Resemiotized experience in classroom interaction: A student teacher’s interactional use of personal stories during teaching placement

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Abstract
One of the most important points of contact that student teachers have with the teaching profession occurs during placement, as placement provides a prime opportunity for them to interact with pupils and to further develop their teaching. In this article, a mediated discourse analytical perspective is employed as a lens to study a student teacher during his final teaching placement, with the aim of exploring how resemiotizations of previous experiences in the shape of oral stories can be interactionally used in the classroom. The data consist of three video recorded oral presentations, two video recorded sessions in a classroom, interview data, and observational field notes. Due to its potential to link past multimodal semiosis to present-time actions, nexus analysis is employed as the method for analysis. By unpacking a student teacher’s use of oral stories in the classroom, the study demonstrates how stories are adaptable resources that can be used to mark proximity to pupils, and thus serve as a means to manage the interaction order in the classroom. This is an activity with relevance for the teaching profession and, by extension, student teachers’ development of professional identity.

Keywords
teaching placement, mediated discourse analysis, nexus analysis, stories, resemiotization

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Introduction

Training to become a teacher in the form of teaching placement is a central part of Swedish teacher education, and teaching placement internationally is highlighted as a part of teacher education that is important to student teachers themselves (e.g., Johnston, 2016). As such, it is an opportunity for novices to practice a future profession in a controlled setting, under the supervision of professionals. Previous research on student teachers’ connection to their future profession has indicated that, among several features, previous experience as learners in higher education is highly relevant to the development of teacher identity (e.g., Beauchamp and Thomas, 2010; Farnsworth, 2010). In the light of this, the present article explores the potential of oral stories as resources for managing the interaction order in a high school history class, and it is to be regarded as a multimodal and discourse analytical contribution to research on classroom interaction.

This article focuses on a student teacher engaged in the activity of teaching, focusing on how oral stories can be interactionally used as a tool to cope with different situations arising in the classroom. A rationale for this focus is that it can potentially illuminate the interrelation of personal aspects (e.g., personal views on teaching) and professional aspects (e.g., social relationships with pupils), which are both important components in the ongoing development of students as future teachers (Alsup, 2006; Beijaard, 2017). Previous research on teaching placement often concerns students’ written or spoken reflections on their teaching experience (e.g., Köcsal and Genç, 2019; Moulding et al., 2014). However, studies of the actual interaction between student teacher and pupils as it occurs in the classroom are apparently rare.

The overarching theoretical framework of this study is mediated discourse analysis (MDA, Scollon, 2001a). An MDA perspective enforces social action as the vantage point for analysis, and to methodologically approach social action, concepts from the ethnographic, and discourse analytical framework of nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, 2007) is employed. The use of nexus analysis is motivated through its capacity to bring history into analysis (cf. Blommaert and Huang, 2009), mainly through its conceptual apparatus for describing the historical transformation of discourse, for example, the concept of historical body (Scollon, 2001b, from Nishida, 1958; see the Teaching placement as an arena for professional development section). Drawing from sociolinguistic research on narratives and storytelling, as well as on previous research on student teachers’ relations with the teaching profession, the article sees oral stories as semiotic resources that have the potential to show how past semiosis in different modes of communication become part of the interaction in the classroom.

The aim of the article is to explore how personal stories can be interactionally used by a student teacher in the classroom, and thus it is intended to shed light on how stories as discursive representations of previous experience can be utilized in the context of teaching placement. The following research questions are asked:

1. How can personal stories be utilized in the management of pedagogical tasks in classroom interaction?
2. Which identities are produced through the stories, and to what purpose?
Firstly, the Mediated discourse analysis and experience in interaction section will provide an overview of the article’s theoretical concepts together with previous research on narratives in interaction. In the Teaching placement as an arena for professional development section, teaching placement is introduced and discussed in the light of professional identity development. The Nexus analysis as framework for data construction and analysis section presents the process of data construction and data overview, together with the analytical process. In the Analysis section, the analysis takes place, followed by discussion of the results and conclusions in the Discussion and conclusions section.

Mediated discourse analysis and experience in interaction

Mediated discourse analysis is a discourse analytical framework for analyzing social action (see Scollon, 2001a, 2008). Due to the rather seamless relationship between MDA and its methodological operationalization nexus analysis (see, e.g., Scollon and Scollon, 2007), the discussion of theoretical outlines in this section applies to both MDA and nexus analysis. A more detailed overview of how nexus analysis is employed can be found in the Data construction section. The most important aspect of MDA is the principle of social action (Norris, 2019; Scollon, 2001) since the interest lies in social actors as they act. The view on discourse in MDA is rather wide-ranging: firstly, it concerns discourse in the narrower sense as language in use; secondly, it concerns Discourse(s) in the broad sense, as linguistic patterns identifying members connected to different social groups (Scollon, 2001b; cf. Gee, 2001). Simultaneously, discourse is understood as both historical and anticipatory, as it transforms through the actions of social actors, creating trajectories that Scollon (2008) points to as discourse itineraries. These discourse itineraries (cf. cycles of discourse, Scollon and Scollon, 2004) are important, as they highlight that discourse comes from somewhere, and that it is going somewhere. In general, the relationship between discourse and social action in MDA can be understood through the idea that social actors use discourse to produce their actions.

The view on social action in MDA is clarified by Scollon and Scollon’s (2004) later work, as they explain social action as taking place in the intersection of three major elements: the historical body (lived experience, Scollon, 1998; inspired by Nishida, 1958; the interaction order (social arrangements, see Goffman, 1983; and discourses in place (incorporating both discourse and Discourse, see Gee, 2001). To fully understand a social action, all three elements need to be taken into consideration, and such an undertaking is one of the central parts of a nexus analysis (see Nexus analysis as framework for data construction and analysis).

In this article, experience is understood as constructed semiotically (Halliday, 2004: 9), and people utilize their previous life experiences in the process of coping with a wide array of different social situations; such observations in and of themselves are rather low-inference claims. However, how the semiotic actions that make up our experiences become part of social actors’ semiotic ecosystems (Scollon and Scollon, 2004: 87), showing up in present-time interaction, is a more interesting aspect of these phenomena.
In MDA, previous experience is conceptualized through the notion of the historical body (Scollon, 1998, 2001a; from Nishida, 1958), which, as previously mentioned, is an element that is always part of social action. The concept of historical body points to the life experiences and goals of a social actor, and consequently brings historical aspects of action and discourse into the analytical scope. As such, the concept of historical body points to the phenomenon of a body (a social actor) performing actions that seem instinctive (Scollon and Scollon, 2004: 13), and can be seen as a “storehouse of discourse sedimented in the history and memory of the individual” (Jones, 2008: 245). It resembles Bourdieus’s (1977) notion of habitus in that it highlights reproduction of discourse; however, it differs in that the historical body is constantly changing, as it is “an expression of the instability and ineffability of the self and its relationship with the collective” (Jones, 2008: 247). The historical body is an actual human body in constant interaction with surrounding discourses (Scollon and Scollon, 2004: 22), and it concerns the tensions between reproduction of discourse and the production of new discourse (cf. Hanell, 2017). It is important to point out that this article is not the study of a social actor’s actual historical body, but rather the study of discourse linked to experience in a historical body, re-emerging in the social world.

Previous experience in spoken discourse is often discussed in forms of narratives. According to Labovian tradition, a narrative can be understood as “the presentation of discourse in a sequence of past events” (Labov, 2013: 14), and thus it is often analyzed as a sequence of utterances that follow a specific order (cf. Labov and Waletzky, 1997). In social interaction, however, narratives “are embedded in concrete discourse characterized by dialogic and rhetorical processes” (Wertsch, 2000: 516), and there are a variety of different definitions of what would constitute a narrative (Johnstone, 2016). This article does not employ narrative analysis in the Labovian sense. Instead, oral representations of previous experience in interaction are conceptualized in the broader term of stories. Stories are used as a concept in order to incorporate “atypical stories” produced in interaction that can include past, present and future events (in accordance with Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008), which might not necessarily adhere to the criteria for narratives presented by Labov and Waletzky (1997). Sociolinguistic research often understands stories as social actors making sense of past events in present time (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 378), but critical approaches in discourse studies have noted that similar phenomena may be used as resources, for example, to legitimize social action (cf. van Leeuwen, 2008, on “mythopoesis”). In the context of teaching placement, stories appear in the study of different reflective practices, that is, where student teachers are encouraged to create and recreate the image of themselves as a part of a professional community (Sutherland et al., 2010: 462). Moreover, studies of student teachers’ stories in written assignments find that reflection on previous experiences of teaching placement helped students shape their professional identity (Muchnik-Rozanov & Tsybulski, 2019: 528).

In this article, stories are understood as potential resemiotizations of meanings connected to life experience (in line with, for example, Scollon, 2005). The concept of resemiotization originates from the writings of Iedema (2001, 2003), who explains that it is a process that “transposes meanings from one semiotic mode into one which is
different” (Iedema, 2001: 33). Iedema (2003: 41) furthermore points out that resemiotization sheds light on how meaning is moved from one context or practice to another. Processes of resemiotization display how discourse travels and transforms over time, across different semiotic modes, because of social actors using it (Scollon, 2008; Scollon and Scollon, 2004). Scollon (2005) used this concept to present how past semiosis making up an individual’s previous experiences may shape how discourse is used in present-day actions. As a clarifying example, Scollon (2005: 29–30) uses the action of having the knowledge of how to lay a floor. This practical knowledge can be transformed into written language, for example, through writing an instructional text about flooring. In this case, it is the actions in different modes of communication of the floor layer (e.g., using the mode of speech to talk to someone more experienced in flooring, using embodied modes such as arm movement to try different practical techniques) that is being resemiotized into the mode of writing. Moreover, someone could buy that book, read it, perhaps go to a hardware store to buy the necessary tools, etc. If that person started laying a floor themselves, the actual laying of the floor would be a resemiotization of the previous discursive endeavors of reading the book (written text) and talking to the employees of the hardware store (speech). Thus, the notion of resemiotization helps to make the constant processes of semiosis that social actors are involved in visible. Another point of this example is to propose that discourse used to carry out actions becomes part of a social actor’s historical body and may re-emerge at a later point in time in another mode of communication. Considering this, a story, then, can be defined as a resemiotization of meanings linked to previous, or anticipated future, actions.

Teaching placement as an arena for professional development

A fundamental feature of the final teaching placement in focus in this article is the expectation of student teachers to essentially be able to teach a class of pupils themselves. This can be seen in an information pamphlet aiming to inform students of teaching placement. The sender of the text is the department responsible for teaching placement at the university in question. VFU is a Swedish abbreviation for “verksamhetsförlagd utbildning” and is equivalent to the term teaching placement. The pamphlet is published on the departmental website in Swedish and English, and the information in the English pamphlet is as follows:

Teaching Placement (VFU)

Teaching placement is an important part of the teacher education programmes. The student will be placed in a preschool or school that is relevant to the training in a municipality within the county of [name of county]. The teaching placement part of the programme comprises a total of 20 weeks (30 credits). Over the course of the training, the student will take an increasingly active role in the preschool or school’s activities in order to be able to – in the final VFU course – essentially assume responsibility for the work in a small group of children or the teaching in a class. The student will receive continuous supervision by a VFU supervisor at the preschool or school, who will support the student in various ways as they
develop into a professional pedagogue. The VFU course teacher at [name of university] will prepare and support the student ahead of the VFU periods, as well as lead VFU seminars during the courses. In several of the VFU courses, the student will be visited in the preschool or school by a VFU course teacher. So-called three-party meetings will take place during these visits.

In the text from the pamphlet, we can see that the importance of teaching placement is institutionally substantiated, and that responsibility for the educational environment is gradually increasing throughout the teacher education program. At the final teaching placement, the student is expected to “essentially assume responsibility for the work in a small group of children or the teaching in a class.” Thus, a student teacher during final teaching placement needs to cope with situations that similarly occur for teachers in the teaching profession.

As pointed out by Beijaard (1995) many years ago, social relationships with pupils are a central part in the process of developing a connection to the teaching profession. For students, teaching placement is their major point of contact with pupils, and it is an arena with great potential for their professional development. The ongoing identification with the teaching profession is a phenomenon of interest in research on teacher identity. Research on teacher identity is a branch mainly focused on professional teachers’ identity development, both in educational sciences (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Bukor, 2015) and in applied linguistics (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017; Li, 2020). However, an interest in student teachers’ professional identity has been vibrant and growing for several years now (e.g., Beijaard, 2017; Christensson, 2019; Friesen and Besley, 2013). Teacher identity can be understood as the continuous identification with the teacher profession, and it concerns the individual’s self-perception as a teacher, as well as appearing as a teacher to others. As such, the idea of student teachers developing their professional identity is generally a desirable outcome of teacher education (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2010; Sutherland et al., 2010). Previous research on the teacher identity of student teachers demonstrated that it is a constantly changing phenomenon (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), thus aligning with a good deal of research on identity in interaction, where identity is seen as an ongoing negotiation between social actors (cf. Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Norris, 2011). As examples of how teacher identity may be produced and imposed on others, respectively, we can see student teachers’ ways of relating their own personal and professional experiences to their self-image of “the good teacher” (van Rijswijk et al., 2013), or the use of personal narratives to positioning others in relation to the teaching profession (Taylor, 2017). In a framework for analyzing identity in educational contexts, Gee (2001) put forward four perspectives of identity: nature-identity, institution-identity, discourse-identity, and affinity-identity. These four views are prototypical examples, concerning identity as, respectively, given by nature, as institutionally assigned, as constructed/produced through discourse, and as experiences shared by social groups. Each perspective may be applied to a single example of identity or may be seen as aspects of one identity (Gee, 2001: 100). As the present article concerns the use of stories in interaction, the notion of affinity-identity will be used to conceptualize how stories as
representations of previous experience can be used to manage affinity groups in the classroom.

Another aspect of teaching placement that is relevant for the teaching profession is subject matter (cf. Beijaard, 1995), that is, the subject that one teaches. In the present article, a student teacher is teaching a class on a potentially sensitive topic in the subject of history: the Second World War (and by extension the Holocaust). This is a difficult subject, since pupils may react in ways that are not considered appropriate. Arneback and Englund (2020) point to the Holocaust as one of the potential topics where racist discourse may arise in the classroom. They find that teachers tend to develop a skill of knowing when to ignore a provocative comment, and when to see the potential for growth, thus engaging in a discussion (2020: 33).

Nexus analysis as framework for data construction and analysis

As previously noted in the Mediated discourse analysis and experience in interaction section, nexus analysis is tightly connected to MDA. It can be understood as an ethnographic and discourse analytical methodological framework, and it has been described in terms of “sophisticated ethnography” (Blommaert and Huang, 2009: 268), partly motivated in its potential to analyze historical aspects of social action. The unit of analysis in nexus analysis is social action taking place in the intersection of the historical body, discourses in place, and interaction order. One of the primary advantages of nexus analysis is its potential to take on the analysis of complex phenomena (Blommaert and Huang, 2009; Kuure et al., 2018: 78), and it is an open-ended framework that encourages the incorporation of different analytical concepts that can be useful for understanding the social action under scrutiny (Scollon and Scollon, 2004).

Data construction

This study focuses on one student teacher—Eric—in the final stages of his teacher education. He is studying to become a secondary school teacher, with his main subject being history. I met Eric during ethnographic fieldwork in a rhetoric course for novice student teachers, a course that he had originally missed when he began his teacher education and now needed to get his diploma. Eric invited me to join him in his final teaching placement, to see him teach in a classroom. During the ethnographic fieldwork, an interest in how Eric used stories in his teaching arose. In summary, the main body of data used in this article is to a large extent participant-initiated, emanating from ethnographic fieldwork from January to May 2016.

Issues of teacher belief regarding teaching and education cannot be acknowledged by only turning to classroom interaction (cf. Richards, 2006: 73). Hence, several types of data are used in this study. The classroom interaction consists of two video recorded history classes with the same set of pupils. The classes take place on the same day: one morning class, and one afternoon class. In order to be able to make potentially more substantiated claims regarding classroom interaction, and to empirically ground the discussion in Eric’s historical body, data of spoken discourse from Eric’s oral
presentations in the rhetoric course, as well as an interview prior to his teaching placement, are part of the data collection. An overview of this data can be seen in Figure 1.

As Figure 1 shows, the oral presentations were video recorded in January 2016 (cf. Christensson, 2020, where Eric is not in focus). Furthermore, I interviewed Eric in April 2016, which was documented by field notes. The classroom recordings took place in May 2016. Approximately 2 weeks before video recording the classroom, I met with Eric and his personal tutor (a teacher at the school) to discuss practicalities surrounding the recording process. At the same occasion, I informally attended one of Eric’s classes and presented myself to his pupils. The pupils were very keen to participate and appeared as rather comfortable with the idea of being video recorded and of my presence in the classroom. All participants in the study signed informed consent.

During the time of the video recordings, the classroom was reorganized with the intention that pupils who were not part of the study should not be video recorded. Motivated from a research ethical standpoint, and in consultation with Eric and his personal tutor, the pupils who signed informed consent were placed in a row to the far left in the classroom, with one camera focused on them. The other camera was focused on the desk in the front of the classroom. However, due to the dynamics of the classroom, pupils who were not part of the study occasionally walked into the frame. Such instances were immediately discarded and are not subject to analysis. As my presence in the classroom most likely affected the classroom interaction, it simultaneously affected the classroom space as well.

**Analytical workflow**

The analytical process was separated into three phases. Firstly, video recorded oral presentations from the rhetoric course were examined for instances in which Eric described his views on education and the teaching profession. This resulted in two stories, which are interpreted through the historical body as an analytical lens in the following section. The main reason behind such analysis was to give a potential insight into Eric’s view on teaching and the teaching profession, in order to enrichen the understanding for his actions in the following analysis. Secondly, the classroom interaction was analyzed. Based on the ethnographic fieldwork, and drawing on previous research pointing to stories and narratives as examples of past events brought into present time (e.g., Bamberg

| Setting | Data type | Participants | Size | Time period      |
|---------|-----------|--------------|------|------------------|
| Rhetoric course (university) | Video recordings, field notes | Eric, tutor, students, researcher | 3 presentations, 3 min. each | January 1–7 2016 |
| Cafe (university) | Field notes | Eric, researcher | 1 hour | April 12th 2016 |
| Classroom (school) | Video recordings, field notes | Eric, personal tutor, pupils, researcher | 2 sessions (approximately 2 hours each) | May 5th 2016 |

**Figure 1.** Overview of data.
and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Labov, 2013), rough transcriptions were made of actions in which Eric told different stories. I regarded such stories as potential representations of previous experience realized in the mode of speech. Then, two actions were selected for further analysis through a nexus analytical approach, focusing on how discourse was used by Eric to manage the interaction order and thus the social relationships with his pupils. As a tool to facilitate such analysis, Gee’s (2001) concept of affinity-identity was employed, with the motive of highlighting how social actors in the classroom may be included or excluded in different affinity-groups. As such, the selection of data represented in the present article aims to facilitate the exploration of re-emerging discourse from a student teacher’s historical body in a teaching placement setting.

Finally, the data were triangulated, searching for itineraries of discourse that circulated through the actions studied (cf. Scollon, 2008). Eric’s views on teaching and education emerging from the stories in the oral presentations and the interview are regarded as a glimpse into his historical body, which is used to support the understanding of his actions in the classroom. The focus of the article is on the detailed knowledge of how stories may be discursively used in the interactional management of pedagogical tasks in the classroom, rather than on the frequency of which such phenomena occur. As Scollon and Scollon (2004) argue, the historical body infuses all social action; hence, the choice of actions under scrutiny does not aim to be representative for all actions where Eric used experience in interaction.

**Analysis**

As a way to introduce Eric’s view on education and the role of a teacher, and thus establish a basis for a better understanding of his historical body in relation to the teaching profession, the first subsection focuses on some of Eric’s life stories, recorded during oral presentations that he gave during a rhetoric course in January 2016. It is worth noting that these stories represent discourse from an assessed oral presentation in front of an audience, as it is rehearsed oral communication in a more rigid academic setting than the interactional data from Eric’s teaching placement. The following two subsections (6.2 and 6.3) focus on classroom interaction during Eric’s teaching placement in May 2016.

**Eric as a student teacher and a teacher**

Eric is a student teacher with the main subject of history. He is approximately 25 years old. In data originating from oral presentations in a rhetoric class in January 2016, Eric discusses how teachers are mentors for their pupils and his ideas of what it is to be a good teacher. Firstly, one of Eric’s oral presentations concerns the importance of teachers, and he chose to center his presentation around a teacher that he admires. This particular teacher also came up as an inspiration in the interview with Eric on 12 April 2016, and based on Eric’s description of him, that teacher can be understood as an embodiment of a quintessential teacher. In the excerpt below, Eric reflects upon past events and how his teacher motivated him to study:
With him [a teacher] I was focused, and that’s because I saw who he was, and one of the first things he told me was: “Eric, you give up too easily. You need to fight in school because you’re smart. You have potential and you are wasting it.” And he was right.

(from oral presentation #2, personal presentation)

In the extract above, Eric shares a short story on how a teacher made him understand the importance of paying attention in schoolwork. The wording, for example, in the phrase “you need to fight in school,” is a typical example of Eric’s rather visceral rhetoric on the topic of the need for education. Delivered as a quote from a teacher in the past, using Eric’s own voice, this story points to discourses on the importance of having a teacher who cares about his/her pupils, and simultaneously, it points to the individual’s responsibility to reach their full educational potential.

During the interview in April 2016, Eric said that a major reason for his choice of becoming a teacher was the opportunity to help pupils, in particular, young men in low status areas, to realize the importance of education. This is related to his own experiences from being a pupil who experienced guidance from a teacher. Moving from past events to present events, Eric shares his view on the importance of education through a story in one of the oral presentations he held during the rhetoric class in January 2016:

The fact is that today the majority of my friends, or childhood friends, are addicts. They take different substances – a lot of stuff – and it hasn’t turned out well [for them]. That is the reason for me being a strong advocate for good education. It is something that can make the difference between being an addict or a teacher.

(from oral presentation #3, argumentation)

As the extract above suggests, Eric sees education as a way to improve the lives of individuals. Here, we see embodied semiotic practices involved in drug abuse (e.g., “they take different substances”) resemiotized into the mode of speech, and furthermore used as a tool to highlight the potential risk of not getting an education.

In summary, in these personal stories, Eric shares his view on education and on what it is to be a teacher. By using discourse linked to past semiosis, he points to specific previous experiences of being a pupil with an attentive teacher and seeing friends’ lives affected by a lack of education. In the following subsection, the multimodal use of stories in classroom interaction will be analyzed in greater detail.

Introducing the second world War

As the analysis of stories from Eric’s oral presentations suggested, he drew on personal experiences to represent (1) the importance of education, and (2) the importance of teachers as mentors, where the idea of “the good teacher” appears to be someone who motivates pupils and is aware of their status as potential mentors or role models. The analysis now turns its focus to the interactional use of stories in classroom interaction. Two excerpts are studied, and Eric’s personal tutor is present in the classroom throughout.
The action taking place in the excerpt below concerns the introduction of the Second World War. Situated at the front of the classroom, Eric has started the computer and pulled down the projector screen, making sure that everything works. During the preparation process, he makes small talk with some of the pupils seated near the front of the classroom. Several of the pupils in the classroom are looking at their phones at this point, and Eric asks them if they are ready to begin:

Excerpt 1 (Eric: student teacher; Thomas: pupil)

01 Eric: okej är ni redo
   alright are you ready
02 Class: ja
   yeah
03 Eric: för andra världskriget
   for the Second World War
04 Thomas: vi är redo för Europa League final [pekar på Eric]
   we’re ready for Europa League finals [pointing at Eric]
05 Eric: ja det också. Det är fett viktigt för om Liverpool vinner den då blir alltså både
   Yeah that too. It’s madly important because if Liverpool wins it then both
06 Manchester city och Manchester united kan inte spela Champions League
   [Manchester] city and [Manchester] united won’t be able to play Champions League
07 Thomas: ja
   yeah
08 Eric: så jag kommer må bra
   so I’ll feel good
09 Thomas: [skrattar]
   [laughing]
10 Eric: nu ska vi diskutera andra världskriget
   now we’re going to discuss the Second World War

In the excerpt above, Eric introduces the topic of the Second World War (line 03) and is interrupted by Thomas, who shifts the topic to soccer by stating, “we’re ready for Europa League finals” (line 04, see Figure 2). Rather seamlessly, Eric shifts focus and presents a
short story using discourse anticipating the future: he states a potential outcome in the future, if Liverpool wins the Europa League finals (lines 05–06). After Thomas agrees with him (line 07), Eric makes him laugh by pointing out that he will be pleased with the consequences in case Liverpool wins the finals (lines 08–09). Finally, on line 10, Eric marks the return to the topic of the Second World War. Figure 2 demonstrates a frame grab at the moment that Thomas interrupts Eric (line 04).

As Figure 2 shows, Eric and Thomas are looking and pointing at each other. By doing so, they produce two vectors (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 59) in two different semiotic modes: one in the mode of gaze, and one in the mode of gestures. Hence, discussing soccer is depicted as a matter between Eric and Thomas, establishing a bond between them. Thomas shifting the topic to Europa League finals (line 04) makes Eric react and adapt accordingly. Naturally, he could have ignored Thomas’ comment, but he chose not to, which interactionally limits the following actions. From a nexus analytical perspective, this action takes place at the intersection of Eric’s approach to teaching: his desire for pupils to speak freely; his interpersonal relationship with the pupils; and surrounding discourses concerning expectations of him being able to manage the classroom situation.

Soccer discourse is brought into the classroom space by Thomas’ response (line 04) to Eric’s question (line 01), which is most likely rhetorical. Through his story of a future event, Eric immediately demonstrates knowledge about the topic, arguing that the results are important to him (lines 05–06, 08), and in so doing presents himself as a soccer fan. Through their use of gaze, gestures, and speech, Eric and Thomas thus co-produce affinity-identity as soccer fans. The production of affinity-identity is a multimodal endeavor where discourses re-emerging from the historical bodies of Eric and Thomas are used in the classroom. The soccer story used by Eric demonstrates knowledge of, for example, scoring and team positions, which is shared knowledge in the affinity group of soccer fans, found in images and texts such as tables and form guides. Thus, such images and texts are used as semiotic resources in the interaction, resemiotized to the mode of speech. Consequently, the production of affinity-identity as a soccer fan is utilized as a tool in the process of dealing with the pedagogical task of a pupil interrupting an introduction.

In summary, Eric’s interactional use of the story highlights processes of resemiotization, where past semiotic actions shared by the affinity group of soccer fans are resemiotized to an oral story that is used as a semiotic resource to manage classroom interaction.

Discussing the holocaust

As previously shown, Eric has established an approach where his pupils are encouraged to speak freely in the class. The action in focus in this subsection is carried out when Eric explains war tactics. He uses a PowerPoint slide with the heading “which war tactics were ‘popular’ during the Second World War.” This can be seen in Figure 3.

At the moment of the frame grab in Figure 3, as Eric talks about war tactics, a pupil in the class draws parallels from the German’s use of mustard gas in World War I to the use of Zyklon-B in concentration camps during World War II. Following this, the general topic of interaction in the classroom shifts to the Holocaust. Another pupil starts talking about
visiting Auschwitz, and in a similar fashion as in Excerpt 1, Eric engages with the pupil-initiated topic, doing so by sharing a story of his own experiences of visiting a concentration camp. After some time, Paul (to the right in Figure 3) engages in the discussion:

Excerpt 2 (Eric: student teacher; Paul and Thomas: pupils)

01 Eric: jag har varit vid ett koncentrationsläger utanför en by och jag minns inte vad den heter. Det var med så här klassresa och det var verkligen hemskt där inne. Det här name. It was during like a school trip and it was really horrible in there.

02 Eric: med Auschwitz exempelvis, det är inte något jag typ skulle vilja åka till i första about Auschwitz, for example, that’s not something I like would like to visit in the first

03 Eric: taget. place.

04 Paul: vill du … dom har kvar alla skor allt avklippt hår do you want to … they have all their shoes, all their hair

05 Eric: ja, det finns bilder där dom exempelvis har yeah, there are photos where they, for example, have

06 Paul: vet du varför dom har rakat av deras hår? do you know why they shaved off their hair?

07 Eric: jag vill inte veta [skrattar till] I don’t wanna know [short laugh]

08 Paul: jo så det inte ska lukta när dom bränns. Du vet så här lukta bränt hår well, so it won’t smell when they’re burned. You know, like, the smell of burnt hair.

09 Thomas: [vänd mot Paul] nej nej en kebabrolle [turned to Paul] no no a kebab roll
11 Paul: [leer] extra allt
[smiling] extra everything

[Several pupils talking at the same time, Paul and Thomas start making small talk and joke around]

12 Eric: [höjer rösten] speciellt efter man har varit i ett koncentrationsläger blir det
[raises his voice] especially after you’ve been to a concentration camp it becomes

13 vildigt svart att ta lätt på förintelsen
very hard to take the Holocaust lightly

[Paul and Thomas quickly pull up their phones and look at the screens]

14 Eric: Det kanske finns skämt och såna saker men det är ingenting man kan ta lätt på. There might be jokes and stuff like that but it is not something you can take lightly

15 Speciellt när man har varit i ett koncentrationsläger. [Harklar sig]
Especially when you’ve been to a concentration camp. [Clears his throat]

16 så har vi blitzkriegstaktiken
then we have the blitzkrieg tactics

Excerpt 2 starts with Eric telling a story about visiting a concentration camp. As he explicitly says that he does not remember the name of the village where the concentration camp was located (lines 01–02), it is most likely an unprepared story that is produced as a reaction to the topic introduced by his pupils. Eric furthermore states that he wouldn’t like to go to Auschwitz in the first place (line 03), as a comment to the pupil who introduced the topic, as described in the paragraph prior to Excerpt 2. Following this, Paul brings up examples of his knowledge about different events taking place in the concentration camps (“they have all their shoes, all their hair,” line 05). After this recount of previous knowledge, some pupils continue to talk with Eric, and others (mainly Paul and Thomas) start talking to each other, making jokes (see lines 10–11). The joke occurring on lines 10–11 is connected to Paul’s statement on the reason for shaving the heads of people (line 07). During this part, Eric does not initially attend to the following small talk and laughter, but soon he sees the need for a remark of some sort, which is observed when he raises his voice, saying: “especially after you’ve been to a concentration camp it becomes very hard to take the Holocaust lightly” (lines 12–13). Paul and Thomas turn silent and pick up their smartphones, while Eric elaborates that the Holocaust is something one should take seriously (line 14). Furthermore, he repeats a version of a previous statement, saying that the Holocaust is not a joking matter “especially when you’ve been to a concentration camp” (line 15).

In excerpt 2, Eric has noticed that the interaction does not follow the intended path. Thus, he needs to act. In this case, he could be said to have at least two identity-related expectations that should be considered: as student teacher, he is expected to demonstrate for the personal tutor in the room that he can manage instances like these, and as a teacher, he is expected to manage the classroom interaction. Eric’s story of visiting a concentration camp is interesting for several reasons: on a generalized level it connects to well-established discourses about the potential benefits for pupils to visit concentration camps.
(see, e.g., Nawijn et al., 2018) and the possible psychological benefits of dark tourism (see, e.g., Chang, 2014). More specifically, it presents a sensitive subject that is important to be able to talk about to the classroom, but simultaneously it may lead to undesirable actions from pupils that Eric will need to address.

Eric’s story is a representation of his own personal experience of visiting a concentration camp in the mode of speech, and in it there are intertwined processes of resemiotization. In line 2, Eric states that it “was really horrible in there,” furthermore confirming to Paul that he knows of how shoes and hair from the victims were kept (“yeah there are photos,” line 06). By stating that it was horrible in there, Eric resemiotizes the multimodal semiotic practices from his visit that together make up that sensation (walking in the camp, taking a guided tour, reading signs, etc.) to the mode of speech. He also specifically refers to photos (“yes there are photos where they,” line 06). Although interrupted by Paul, the interaction suggests that the photos may refer to the rather well-documented collections of human remnants from concentration camps. Thus, Eric also resemiotizes meaning from the mode of image to the mode of speech, which in this case produces more commonplace knowledge that does not necessarily rely on personal experience.

While noting that the pupils have started to make jokes, Eric makes the visit to a concentration camp a desirable part of the historical body that will affect future actions. By using the generic pronoun “man” (English: you/one)—“it is not something you can take lightly,” “especially when you’ve been to a concentration camp” (lines 14–15)—he suggests that people who have engaged in the semiotic practices making up the experience of visiting a concentration camp are part of an affinity group that will not joke about the Holocaust. By doing so, he simultaneously elucidates the joking from Paul and Thomas as being caused by them not knowing better, by extension suggesting that they have not been part of such semiotic practices. In that sense the story is used as a tool for interactional facework that signals that there is no moral difference between the affinity groups. Instead, it is their engagement in semiotic practices connected to specific places—or lack of—that explains their actions. Eric’s use of the story thus produces the affinity-identity as a concentration camp visitor in the mode of speech. His remark, highlighting the seriousness of the Holocaust (e.g., lines 12–13), echoes contemporary public discourses on whether the Holocaust can be a laughing matter at all.2 Eric also makes it clear that the personal experience of visiting a concentration camp will enforce that one does not make fun of the Holocaust.

In summary, Eric’s use of the story about visiting a concentration camp suggests that people who visit such places are part of an affinity-group comprising members who have engaged in similar actions. This mutual semiosis is rooted in shared experiences that affect present actions. Simultaneously, the story has a very practical function in the classroom, as Eric needs to demonstrate to his personal tutor that he can professionally manage the situation of pupils joking about a sensitive subject in the classroom.

**Discussion and conclusions**

As the results of this article suggest, an important aspect of the stories that Eric uses is that they are semiotic resources that can be adapted. In Extract 2, Eric shares a story representing the experience of having visited a concentration camp with some of the pupils in
the classroom, but due to a disorderly situation, he explicitly points to pupils excluded from that affinity group. The personal tutor’s presence as a historical body in the classroom makes her a part of the interaction order, representing the institutional expectations of Eric as a student teacher. If a pupil makes a joke about the Holocaust, Eric, as a student teacher during his final teaching placement, will most likely be expected by his personal tutor to handle that situation. Thus, it is sensible to argue that Eric needs to demonstrate that he has appropriated the necessary skills to manage a class by himself. In this sense, the situation may include demonstrating learning related to his teacher education, and one could argue that Eric does so at the intersection between ideals of being friendly with his pupils (as mentioned in the interview), rooted in his historical body, and the institutional expectations of him as teacher. Engaging in a discussion, rather than ignoring the comments, when pupils joke about sensitive matters is a sign of a professional approach to classroom interaction (cf. Arneback and Englund, 2020) and signals that Eric most likely sees the potential for pupil growth in this situation. In a sense, he uses his stories to design the learning situation in the classroom.

On a methodological note, it is relevant to highlight that nexus analysis, in combination with the notion of affinity-identity, is a fruitful way of viewing how Eric use stories to create closeness and distance respectively with his pupils. In the co-production of affinity-identity as soccer fans in Extract 1, Eric and Thomas share a joint experience and are part of the same affinity group. At that point, Eric and Thomas, and probably other pupils in the room as well, are members of the same affinity group. Although, it is worth noting that Eric and Thomas use the modes of gaze and gesture to produce vectors between them, potentially distancing themselves from the other pupils. As such, the affinity-identity production in the first excerpt attends to the interpersonal relationships between student teachers and pupils, and thus facilitates the continuation of the professional task of introducing the lesson.

Bamberg (2011: 5) notes that all stories are told with a purpose. Initially, Eric’s story about visiting a concentration camp is told with the purpose of being an account for the horrors that took place there. Due to the jokes between Paul and Thomas, Eric reshapes the purpose of his story by raising his voice, adding that the Holocaust is not something one should take lightly (Excerpt 2, lines 17–18). Discourses of serious matters of death (cf. Labov, 2013: 89) are certainly circulating in the practice of visiting a concentration camp, and here they become present in the classroom. Visiting a concentration camp is an experience that is part of Eric’s historical body, and by resemiotizing semiotic practices that make up that experience to the mode of speech, he implicitly (1) connects to pupils who may be included in the affinity group of people who have visited concentration camps, and (2) highlights Paul and Thomas as potential non-members of the same affinity group. In other words, through his story Eric produces affinity-identity of having visited a concentration camp, utilizing both inclusion and exclusion in affinity-groups in order to manage the interaction order in the classroom. This result suggests that personal stories have a professional application in the classroom, something that ought to be relevant for teacher education in general.

This article has demonstrated a student teacher’s use of personal stories in interaction with his pupils during teaching placement. The results show how discourse connected to
the everyday experience of engaging in the sport of soccer (e.g., a results table), and the experience of visiting a concentration camp (e.g., a guided tour, written signs, etc.), become resemiotized to the mode of speech and used in immediate interaction. The present article also demonstrates how such stories are linked to past semiosis and may function as flexible resources used to manage concrete pedagogical tasks in the classroom (managing a pupil that interrupts, making a remark to inappropriate behavior). Previous research argues that the experience of student teachers as learners in higher education is important for the production of professional identity (e.g., Muchnik-Rozanov and Tsybulsky, 2019; Sutherland et al., 2010). However, the findings of this article suggest that experiences not necessarily connected to learning within formal education may be highly relevant for managing social relationships with pupils in classroom settings. This article has enriched the knowledge about how stories may be used in classroom interaction between student teachers and pupils, and it may serve as a basis for further research focusing on the interaction between student teachers’ and pupils. As a suggestion, it would be interesting to further investigate the relationship between previous experiences and the development of professional identity.

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Notes

1. At the time of this article being written, Eric was working as a teacher in a Swedish high school.
2. For instance, in 2017, while hosting the comedy show Saturday Night Live, comedian Larry David made a joke about “checking out” fellow prisoners, if he were to have been in a concentration camp himself. For this, he later received criticism from several people and organizations.

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