed a full quantitative/qualitative analysis. This gave me an extraordinary opportunity to design a study around my own interest in students' decision-making processes and school-to-work connection. Juxtaposing my research work (with ten of the students over a period of five years, which would culminate in my dissertation) to my academic studies, I participated in a series of seminars in qualitative methods generally and discourse analysis specifically. That training, under the direction of James Paul Gee and Sarah Michaels, provided me with the skills I would need to complete the analysis of that very large project.

To help explicate the results of the five-year study, I developed discourse analytic tools. Those tools helped to assess the degree of groundedness in adolescents' decisions about their educational and vocational goals and the degree to which the interviews, as co-constructed by the interviewer and interviewee, were successful. This book is based on that work.

Acknowledgments

Many have helped to make this book a reality. In the company of and with guidance from intellectual giants, I benefited enormously. Chief among them was Sarah Michaels, Associate Professor of Education and Director of the Jacob Hiatt Center for Urban Education at Clark University, who insisted always that I'd have to push harder and farther if I wanted to step into the arena of education research using discourse analysis. I am most grateful to her for her guidance and for that I can never thank her enough.

I had the good fortune to receive guidance also from James Paul Gee, sociocultural linguist, before he left Clark for the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Dr. Gee, through both his direct advice and readings of his numerous published works, has had a profound effect on the way I conduct my own work. His brilliance and candor both helped enormously to shape my work. I want also to thank David Zern, Associate Professor of Education and Adjunct Associate Professor of Psychology, for his important guidance. His influence started many years earlier when I first informally inquired about doing doctoral work at Clark. He will always be in my memory as a source of inspiration. I am grateful to Fern Johnson, Chair of the English Department, Clark University. Just a few words from her e-mails went a long way to keeping up my spirit. And I would be remiss if I did not in passing mention Edwin Herr, Professor Emeritus, Education Department, Pennsylvania State University, who, through his teaching, guidance and enormous scholarly contribution to the field of career guidance and counseling has influenced my work.

To Kathy Goldstein, an extraordinary middle school teacher (now principal) whose passion for teaching was often mentioned by the students in our interviews, many thanks for helping me to get my research off the ground. And I am grateful to my colleagues at Clark for all the phone calls, the e-mails and the moments for quick comments in the hallways. And I would like to thank the school administrators who, in spite of their very busy lives, always found time to help me arrange the interviews. Five years is a long time to ask anyone to remain interested.

I've grown fond and greatly appreciative of the Spencer Foundation for its help in funding my work—particularly Marty Rutherford for encouraging me to consider writing this book. But Spencer has given me much more; the conferences in Racine, Wisconsin (Wingspread), New Orleans and Seattle (in which I was invited to present my work) provided splendid opportunities to be with others who are passionate about their own work. Through their Practitioner Research Communication and Mentoring Program, Spencer has brought together educators and researchers from around the world to learn from one another.

I want to thank my family for supporting me, for this has been as much an emotional journey as an intellectual one; to my wife, Maryse, who shared my many moments of frustration and elation as only a significant other could, and for all of the promises that had to be repeatedly pushed back; to my children, Binford and Jen, who had just barely begun their own primary school careers when I set out on my journey; to both my father and my brother who have left this earth much too early, and to my mother, whose unwavering belief in me has been a constant source of inspiration.

Finally, without "my kids," the ten students, this book could not have been written. Their willingness to meet with me for five years is a testament to their own recognition that education and careers are essential to all of our futures. In giving of themselves selflessly so that we can better understand what students think, they will help others achieve more fulfilling lives.

Introduction

Introduction

I dream about stuff I want to be, but I know it ain't going to happen.
Like I dream I want to be a lawyer or something like that. I (could)
go to law school for that. Police academy. Stuff like that, but . . .

Angela: ninth grade—urban community high school

A full-view conference room, adjacent to administrative offices at a large urban community high school, is vacant except for the interviewer. School personnel and students peer in as they pass, some smiling but say nothing. A tape recorder and video camera are in plain view. On the table is a note pad. Angela's name can be heard over the intercom, telling her to report to the main office. She arrives moments later and is greeted by the interviewer who is seeing her for the second time, the first a year before when she attended middle school, which is only a stone's throw from where she now stands. She politely greets the interviewer with a handshake and is directed to sit in a designated chair that is positioned properly for video recording. The door is shut for privacy. But even with the door closed, voices can be heard outside and the intercom is busy sending messages, making requests or sounding the bell marking the end of classes. Angela knows why she is here; she will talk about her school experience this year, her life outside of school and her plans for the future. She also knows that her interview is being recorded so that it can be later transcribed for analysis and that the interviewer hopes to see her each year until she graduates from high school. And Angela knows she is one of ten students who have agreed to these interviews, each acquainted with the other from their membership in an experimental non-tracked program that began when they,

along with 72 other students from diverse ethnic and academic backgrounds, were in seventh grade.

Angela is uncertain about what she'll do when she completes high school; she has dreams about becoming a lawyer or a police officer. The year before Angela was on a different path in her thinking about her goals:

EXAMPLE OF "FUTURE TALK"

Interviewer: Do you know where you're going to go after high school?

Angela: Not really. I want to go to college.

I: Okay, well—

A: I want to take up like nursing.

I: You want to go into nursing?

A: Yeah.

I: Okay. Where are you going to go to college?

A: I want to go to, I don't know—Amherst?

I: Where is it? Do you remember where it is?

A: We went there on a field trip. I think—

I: Is it far away from here?

A: Yeah. Am—?

I: Amherst?

A: Yeah, something like that. Amherst College. I don't know.

I: All right. Why do you think you might want to go there? Did you like it?

A: Yeah, I liked it? We went there on a field trip and it was nice.

I: What were you doing on the field trip? What was it for?

A: I guess if you wanted to get in there or something like that. And they told us about the classes and if you wanted to take up all these things, what we'd have to do.

I: Okay, so you're thinking about going to college?

A: Yes.

I: Thinking about making a goal of going to college?

A: Yes.

I: Work hard in high school?

A: Mm-hmm.

I: So, what do you think will happen after college? Try to think about later on, down the road.

A: I hope to become what I want to become.

I: Nursing?

A: Mm-hmm. I might become a nurse, but—.

I: What's holding you back?

A: Well, if you can't get a job or something.

I: Well, they have a lot of jobs in nursing. Are you thinking about going to nursing school after college?

A: Mm-hmm.

I: Could be a nursing school at the college?

A: Mm-hmm.

In contrast, John, in his eighth-grade interview, tightly weaves together school subjects, extracurricular activities with self-assessment of his abilities to suggest a goal but still, at this early stage, points out that his primary goal is to prepare for college:

Interviewer: Do you have any sense of where you might take the interest you have now and get it worked into some kind of a career or a job that—.

John: I'm going to say—my best two subjects are science and math—my highest grade averages. I am good at both of them. I just—my main goal right now is to go to college, you know? Once I get there, I can decide. But what I have to worry about now is going to college. I mean, I can do them really well. So I thought engineering would be a good field to go into. And I'm going to still play basketball, because that would enhance my chances of getting a scholarship. Besides my grades I have the athletics to go with it, too. So, I'll keep working.

When Angela's and John's transcripts are compared, broad discourse features differentiate the co-constructed talk as shown in Table 1.1.

Early in the interviews it was apparent to me that these ten students had different discourse styles, some vastly so, and it seemed to me that part of how and how effectively their stories would be told would have to do with how I was helpful or a hindrance to those encounters. Research questions formed from these early analyses became the basis for my doctoral dissertation on which, in large part, this book is based.

I was also finding what I had all along theorized, that many students were not getting meaningful guidance services. In fact, in my 20-year counseling career I have come to know many individuals, of various ages and backgrounds, who have entered adulthood with little or no understanding about their educational and career options. Often, after they completed interest and ability testing with me, they learned, for the first time, things about themselves that at an earlier time might have led them in different, possibly more fulfilling, directions. "An earlier time" in this case refers to their middle and high school years when important decisions were being made about their educational and ultimately their vocational options. All of them had access to standard guidance counseling programs. From my own counseling experiences, and from the popular press, it appears that these standard approaches to helping students make career choices are not working.¹ This is especially true in the inner-city schools where students see their guidance counselors briefly several times each year to "sign off" on their choice of classes, or, in some cases, only if they have some particular academic or behavior problem. Particularly disadvantaged are the students who are struggling in their academic work or failing to find school interesting.

STUDIES FIND WEAK GUIDANCE SERVICES

In fact, a review of studies conducted elsewhere (National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education, 1985; Prediger, Roth, and Noeth, 1973; Weissberg et al., 1982), point to evidence of a long-standing problem with students often not receiving guidance counseling that re-

TABLE 1.1
Broad Features Differentiating Interview Talk

| <i>John</i> | <i>Angela</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee dominates quantity of talk • Interviewee “peak” turns represent the core of the discourse (peak turns are those that stand out as the longest in terms of number of words) • Active looking graphical representation of discourse with lots of turns exceeding 40 words (can see word count pattern in graphical form much like an EKG) • Vertical building of the “stories” with respect to the interviewee, requiring relatively little prompting by the interviewer to provide full answers. • Some closed-ended questions by the interviewer, but interviewee continues discourse beyond. • Only one series of one-word turns by the interviewee. In the total discourse, nearly the same number of one-word turns as the interviewer (20 & 17 respectively, for a total of 37). • 12 judgment words (i.e., encourage interviewee to continue his talk with interviewer support). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewer dominates quantity of talk • Interviewee “peak” turns do not provide enough substance to stand alone. • Flat-looking graph with few turns that exceed 40 words. • Horizontal building of the “stories” with respect to the interviewer required to frequently question the interviewee over numerous turns in an attempt to achieve full answers to questions. • Many closed-ended questions by the interviewer treated as such by the interviewee. • Six series of one-word turns by the interviewee. In the total interview, more than a 4 to 1 ratio between the interviewee’s use of one word turns and the interviewer’s use (37 & 8 respectively, for a total of 45). • 4 judgment words or phrases by the interviewer. |

sult in realistic educational and vocational choices. This applies across the various academic preparation programs including college preparatory, general coursework, and vocational-technical areas where there is increasing concerns about the disparity between the level of skills young adults bring to the workforce and those needed by employers (Grubb, 1995). Of particular, urgent concern regarding the fundamental goal of school programs to prepare students for productive lives as

adults are the students who are at risk for not completing even their secondary education. In its most recent report (1998), the U.S. Department of Education reported dropout statistics for the United States of about 5 out of every 100 high school students. While this rate remained steady over the past ten years, and represents an improvement from the decade of the 1970s, the dropout rate for Hispanic students was nearly two and one-half times that of whites (9.4 vs. 3.9), and somewhat less than twice the rate of African-American students (9.4 vs. 5.2). Family economic status was also a significant indicator of student dropout potential. In 1998, young adults living in families with incomes at the lowest 20 percent of all family incomes were four times as likely as their peers from families in the top 20 percent to drop out of high school. In actual numbers, in October 1998, 3.9 million young adults did not complete high school. Of very significant concern are the Hispanic young adults who were born outside of the United States: Forty-four percent became high school dropouts (Kaufman, Kwon, and Chapman, 1999).

In addition to the troubling dropout rate are concerns about the students who receive little or no or inappropriate guidance. Because guidance counselors traditionally serve as gatekeepers as they direct students' futures (and in many cases give passage or denial to their educational wishes), it is crucial to examine their roles in conjunction with how students, especially at-risk² adolescents, make their choices.

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS BOOK

Given the complexities of the world today, particularly the rapidly changing global economy and the need for more highly trained people, it is all the more essential that students have the opportunity to match their abilities and interests with realistic goals and to understand how the educational or vocational training systems work so that they can have a realistic chance to reach those goals.

By offering a rich presentation of adolescents' struggles and achievements as they move through their important years toward adulthood, this book highlights their successes and shortcomings. It comprises their stories about their school experiences, home, and social lives, and their views on social issues. It is also about their decision-making capabilities, with regards to both communication competence and evidence for making connections between abilities, interests, and goals and how to achieve them. The reader will "hear" the students' stories in their own words as they told them to me over five years, talking about their families, schools, friends, social issues, and the like, all of which impact quality and capacity to think critically about, and to articulate, their goals.

This book is also about how to use tools of discourse analysis to make sense of co-constructed talk. While it is primarily about “future talk” here, these tools are applicable to any talk situation where assessing degree of success in the talk is desired. In the case here, my goal is to raise the readers’ consciousness about adolescents’ own concerns about their educational and vocational futures. In offering profiles of ten very different students (different with respect to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and academic standing), chances are good that the reader will see something of him/herself or someone he/she knows and cares about endeavoring to develop their own future plans.

This is not a book by an expert telling the reader how to do better counseling, or how to be better counseled, but instead offers systematic ways to evaluate the significance of powerful stories by students, in their own words, struggling to make sense of their lives as they move through their middle and high school years and beyond. It is a book intended for parents, teachers, guidance counselors (all of whom are guidance sources for kids), education researchers, and for students themselves.

The reader may ask how we can expect students in their middle school years to know what they wish to do for their careers. The answer simply is that they are not expected to know. What we should expect, and what is a focus of this book, is that they be able to develop decision-making skills of progressively more complexity as they move through their educational experiences, beginning in elementary school. Even in those early school grades, it is not too early to begin exploring interests, thinking about what they like and what they are good at, and begin making connections between them and education preparation. Empowering kids by giving them recognition for their own voices paves the way for them to become better decision-makers, and ultimately gives way to happier and more productive lives. In essence, others serve as influencers and gatekeepers—not just guidance counselors—including parents, teachers and peers. Students’ own capacity to think critically and to articulate their views ultimately determines their social and economic path(s).

The book is organized to accommodate the interests of a wide spectrum of readers, from the casual reader who may find it enough to read only stretches of talk by the participants for self-reflection, to the serious educator-as-researcher who wants to develop discourse analytic skills to conduct his/her own inquiries, to graduate students taking an introductory qualitative methods course. The book is divided into three parts.

Part I includes this chapter, which finishes out the introduction with a brief discussion about how the study came to be, and chapter 2, which provides a summary of research questions that guided my study, a brief

review of the literature that has informed it, followed by an overview of approaches to analysis of discourses as a prelude to tools of analysis that I developed to assist in analyzing this study.

Part II includes chapters 3–9, which collectively present a comprehensive qualitative introduction to the ten students using excerpts from five years of interviews, along with my comments. Each of those chapters presents a different interview style and includes one or two of the ten students who represent those talk styles respectively.

Part III includes chapter 10, which is the heart of the study's methodology, results, and analysis of findings. The closing chapter, 11, offers conclusions and suggestions for using this book to improve guidance services and awareness among adolescents through class projects, and as a supplement to an introductory research methodology course.

THE H-TEAM

A year prior to the start of the research for this study, I began working with a group of middle school teachers in an experimental, "untracked" academic program. This program, known as the "Heterogeneous Team," was the first of its kind in a large urban center in the northeastern United States, a city in which all middle schools and high schools, up until that point, had been academically tracked. That program, referred to as the "H-Team," sought to teach students from a full range of academic capabilities in untracked classes. A group of 82 students volunteered for the program and were assigned to work with four teachers (English, history, math, and science) and a reading specialist. This group of 82 was representative of the ethnic, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and academic abilities of the larger middle school (of nearly 1,000 seventh and eighth graders). Because of the experimental and quite controversial nature of the program, I was invited to find out from these students (who were then in the eighth grade) what they thought of their first-of-its-kind program. From a questionnaire that I developed for that purpose, I completed a quantitative analysis and report.³ The results were interesting, but I wanted more in-depth, qualitative information from the students. I asked permission to return to the school the same year to talk to a subset of the H-Team students one on one, in videotaped interviews. The teachers selected 14 students whom they identified as representative of the larger group, with respect to ethnicity, SES, and likely academic track in a traditional program. I met individually with these 14 students, interviewed each for approximately 30–45 minutes, and transcribed our conversations. That was the start of my longitudinal study.

So compelling to me were the differences in these initial interviews, with respect to what they were telling me and how and how effectively they were doing it, that I returned to interview 10 of the 14 students a year later, at the end of their ninth grade year⁵ when they were no longer in the H-Team program. Now, instead, the 10 were in four different high schools, ranging from an inner-city “comprehensive” high school, the city’s vocational technical high school, the high school in the wealthiest part of town (considered the most academically challenging high school in the city) and a parochial school. From that point on, I contacted the students near the end of each successive academic year, wherever they were in school, and interviewed them on videotape. My interviews thus captured these students from eighth grade until the end of their high school careers, with most ready to graduate and move on to college or work.

This book will take the reader on a journey into the thoughts and actions of students much like those they know—or perhaps are or have been themselves.

NOTES

1. Herr (1992) cites a 1989 Gallup Poll survey for the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee and the National Career Development Association that found nearly two-thirds of American adults would have wished for more guidance before making career choices, with minority adults (i.e., African-American 79 percent and Hispanics 75 percent) indicating the highest interest.

2. The term “at risk” refers here to the students who are at risk for dropping out of school, have behavioral problems that interfere with learning, are academically challenged or are disadvantaged in some other way(s) so that their academic performance and/or educational/vocational futures are in jeopardy (i.e., SES, single parent homes, minority status, etc.).

3. In Appendix 1 I provide some of the quantitative findings that relate, in part, to this study by topic (that is, career goals) and that help to characterize the H-Team as a group.

Theoretical Orientation

This chapter will give the reader the research questions that emerged from the early analyses touched upon in chapter 1. Then a review of literature pertinent to my study will be offered, and finally an overview of discourse analysis will be presented as an introduction for readers not familiar with it.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do interviews help us to see students' stories, to understand more about them from their own perspective, and to understand more about how to help them make appropriate career-related decisions and choices? That is, what do the interviews reveal that a typical guidance counselor would not gain access to?
2. What can we see in the interviews about students' understanding and ways of talking about their future? How do students differ from one another with respect to their "groundedness" in talking about future goals or work? In other words, to what extent is their future-related talk grounded in real experience or personal knowledge? How well does the groundedness or the lack of groundedness in the students' "future talk" relate to their choices and success at the end of high school?
3. How much of a role does the interviewer play as co-constructor of these interviews? How can this kind of analysis influence the work of guidance counselors more broadly? How can the tools of dis-

course analysis that are used in this study be applied to guidance counselors' own guidance as a tool for practitioner research and improving services to students?

GROWING PROMINENCE OF QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO STUDY OF CAREER DECISION-MAKING

During the last two decades a significant shift to qualitative approaches to career theory has taken place. Earlier, vocational decision-making research had almost exclusively come from quantitative, positivist, and empirical traditions (Herr and Cramer, 1992). In that tradition, first brought to prominence by Frank Parsons (an engineer considered the founder of formalized vocational guidance in the United States), the focus of inquiry and analysis is predominantly in the form of norm-based standardized aptitude and achievement tests and interest inventories based on "traits and factors" approaches (e.g., abilities, work values, SES, personality factors, educational achievement). Today, career counseling is increasingly also about gaining understanding of what lies behind what students say beyond what standardized tests tell them (and us). For that reason, a range of more qualitative (e.g., ethnographic, interview-based, inductive) approaches have gained strong ground because they go further in capturing the richness and multidimensionality of the individual's thinking and action (in some meaningful context) as he/she goes about the process of making decisions.

It has been nearly a century since Parsons defined what he called "true reasoning" as it relates to the process of vocational guidance:

First, a clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations, and other qualities. Second, a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages, and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work. Third, true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts. (1909: 5)

My study examines the third of these steps as it relates to how and how effectively students articulate their goals and the arguments (grounded references) for their goals, through discourse analysis of our co-constructed interviews. In general, those of us who subscribe to qualitative approaches to the study of career processes believe that understanding the complexities of individual and group decision-making processes is simply not possible using only traditional,

questionnaire-based, hypothesis-testing designs. Rubin and Rubin (1995) summarize the strength of qualitative interviewing:

Qualitative interviewing is both an academic and a practical tool. It allows us to share the world of others to find out what is going on, why people do what they do, and how they understand their worlds. With such knowledge you can help solve a variety of problems. (p. 5)

Written questionnaires, for example, are of far more limited value; they do not allow for clarification, follow-up questions, or the situated moment-to-moment sense-making exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee which provide much deeper understanding about what really is being communicated, and reveals more of the actual social interplay(s) that influences decision-making behavior. Kvale (1996) points out that:

The inter-view [*sic*] is an inter-subjective enterprise of two persons talking about common themes of interest. The interviewer does not merely collect statements like gathering small stones on a beach. His or her questions lead up to what aspects of a topic the subject will address, and the interviewer's active listening and following up on the answers co-determines the course of the conversation. (p. 183)

However, in spite of increasing recognition of the co-constructed nature of the interview, there is little attention paid in the guidance research literature to the details of the talk itself. That is, conspicuously lacking is any kind of systematic, discourse-analytic approach to uncovering the way interviewees make meaning in these interviews, how students' perceptions about their educational and vocational choices are communicated in talk, and the degree to which the interviewees explicate the groundedness of their decision in language, or how the "interviewer's active listening and following up on the answers co-determines the course of the conversation" (Kvale, 1996: 183). For all the talk about the importance of co-constructed or inter-subjective meaning between counselor and counselee, there has been little systematic attention to or analysis of the talk within the interviews themselves. An exception is the important work of Fredrick Erickson and Jeffrey Shultz.

From a study begun thirty years ago, Erickson and Shultz wrote "The Counselor as Gatekeeper" in 1982. That was an early attempt to look at characteristics of co-constructed interviews between counselors and students. They recorded on videotape verbal and non-verbal behaviors between junior college counselors and students from two settings during brief (ten minutes or so) discussions about the students' school and