A STUDY OF ORAL LANGUAGE USE IN A GRADE THREE CLASSROOM: IMPLICATIONS OF A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Oral communication is a vital component of the learning process. Research demonstrates that children benefit from engaging in oral interactions with their peers and, through such interactions, can co-construct knowledge and develop deeper understandings of issues being explored. Currently, however, it can be argued that talk is undervalued in our educational system and little effort is made to focus teaching in this area. The research outlined in this thesis explores the impact of a focus on oral communication skills in a grade 3 classroom. Making use of ongoing assessment and explicit instruction, a systematic approach to instruction was implemented, over a five month period, with tracking of both feasibility and effects. The intention was also to create a community of learners in the classroom, through students' increased use of collaborative, exploratory, and accountable talk. Interventions attempted to address both social and cognitive aspects of classroom talk. The results of the study demonstrate that the impact of the interventions was complex and appeared to be affected by the initial socio-cognitive profiles of the individual children involved. Discussion is provided of the implications of these results for various stakeholders.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal Context

It was the last period of the day in my grade 2/3 class and the children and I were involved in a discussion about Rosa Parks. We were debating whether or not it was all right that Rosa Parks had broken the law by refusing to give up her seat on the bus. We were getting into some fairly complex issues and I was thrilled with the oral interaction I was witnessing. My students were expressing opinions, adjusting viewpoints, building on ideas, and agreeing and disagreeing with one another. They were working together as a community of learners. Reluctantly, I stopped the discussion to give my students time to prepare for dismissal. As they were leaving the carpet area, I overheard one of my grade 2 students express his surprise that it was already time to go home. He added that we had not really done much for the last hour of the day; all we had done was talk. I reflected on the thinking behind this statement. It led me to wonder how my students perceived classroom talk. Was this student surprised because I normally did not allow for so much time to be spent on talk? Did he view it as *not really doing much* because he had not been required to produce a concrete piece of writing? Had I created an environment in which students did not understand the importance of oral communication?

In reflecting on my previous years of teaching, I would suggest that I had not created a classroom environment in which talk was promoted. In terms of

literacy acquisition, I had devoted more time and thought to developing the reading and writing skills of students as opposed to their oral communication skills. I would add that I had addressed the oral communication expectations of the Ontario language curriculum in a fairly superficial manner. I had never addressed them in the same kind of systematic and thorough manner I used for instruction of reading and writing.

I valued oral communication and understood the importance of giving children time to talk. I never, however, viewed oral communication as being as important as reading and writing. I also did not devote as much time and attention to planning for the instruction of this strand of the Ontario language curriculum. I felt that allowing some time during the day for discussion was sufficient, and that this would give me an adequate understanding of how students communicated with one another. I never felt that I had to teach oral communication in the same way I taught other subjects. In fact, the only time I really taught oral communication skills was when I was working on speech arts in my class. Most years, I would have my students write an exposition and then deliver this as a speech to the rest of the class. This was the only oral communication activity that I felt required teaching. I would provide instruction on maintaining eye contact with the audience, using good enunciation, and projecting one's voice. I would also assess students quite thoroughly during this activity. I prepared rubrics, highlighted these, and sent them home to be shown to parents. The marks

generated from these speeches became a significant part of the oral

communication mark for each student on the report card for that term.

During the year of the Rosa Parks discussion described above, my

manner of teaching underwent a change. I had taken a graduate course called

Language Learning in the Classroom. This course involved the analysis of

classroom discourse. The major assignment required us to audio record oral

interaction from our classrooms, transcribe a portion of this, and then analyze it.

The analysis of my transcription was revealing. My students spoke infrequently

and in short utterances. I monopolized the conversation. Few of my students built

on the ideas of others. My lesson turned into a painful 20 minutes of trying to get

students to recall and regurgitate information. This assignment made me realize

that I needed to take a more serious look at how I used talk in my classroom and

at how I addressed the oral communication expectations of the language

curriculum. I started to consider what I might be able achieve in my classroom if I

devoted more time to focusing on oral communication skills.

The Importance of Oral Communication

Many researchers and writers in the field of education have suggested that

strong oral communication skills are essential for our students to achieve success

in school and also to be productive members of society (Wells & Chang-Wells,

1992; Cazden, 2001; Gilles & Pierce; 2003; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Alexander,

2008; Barnes, 2008; Wells, 2009, 2010). Cazden (2001), for example, places the

importance of oral communication in a global context, explaining that:

> [T]wo of the abilities necessary to get good jobs in the changing
> economy are also necessary for participation in a changing society:
> effective oral and written communication and the ability to work in
> groups with persons from various backgrounds. In other words,
> schools have a responsibility to create not only individual
> human capital for a healthy economy, but collective social
> capital for healthy communities as well. (p. 5)

Alexander (2008) contends that education should provide students with the

abilities they will need as future citizens of our world: skills to listen to and

question one another, examine and debate issues together, and solve problems

(p. 122). He explains that, "Dialogue within the classroom lays the foundations

not just of successful learning, but also of social cohesion, active citizenship and

the good society" (p. 122). This suggests that one of our primary goals as

educators should be to focus on the development of oral communication skills. In

reflecting upon the world in which we currently live and where this world is

headed, these skills will become a vital resource for our students, as they

navigate through a rapidly-changing, technological, and competitive environment.

Oral Interaction in Today's Classrooms

According to the literature, oral interaction in today's classrooms is

characterized by the use of closed questions to test students' recall abilities,

teachers talking significantly more than their students, and few opportunities for

students to extend their thinking and deepen their understandings of topics that

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are explored (Wells, 1989; Cazden, 2001; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Alexander, 2008; Clifford & Marinucci, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Barnes, 2010; Gilles, 2010; Reznitskaya, 2012). For example, Cazden (2001) suggests that the most common way teachers interact with their students is through the IRE/F, Initiation - Response - Evaluation/Feedback manner of oral interaction (p. 30). The teacher engages in an illusory dialogue which is, in fact, a monologue during which he/she stops occasionally to involve his/her students, by asking closed questions to which there are already predetermined answers (p. 46). Wells (1989) notes that the majority of speech in a classroom comes from the teacher and that mathematical calculations suggest the individual student only speaks 1% of the entire day (p. 251).

When my thinking around classroom talk began to shift, I started to reflect on how I might promote talk more effectively with my students. How might I break the IRE/F pattern of oral interaction? How might I create a classroom environment in which the students spoke more than the teacher? I also started to wonder about how students acquire oral communication skills. Did students naturally develop the ability to communicate effectively and productively with one another or did they require the same kind of targeted and explicit instruction we provided in other subject areas such as reading and writing?

The Aim of this Research

The aim of my research was to explore the following question: what is the impact, if any, of targeted and explicit instruction on the oral communication skills of grade 3 students? When I began my research, I did not believe that students automatically developed the ability to be effective communicators and to engage in productive discussions. This belief was drawn from personal experience. In my classroom, I had never spent much time focusing on oral communication skills; however, I had always set aside time during the day for a variety of class discussions. Despite giving my students daily opportunities to engage in discussion, I was not seeing the kind of classroom talk that I would characterize as productive or even interactive. Instead, I was seeing the opposite. In discussions that involved the whole class, oral interaction consisted of me doing most of the talking and my students regurgitating previously stated information. There was minimal student-teacher interaction and no genuine student-student interaction. In smaller group situations, I would also suggest that there was not genuine student-student interaction. During these, one or two of the more dominant group members tended to monopolize the discussion.

My research began from this vantage point, from my belief that we needed to address oral communication in a systematic manner and that it was erroneous to assume that students developed oral communication skills on their own, without any instruction. I was hoping that a systematic approach to the instruction

of oral communication skills would lead to collaborative, accountable, and exploratory forms of talk (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2) and I would begin to see the emergence of a community of learners in my classroom.

Definition of a Systematic Approach

Given that the aim of this research was to look at how oral communication skills developed when one adopted a systematic approach, a definition of the term *systematic approach* is required. Throughout my years of teaching, I have been encouraged to adopt a systematic approach to my instruction of various subjects, such as reading, writing, and mathematics. In my school board, my understanding of a systematic approach to instruction in reading, for example, involves identifying expectations from *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1 - 8, Language* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), using explicit instruction to address these expectations, and providing opportunities for students to master these expectations through practising the skills they have learned in group situations and with teacher support. Although these instructional strategies are thought to be best practice, I have never received professional development pertaining to using these instructional practices in the area of oral communication. In 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Education published a resource to provide guidance in the instruction of oral communication in the junior grades, entitled *A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4 to 6, Volume Four, Oral Language*. There is, however, no resource for the primary grades.

The Use of Assessment in a Systematic Approach

Assessment plays an important role in a systematic approach to instruction. Diagnostic assessment is used at the beginning of a unit of study to gauge the state of students' knowledge of a topic and to shape future instruction. Formative assessment practices (Black & Wiliam, 2009) are used throughout a unit to allow teachers to determine how students are progressing and where there are gaps in their learning. According to Black and Wiliam (2009), formative assessment allows teachers "to make decisions about the next steps in instruction" (p. 9). The insight that teachers gain from using formative assessment practices may lead them to revisit certain points of previously taught lessons if students are struggling with a specific concept or skill.

Applying a Systematic Approach to Oral Communication

To attempt a systematic approach to my instruction of oral communication, I audio recorded weekly discussions and then transcribed these audio recordings (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3). I used this transcribed material as evidence of student learning. The first several transcriptions served diagnostic purposes: these transcriptions allowed me to determine what I needed to focus on in my instruction of oral communication (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). Subsequent transcriptions became formative assessment pieces and provided me with insight into how individual students were progressing in terms

of their development of oral communication skills. This information shaped future instruction and allowed me to reflect on previous instruction.

I used a variety of activities to promote the use of various oral communication skills in my classroom. All of these activities were designed to address curriculum expectations, as listed in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1 - 8, Language* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), and areas of oral communication in which I noticed gaps. Instructional interventions occurred as needed throughout this process. These consisted of revisiting certain lessons, going back and emphasizing one or two previously taught points of a lesson, and redesigning lessons to meet the needs of my students.

Summary

My decision to conduct this research arose from taking a critical look at my own instructional practices in the area of oral communication. I concluded that the oral interaction in my classroom was lacking. I was speaking more than my students, I was not providing them with opportunities to develop and deepen their understandings of the topics we were exploring, and my students were not interacting with one another in a productive manner during their small group discussions. Although research suggests that classroom talk can be used to promote learning and to enable students to co-construct knowledge together (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2), I did not feel this was happening in

my classroom. Therefore, I wanted to explore whether or not a systematic

approach would improve the quality of talk in my classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Classroom Talk: Theoretical Models and Practical Implications

As the goal of this thesis is to explore the impact of a systematic approach (as described in Chapter 1) on the teaching of oral communication skills, a review of carefully chosen pieces of literature from several fields of study, including those of education and psychology, is key. In this chapter, I will be looking at the role of talk in relevant theories of teaching and learning, as well as the work of Vygotsky, whose research on the relationship between speech and cognitive development provides the theoretical foundation for my exploration of this thesis topic; sociocultural and constructivist perspectives of learning; recommended practices regarding talk; how talk is currently used in classrooms; and challenges teachers face in using talk effectively in their classrooms. I will also be delving into theories of assessment, such as divergent and formative assessment practices, how one might apply these to the assessment of oral communication skills, and challenges inherent in assessing oral communication.

My desire to explore oral interaction comes out of a concern that, despite research showing the important role that talk can play in cognitive development and the learning process, limited demonstrations of this understanding are made evident in current classrooms. Research suggests that the school environment is less stimulating than the home environment (Wells, 1986) and teachers are accused of using artificial knowledge display questions (Cazden, 2001; Mercer &

Dawes, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Reznitskaya, 2012), engaging in "pseudo-enquiry" with students (Alexander, 2008), and not making attempts to probe and extend thinking (Alexander, 2008). Furthermore, teachers are faced with challenges in promoting forms of talk that will result in deeper understanding. These include views of how knowledge is acquired (Wells, 1999; Eun, 2010), the perception of teachers that they need to maintain a silent classroom (Mercer & Littleton, 2007), and external pressures such as government-imposed standardized testing and an extensive curriculum to cover (Alexander, 2008; Solomon & Black, 2008; Madaus & Russell, 2010/11).

It is in response to these bleak portrayals of the classroom that I believe my research can contribute to our understanding of how talk can be used effectively in the learning process.

Theories of Learning and Implications for the Understanding of Talk

To develop an understanding of how classroom talk can be used to promote learning, it is necessary to explore perceptions of talk in education and how these have evolved throughout the 20th century. In the following sub-sections, I will be exploring various theories of learning, including Vygotsky's contribution to our understanding of the role of talk in the cognitive development of children.

Historical views of teaching and learning. The role of talk has been perceived differently throughout the centuries and across different cultures. At

various times and places, talk has been considered of primary importance as the channel for education. At other times, print has been dominant in models of learning. The value of talk is inevitably bound up in conceptions of knowledge and assumptions about how knowledge is taught and acquired. For much of the 20th century, for example, the dominant ideology in education could be understood as one of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and not only was talk seen as unimportant, it was also viewed as a problem. The purpose of going to school, according to this ideology, was to impart to children a predetermined body of knowledge deemed by outsiders to be of cultural value and relevance. The role of the teacher was to transmit or pass along this knowledge to students. In this model, learning occurred in isolation as students were taught by listening to their teachers and parroting back to their teachers what they heard. Classroom talk performed the basic function of checking whether or not students had achieved a basic understanding of the material covered in class.

In contrast to this ideology of teaching and learning, a more progressive model was that of learning through discovery. When students were ready, they learned through a process of engaging in discovery-based learning activities. In this model of learning, talk was used to express students' thoughts as they participated in these various learning activities. Talk, according to this ideology, served a more complex function in learning than simply being a way for students to regurgitate information that had been passed along to them. Instead, talk was

linked to cognitive activity as students were required to make their thinking explicit.

Critics of such approaches believe that both these ideologies are problematic. For example, Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) contend that they fall short in their failure to recognize the value of collaboration in the learning process. In both, learning is seen as an individual endeavour and the student as "independent and self-contained" (p. 28). Furthermore, in both ideologies, talk serves a perfunctory function. In one model, talk is used to express students' thoughts; in the other model, it allows the teacher to check whether or not students are able to recite information that has been transmitted to them. In neither model is talk seen as a means through which students can explore, develop, and construct knowledge through social interaction with others.

Changing views of talk in the 20th century: Piaget and Vygotsky. In the earlier part of the 20th century, the dominant theory of learning was that of transmission: the teacher transmitted information to the student and the student recited this back to the teacher. In the 1920s and 1930s, psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky were exploring the connections between speech and thought. Although their work suggested that talk played an important role in cognitive development, their ideas were not embraced and it took some time for these to filter down into educational practice. In the 1980s, the ideas of Piaget and Vygotsky led to a re-examination of the importance of talk in the learning

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process. Those in the field of education began to recognize there was a connection between talk and cognitive growth.

Any discussion of classroom talk, therefore, must begin by acknowledging the contributions of Piaget and Vygotsky and examining the research they conducted in terms of oral activity and its impact on cognition. Jean Piaget, for example, explored the connection between speech and thought and his findings opened the door to more complex considerations of talk and its role in childhood development. Vygotsky (1934/1986) credits Piaget with revolutionizing "the study of the child's speech and thought" (p. 12). Piaget (1923/2002) identified two forms of speech, egocentric speech and socialized speech (p. 9). Egocentric speech was used to convey out loud what the child was thinking, as he engaged in various activities. Piaget explained that, through the use of egocentric speech, the child was able to talk "to himself as though he were thinking aloud" (p. 10). Talk, therefore, was seen as a window to what was going on inside the mind of the child.

Vygotsky also explored links between speech and thought, and built on Piaget's research, as well as findings of others in the field. In his book, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Vygotsky (1978) identified two distinct and separate paths that merged in the process of individual development: the elementary processes, which were biological, and the higher psychological functions, which were sociocultural, or formed through social

interaction and cultural influences (p. 46). In his exploration of connections

between these two paths, the biological and sociocultural, he took up the work of

Kohler, Buhler, Shapiro and Gerke, and Guillaume and Myerson, all of whom had

researched aspects of cognitive development through comparing children's

abilities to perform various tasks with the abilities of animals, such as apes and

chimpanzees. Kohler, for example, studied the practical intelligence of

chimpanzees and compared how these animals reacted in certain situations to

how children reacted in similar situations (p. 20). Buhler's experiments with

chimpanzees and young children led to his conclusion that the development of

practical intelligence was separate from the development of speech (p. 21).

Shapiro and Gerke claimed that children copied what they saw adults doing and

that it was through this imitation of the actions of adults that they developed a

repertoire of actions that could be used to solve problems in the future (p. 22).

Guillaume and Myerson suggested that there were similarities between the ways

in which apes performed a task and how humans who were unable to speak

performed a task (p. 22). Based on the findings of the research described above,

Vygotsky explored the relationship between cognitive development, practical

intelligence, and speech. From Guillaume's and Meyerson's contention that the

actions of apes in completing a task were similar to those of an individual

deprived of speech, Vygotsky concluded that "speech plays an essential role in

the organization of higher psychological functions" (p. 23).

As Vygotsky built on Piaget's findings, he also expanded on his own theory

of the role of speech in cognitive development by exploring claims made by

Piaget concerning children's use of egocentric speech. As mentioned earlier,

Piaget (1923/2002) identified two categories of speech: egocentric and

socialized. The function of socialized speech, according to Piaget, was to interact

and communicate with another individual (Piaget, 1923/2002, pp. 10-11). Piaget

(1923/2002) believed that egocentric speech, on the other hand, served no real

purpose, other than as a monologue or a thinking aloud of the child's thoughts as

he played, speech used "to accompany the action as it takes place" (p. 16). In the

1930s, when Vygotsky (1934/1986) was exploring Piaget's claims, he disputed

this notion of egocentric speech as nothing more than "accompaniment" to what

the child was doing (p. 29). In his own exploration of egocentric speech, Vygotsky

(1978) referred to the work of Levina (p. 25), who set up experiments in which

young 4- and 5-year-old children had to perform the challenging task of obtaining

a candy that was out of their reach. As they attempted the task, the children

began to use egocentric speech. Interestingly, the children's egocentric speech

changed as they persisted in trying to get the candy. At first, the children, through

their use of egocentric speech, described what they were doing in their attempts

to get the candy. Eventually, however, the egocentric speech became "planful",

that is, the children began to plan out how they would solve the problem of

obtaining the candy (p. 25). Vygotsky (1934/1986) conducted similar experiments

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to observe children's use of egocentric speech. He created a range of tasks for children to complete and engineered obstacles to try to hinder their ability to accomplish the task. Vygotsky discovered that, when faced with these obstacles, the amount of egocentric speech increased, which led to his conclusion that, "egocentric speech appeared when a child tries to comprehend the situation, to find a solution, or to plan a nascent activity" (p. 30). Going beyond Piaget's notion of egocentric speech, Vygotsky (1978) contended that "speech not only accompanies practical activity but also plays a specific role in carrying it out", that is, speech helps individuals solve problems when attempting tasks (p. 25).

Vygotsky (1978) suggested that egocentric speech not only increased when a child was presented with barriers to completing a difficult or challenging task, but it also evolved over time. As a result of his observations of children attempting specific tasks, Vygotsky noted that, at first, speech occurred *during* the performance of the task; eventually, however, speech occurred *before* performing the task. Vygotsky concluded that when speech occurred before the individual attempted a task, it served to guide and plan how the task would be executed: speech served a "planning function" (p. 28). Vygotsky (1934/1986) compared this evolution of the use of speech, first during the activity and, later, in the planning of the activity, to the process that occurred when children drew pictures: "A small child draws first, then decides what it is that he has drawn; at a slightly older age, he names his drawing when it is half-done; and finally he

decides beforehand what he will draw" (p. 31). One may conclude from Vygotsky's observations that egocentric speech does play an important role in the development of an individual's cognitive skills, in helping one plan out his/her activities.

Vygotsky also disputed Piaget's notion of what happened to egocentric speech as children aged. Whereas Piaget (1923/2002) believed that egocentric speech eventually disappeared and died away, Vygotsky (1934/1986) believed that egocentric speech became what he called "inner speech" (pp. 32-3), through the process of internalization. Internalization, as defined by Vygotsky (1978), was "the internal reconstruction of an external operation" (p. 56). According to Vygotsky, every aspect of a child's development occurred twice, first externally, on an interpersonal or social level (among individuals) and, second, internally, on an intrapersonal or psychological level (within the individual) (p. 57). Vygotsky wrote that egocentric speech "should be regarded as the transitional form between external and internal speech. Functionally, egocentric speech is the basis for inner speech, while in its external form it is embedded in communicative speech" (p. 27).

One can apply the notion of internalization to the ways in which speech develops as children get older. As a child's ability to use language develops, speech, which was once used for interpersonal purposes, begins to assume intrapersonal qualities. For example, Vygotsky (1978) discovered that when

children found tasks difficult, they would use speech to explain to an adult why they could not complete the task. Eventually, instead of using speech to address the adult, they began to use inner speech to "appeal to themselves"; this is what Vygotksy referred to as the "process of *the internalization of social speech*" (p. 27, his emphasis). Children, at this point, were starting to use inner speech, which was once egocentric speech, or language that had been internalized, to guide their actions and behaviours (p. 27). Vygotsky (1934/1986) concluded that speech did not develop from the individual to the social, as suggested by Piaget, but occurred in reverse, that "the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual" (p. 36).

To place Vygotsky's theories of speech within an educational context, one must explore his notion of the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) identified two levels of cognitive development: the actual developmental level and the proximal level of development. The actual developmental level was what the child was able to do on his/her own, or "the level of development of a child's mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already *completed* developmental cycles" (p. 85, his emphasis). The proximal level of development was the child's potential level of development, or what the child could do with help and guidance from another. Vygotsky called this "the zone of proximal development" and defined it as "the distance between the actual

developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level

of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult

guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Vygotsky

suggested that effective learning was "that which is in advance of

development" (p. 89) and, according to Vygotsky, "creates the zone of proximal

development" (p. 90). Through interaction with others, Vygotsky explained, a

zone of proximal development was established: "learning awakens a variety of

internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is

interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (p.

90). Based on this theory, as teachers, we need to create opportunities which

promote collaborative interactions among students and between students and

their teachers to enable children to progress in their learning.

To summarize Vygotsky's theories, speech plays an essential role in the

development of a child's thinking. When a child is attempting to perform a task

and solve a problem, egocentric speech is used in a variety of ways. If the task is

difficult, the use of egocentric speech increases. Furthermore, at first, the child

uses egocentric speech to describe what he/she is doing. Eventually, however,

egocentric speech is used to plan out and guide what the child will do to

accomplish the task and solve the problem. Egocentric speech does not go away

as the child ages; instead, it becomes inner speech and is used, internally, to

guide thoughts and plan out activities. In a school setting, interaction is essential

to learning as it creates a zone of proximal development: through interaction with their peers and the teacher, children are better able to develop their cognitive abilities. Vygotsky's theories carry strong implications for the role of oral communication in the schooling of our children. If the development of one's ability to think more fully and learn is connected to social activity, dialogue becomes an essential component in student learning.

Sociocultural / Constructivist theories of learning. Talk cannot be relegated to an insignificant role in learning. Rather, one might perceive talk as at the very heart of the learning process. Consistent with Vygotsky's theory of speech and cognitive development is an ideology of constructivism. Constructivism (Barnes, 1976, 2008; Parr & Campbell, 2007) opposes the notion that knowledge can be acquired through transmission from one individual to another. Instead, from a constructivist perspective, learning is understood to result from an active process of knowledge construction whereby the learner builds on what he/she already knows in order to develop new understandings (Barnes, 2008, p. 3). Barnes (2008) explains that learning, from a constructivist view, results from our "making sense of what happens to us in the course of actively constructing a world for ourselves" (p. 3). He describes this process "as *working on understanding*. Working on understanding is, in essence, the reshaping of old knowledge in the light of new ways of seeing things" (p. 4, his emphasis). Barnes' notion of "working on understanding" highlights the transitory

nature of knowledge, that it does not exist as an absolute set of facts to be taken

and stored in one's mind. Instead, learning is a process through which we build

on, rethink, and reconstruct what we already know.

A number of researchers have explored sociocultural approaches to

instruction, based on constructivist theories of the learning process (Wells &

Chang-Wells, 1992; Wells, 1999; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Eun, 2010). A

sociocultural approach opposes an individualistic perception of learning and

embraces a social one: the learner develops understanding through social

interaction with others. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) discuss how, when one

subscribes to a sociocultural view of learning, there is a shift in how talk is

perceived: talk can no longer be perceived as "an unimportant accompaniment to

the real business of learning and teaching" but must be acknowledged as "a

central and constitutive part of every activity" (p. 32). They conclude that, "In a

very important sense, education *is* dialogue" (p. 32, their emphasis). Similarly,

Mercer and Littleton (2007) describe the role of dialogue from a sociocultural

perspective. They suggest that dialoguing with others in their community allows

children to make sense of what is happening around them:

> Through engaging in dialogue, children encounter the culture of
> their community and society embodied in the language habits of this
> community and so discover how people around them make sense
> of experience. This is the level of talk as social action, and the
> actions people pursue through talk include those crucial to the
> pursuit of education - sharing information, instructing, arguing,
> narrating, eliciting information, assessing knowledge, demonstrating
> understanding and evaluating understanding. (pp. 20-1)

Eun (2010) describes principles of "socioculturally based" instruction. One of

these is that teaching and learning are "interactive, collaborative, dynamic, and

dialogical" in that teachers and students use dialogue to work together in order to

pursue common goals (p. 404). A second principle, Eun explains, is that

knowledge must be seen "as something to be co-created among teachers and

students as they engage in inquiry-based activities that serve to solve real-life

problems" (pp. 404-5). The ideas that began with Vygotsky's notions of the

connections between talk and cognitive development carry strong implications for

educational practices. Classroom talk, from a sociocultural perspective, becomes

a vital component in the learning process. Talk can no longer be simply viewed as

a by-product of learning or as a means of finding out what students know.

Instead, talk plays a critical role in how children learn.

Recommended Practices Regarding Talk

If the research tells us that talk is essential in learning, the following

questions arise: What constitutes the work of teachers? Is it simply a matter of

teachers allowing more talk in their classrooms? Are there certain types of talk

that are more effective than others and, if so, how can teachers encourage the

use of these types of talk? The literature refers to multiple ways in which teachers

might embrace talk and use it effectively to promote learning. These include

establishing communities of learners in their classrooms, promoting specific

forms of talk, such as collaborative, accountable, and exploratory talk, working

with students to help them develop the necessary skills to enable them to use talk
to explore and build on ideas, ask questions, solve problems, and develop new
and deeper understandings. Furthermore, the literature suggests that teachers
need more professional development in the area of oral communication and that
certain instructional strategies that teachers employ are beneficial to student
learning.

Communities of learners. If we, as educators, embrace the notion that
learning is formed through social interaction, we might view our classrooms as
communities of learners. Increasingly of late, it is being recognized that children
do not learn as individuals but need the opportunity to be part of a learning
community in which they practise the knowledge that they are developing
(Dudley-Marling & Searle, 1991; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992; Elbers & Streefland,
2000; Cazden, 2001; Fisher, 2007; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Black & Wiliam,
2010; Eun, 2010; Reznitskaya, 2012). In a community of learners, the classroom
is more than a collection of individual students; it is a group of students working,
collaborating, and learning together. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992), for example,
suggest that educators move away from "individualistic conceptions" of learning
by rejecting models in which "the learner is seen...as independent and self-
contained, and learning activities as taking place *within* individuals rather than in
transactions *between* them" (p. 28, their emphasis). Black and Wiliam (2010)
propose that teachers establish "a classroom culture of questioning and deep

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thinking, in which pupils learn from shared discussions with teachers and peers" (p. 87). Cazden (2001) refers to the work being done in the field of mathematics that is geared toward looking for ways to change how talk is used in classrooms. Guidelines issued by the *National Council of Teacher of Mathematics* call for a movement toward redefining classrooms as communities and "away from classrooms as simply collections of individuals;...away from the teacher as the sole authority for right answers", in which students "listen to, respond to, and question the teacher and one another" (p. 48).

When one establishes communities of learners in the classroom, students are empowered. Cazden (2001) describes that, "as classrooms change toward a community of learners, all students' public words become part of the curriculum for their peers" (p. 169). In this way, the thinking of each student becomes a resource in the learning process and what is learned in the classroom is student-generated. The strategies they use to solve problems, the ideas and opinions they voice, and their disagreements and agreements become part of the curriculum. The onus is taken off the teacher to be the sole resource for knowledge, as students are not only learners in the classroom but also resources for one another. Lindfors (1999) also describes this shift in the teacher's role and the importance of developing common understandings in communities of learners, such as an understanding that everyone in the classroom be viewed as a learning resource (p. 223). Eun (2010) describes a "collaborative culture" in

classrooms, which values "common learning goals that are shared by the students as each contributes to the overall classroom learning" (p. 408). In such a collaborative culture, Eun explains, a desire to achieve common goals supersedes competition, no individual (including the teacher) takes control of the creation of knowledge, and learning occurs as a result of the collaborative learning culture that has been established (p. 408). Similarly, Elbers and Streefland (2000) describe how, in the community of inquiry, students take responsibility for their learning, and the traditional role of the teacher as authority figure is altered: "Learning occurs because children contribute to the construction of knowledge for which they themselves, to a certain extent, have been made responsible" (p. 37). Reznitskaya (2012) describes the dialogic nature of classrooms that function as communities of learners. In these, authority to determine the content of what will be discussed is shared among all, and not solely determined by the teacher (p. 447). Through establishing communities of learners, therefore, students are able to take ownership of their learning, classroom talk becomes part of the curriculum, and each student takes on the dual role of learner and teacher.

In their book, *Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking: A sociocultural approach*, Mercer and Littleton (2007) devote a chapter to showing teachers how to establish communities of learners in the classroom. They view this as one component in the implementation of a program they call the *Thinking*

Together approach (to be discussed in a subsequent section of this Literature

Review), which consists of a series of lessons designed to promote "the

construction of knowledge". They argue that "it aims to do so through the creation

of a positive culture of collaboration and community of enquiry in the

classroom" (p. 73). Part of establishing this learning environment involves the

collaborative development of ground rules. They explain that:

> [I]n the *Thinking Together* lessons teachers talk explicitly with
> children about what counts as good, productive discussion and
> together the children and their teacher collectively construct and
> agree some clear ground rules for making this happen in their
> particular classroom context. It is not the case that a set of
> predefined ground rules are somehow imposed upon children and
> their teacher. Rather, an agreed set of ground rules emerges from
> joint discussion and collective consideration by the children and
> their teacher of what makes for productive talk in their classroom
> context. (p. 70)

Mercer and Littleton suggest that a learning environment be created in which

there is an understanding that criticism is not a personal attack on an individual

but, rather, involves a range of perspectives and opinions: "The debate and

discussion of ideas may at times involve dispute and disagreement, but this is

undertaken in an environment in which personal criticism is clearly distinguished

from the criticism of ideas" (p. 73). The teacher plays a specific role in the

community of learners. Mercer and Littleton suggest the teacher's role is not

simply as instructor or facilitator but also as "someone who can use dialogue to

orchestrate and foster the development of a community of enquiry in a classroom

in which individual students can take a shared, active and reflective role in

building their own understanding" (p. 74). When one perceives the teacher in this

way, students become "apprentices in collective thinking, under the expert

guidance of their teacher" (p. 74). The teacher, therefore, assumes the

responsibility of working with students to develop a learning environment which

functions as a community of learners. He/she establishes and promotes this

community of learners by providing guidance to students as they develop an

awareness of the value of talk and collaboration and as they learn to use

dialogue to co-construct knowledge and understanding.

Developing skills with various forms of talk. Alexander (2008) provides

what he calls a *learning talk* repertoire: a list of various functions of talk that

promote learning (pp. 111-2). He suggests that children need to be exposed to

and learn how to use talk for a variety of purposes, such as to "narrate; explain;

instruct; ask different kinds of question; receive, act and build upon answers;

analyse and solve problems; speculate and imagine; explore and evaluate ideas;

discuss; argue, reason and justify; negotiate" (p. 112). Furthermore, Alexander

describes four other skills students need to develop in order to learn through talk,

which he terms "contingent abilities": the abilities "to listen; to be receptive to

alternative viewpoints; to think about what they hear; to give others time to

think" (p. 112). Researchers in the field refer to various forms of talk that might be

characterized as rich forms of talk (Chang & Wells, 1988; Lindfors, 1999; Mercer

& Littleton, 2007; Barnes, 2010). By *rich forms of talk*, I am referring to talk that

enables students to achieve the functions of talk that promote learning, as listed above in Alexander's repertoire. Collaborative, accountable, and exploratory talk are three of the most widely used labels. Although writers tend to stress slightly different aspects as the primary focus of each, all of these versions of rich talk share common features. For example, all of these forms of talk, according to the literature, intend to enable students to develop an awareness of gaps in their own thinking and to revise and refine their thinking through sharing ideas and listening to the ideas of others. It is clear from exploring these forms of talk that there is agreement that certain types of talk are more beneficial to learning than others, and teachers should try to foster these in their classrooms. These forms of talk will be described in the following sections.

Collaborative talk. Chang and Wells (1988) define collaborative talk as that which "*enables* one or more of the participants to achieve a goal as effectively as possible" (p. 96, their emphasis). They suggest it is a form of talk that "has the potential for promoting learning that exceeds that of almost any other type of talk" (p. 97). Chang and Wells distinguish between two forms of collaborative talk: talk that occurs within a group of individuals who are of equal status in a learning situation and talk that occurs among a group of individuals who do not possess equal status (pp. 96-7). In both instances, collaborative talk becomes an effective tool for learning.

When collaborative talk occurs among individuals of equal expertise,

several aspects of this kind of talk lead to learning and to the development of

individual thinking skills. Collaborative talk, for example, can be used to help

students develop what Chang and Wells refer to as literate thinking skills. Literate

thinking enables the learner to critically reflect on how he/she uses language to

make his/her point: "Thinking is literate when it exploits the symbolic potential of

language to enable the thought processes themselves to become the object of

thought" (p. 106). Key features of collaborative talk that enable participants to

develop literate thinking skills, according to Chang and Wells, include

"explicitness, connectivity, justification, relevance" (p. 105). In collaborative talk,

participants must make their thinking clear and explicit to one another in order to

achieve intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity involves developing a mutual

understanding. Wells (1989) suggests that the need to achieve mutual

understanding "requires each participant to make his or her meaning clear to the

other" (p. 260). In being explicit and attempting to reach a mutual understanding,

participants have to clarify and alter their own ideas. Participants also have to

justify their thinking and support their opinions by providing relevant ideas that

are connected to the topic of discussion. Chang and Wells (1988) claim that it is

through this process of justification that participants develop an awareness of

how understanding is achieved through building on and making connections to

knowledge they already possess (p. 106). Collaborative talk makes thinking

processes more transparent as students develop an awareness of how their thinking is influenced and shaped by their dialogic interactions with others (p. 107). It is my understanding that this implies that students begin to identify weaknesses in their viewpoints and how they convey these to the others. In listening to differing viewpoints, they can determine where their own viewpoints fall short, where there are gaps, where their vocalizations are unclear, where their claims are not justified, and where they are unable to explain their thinking clearly to another.

Chang and Wells (1988) also discuss how collaborative talk can promote learning when participants are not of equal status. In a classroom situation, this might involve a teacher engaging in collaborative talk with a student or a group of students. In these instances, Chang and Wells suggest that collaborative talk can be helpful to both student and teacher, provided the interaction is "contingently responsive". A contingently responsive interaction occurs when the teacher gauges the ability of the child and formulates his/her responses based on what that student needs in order to progress developmentally. The teacher uses talk, therefore, as an opportunity to push the student's thinking and encourage a move forward in learning (pp. 97-8). This is based on Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, described earlier in this chapter (on p. 20): talk creates a space in which the teacher is able to assess the learner's current understanding and proficiencies in order to promote further learning. Chang and Wells explain

that engaging in collaborative talk allows the teacher "to increase his or her understanding of children's thinking in general, and....the teacher can become knowledgeable about the learner's purposes and current state of understanding" (p. 98). The teacher, in these situations, uses collaborative talk to give the student an opportunity to gain knowledge that will be useful in future learning situations. Through this process, both teacher and student are empowered: the student is able to acquire new knowledge and skills that will be valuable and the teacher is able to develop a better awareness of the needs of the student and how to help that student progress (pp. 97-8).

Accountable talk. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) has a different term for the type of classroom talk that promotes learning; they call this *accountable talk.* In *A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4 to 6, Volume Four, Oral Language*, a resource created by the Ontario Ministry of Education, accountable talk is defined as talk that:

> goes beyond conversation as ideas are not just exchanged but considered and acted upon, becoming part of each participant's thinking. As they put forward their ideas to be considered and tempered by the ideas of others, students extend and refine their personal understanding. (p. 76)

Engaging in accountable talk provides valuable learning opportunities because, according to the Ontario Ministry of Education, it allows students to become "flexible thinkers": in listening to the ideas and perspectives of their peers and seeing how their peers use a range of problem solving strategies, students

discover that there are alternative ways of understanding things and solving

problems (p. 76). Similar to Chang's and Wells' belief that collaborative talk can

lead to the development of literate thinking skills, accountable talk is also

described as playing an important role in the development of metacognition:

"When students engage in an exchange of ideas and points of view, they learn to

question not only what others say, but also their own thinking and

understanding" (p. 84). Both collaborative talk and accountable talk, therefore,

help students develop awareness of gaps in their own understanding and

thinking.

In his description of accountable talk, Alexander (2010) cites Michaels et

al. (2008) to explore the notion of accountability in accountable talk. When

engaging in this form of talk, according to Michaels et al., students are

accountable to knowledge, to reasoning, and to the learning community (as cited

in Alexander, p. 106). As students engage in talk with others, they must be

accountable to knowledge by using accurate information to support their

opinions; they must be accountable to reasoning by using language effectively to

present their opinions and arguments; they must be accountable to the learning

community as they listen to one another to question the ideas and opinions of

their peers (as cited in Alexander, p. 106). Students, therefore, are not only

responsible for their own learning; they are also responsible for the learning of all

members of the learning community. Similar to the notion of collaborative talk,

through the use of accountable talk, the process of learning is not only an

individual one but also an interactive and social one during which, through the

exchange of ideas, understandings are shaped, modified, and refined.

Exploratory talk. Another type of talk referred to in the literature is

exploratory talk (Booth, 1994; Mercer et al., 2004; Mercer & Littleton, 2007;

Barnes, 2008, 2010; Reninger & Rehark, 2009; Vetter, 2009; Dawes et al., 2010;

Gilles, 2010). Mercer and Littleton (2007) define exploratory talk as talk during

which:

> partners engage critically but constructively with each other's
> ideas. Statements and suggestions are offered for joint
> consideration. These may be challenged and counter-challenged,
> but challenges are justified and alternative hypotheses are offered.
> Partners all actively participate, and opinions are sought and
> considered before decisions are jointly made...in exploratory talk
> knowledge is made more publicly accountable and reasoning is
> more visible in the talk. (p. 59)

Mercer et al. (2004) list the characteristics of exploratory talk. These include that

all participants are encouraged to speak and share ideas; all ideas are welcomed

and explored; students must make the thinking behind their ideas clear; students

challenge one another; students arrive at a consensus after considering ideas (p.

362). Similar to Chang's and Wells' understanding of collaborative talk, when

engaged in exploratory talk, children must "present their ideas as clearly and as

explicitly as necessary for them to become shared and jointly analysed and

evaluated" (Mercer & Littleton, 2007, p. 62). Mercer and Littleton (2007) explain

that exploratory talk is in direct contrast to two other types of talk frequently heard

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when students engage in group work: disputational talk and cumulative talk (pp. 58-9). When students engage in disputational talk, they disagree with one another, but not in a productive manner as they do not explain to one another why they disagree, and they are unable to reach consensus within the group (pp. 58-9). Unlike disputational talk, when they engage in cumulative talk, students readily agree with one another, repeat ideas, and elaborate on these, but there is little knowledge construction or development of new ideas because students do not question one another, thus preventing them from deepening their understandings of the issues being discussed (p. 59). It is my understanding that, unlike disputational and cumulative forms of talk, exploratory talk promotes learning because knowledge is co-constructed within the group, opinions are questioned and challenged, new ideas are explored, and students are provided with opportunities to deepen and revise their personal understandings of the topics and issues being discussed. Similar to collaborative talk, as defined by Chang and Wells, Mercer and Littleton suggest that exploratory talk functions through the creation of "a dynamic state of intersubjectivity" in that ideas are explored in a collaborative as opposed to "individualistic" manner, resulting in the development of shared understandings (p. 136).

Certain authors emphasize the notion of talk being used to enable students to try out their ideas on others (Barnes, 1976, 2008, 2010; Lindfors, 1999; Cazden, 2001; Dawes et. al, 2010). One author has worked closely with

this. Barnes (2008) describes the tentative nature of exploratory talk, that it is "hesitant and incomplete because it enables the speaker to try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns" (p. 5). He makes a distinction between exploratory talk and presentational talk, explaining that, "in presentational talk the speaker's attention is primarily focused on adjusting the language, content and manner to the needs of an audience, and in exploratory talk the speaker is more concerned with sorting out his or her own thoughts" (p. 5). He also distinguishes between exploratory speech and final draft speaking. He explains that, unlike exploratory speech, "final draft language" does not show "the detours and dead-ends of thinking, it seems to exclude them and present a finished article, well-shaped and polished" (Barnes, 1976, p. 108). Cazden (2001) cites Barnes to highlight his comparison between first drafts of rough writing and exploratory talk as a first draft of speaking: "Douglas Barnes called our attention to the analogy between first drafts, now an accepted first step toward fluent writing, and exploratory talk as a first step toward fluent and elaborated talk" (p. 169). Similar to the messy, unedited, and unrevised first draft of a piece of writing, exploratory talk allows students to try out their ideas in collaboration with others and, in the process, reformulate, revise, and rethink their ideas, thereby extending their own learning. Dawes et al. (2010) suggest that this form of talk allows children to experiment with ideas and present these without fear of judgement or rejection (p. 102).

Lindfors (1999) addresses the notion of exploratory talk, in a discussion of how talk can be used effectively in inquiry-based learning to delve into science topics. She highlights the dialogic and exploratory nature of talk, arguing that:

> [It] is profoundly dialogic, the speaker in each turn turning to others for active understanding and response. Also absent is performance talk - perfectly crafted and executed conversational turns. The talk here is messy. It is rough draft talk, thought-becoming-word talk. (p. 169)

The word *exploratory*, as an adjective to describe this form of talk, is appropriate in that ideas are explored through language. This is summed up in Lindfors' notion of "thought-becoming-word talk": as students come up with ideas, exploratory talk provides them with opportunities to vocalize their ideas and try them out on others. Just as the rough draft of a piece of writing is part of the writing process, exploratory talk becomes part of the process in using language effectively to express ideas.

To sum up, there are numerous similarities and some differences between collaborative, accountable, and exploratory talk. While all three forms of talk emphasize the notion that talk can be used as means of co-constructing knowledge through social interaction, collaborative talk is described as a form of talk that can also be used to promote learning between teachers and their students. Both collaborative and accountable talk allow students to extend and refine their own thinking as they become aware that there are many ways of understanding and seeing things and are exposed to differing viewpoints and

perspectives. On the other hand, one of the key features emphasized in exploratory talk is that it allows students to try out their ideas on others and might be viewed as a rough draft of speaking, serving the same purpose in the writing process as a rough draft of writing. When one combines these various aspects of collaborative, accountable, and exploratory talk, the literature suggests that talk can be a valuable learning resource, when it allows students opportunities to voice opinions, agree with, disagree with, and challenge ideas, and reach mutual understandings.

Teacher education for the effective use of talk. Teachers need to be educated about how to increase the use of collaborative, accountable, and exploratory forms of talk in their classrooms. There is evidence to suggest that, when teachers are provided with professional development in the area of oral communication, student learning improves. Gillies and Khan (2008), for example, conducted a study in which they explored the talk of students in classrooms in which teachers were provided with various forms of focused professional development in how to improve student learning through dialogue and group work. In one training activity, teachers learned about elements of cooperative learning, how to use these in their teaching of curriculum, how to use specific communication strategies to improve student thinking, and "how to promote discussion among students during their small-group activities". In addition, they were provided with theoretical information (on, for example, Vygotsky's and

Piaget's theories of learning). In the other PD situation, teachers received less

extensive training on a wider "range of strategies for promoting effective learning

and teaching in students" (pp. 326-8). Gillies and Khan found that the talk was

more extensive and of a higher quality in the classrooms in which teachers had

received more extensive training on cooperative learning and how to use specific

communication strategies. For example, students were observed "providing more

elaborations" (p. 337) and they "adopted many of the higher-level thinking

responses that their teachers had modelled and used them in their interactions

with each other" (p. 337). From this study, Gillies and Khan concluded that, "The

results provide support for the importance of training teachers to use those

communication strategies that challenge children's cognitive and metacognitive

thinking and promote learning" (p. 338). This supports the notion that teachers

need to be educated about classroom talk: in what it can sound like, in how it can

be used to promote learning, and in how to support their students to converse

effectively and in this way collaborate with one another.

Explicit teaching of oral communication skills. There is also evidence

to suggest that students need to be taught, through explicit instruction, how to

use talk effectively (Mercer et al., 2004; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Mercer and

Littleton (2007), for example, conducted research to explore the theory that one

can promote learning and improve student achievement by formally teaching

students how to use talk to co-construct knowledge. Mercer and Littleton describe

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an approach to teaching they, along with others, have designed called the

Thinking Together programme. The purpose of this programme is to promote a

more effective use of classroom talk and to help teachers "shape and facilitate

the use of discourse for the purpose of building understanding, enabling and

encouraging the construction of personal meaning as well as shaping and

confirming collective understanding" (p. 68). *Thinking Together*, they explain, is

based on a "sociocultural perspective" of learning and "is designed to ensure that

children have educationally effective ways of talking and thinking together in their

repertoires" (p. 69). The approach involves the implementation of a series of

lessons during which:

> the whole class is directly taught ways of using
> language as a tool for reasoning, with the aims for
> collaborative activity being made explicit in the teacher's
> whole class introduction to each lesson. The children are
> provided with well-designed activities for work in groups, in
> which they can practice applying and developing such
> skills....The teacher-led whole-class activities have been
> specifically designed to raise children's awareness of how
> they talk together and how language can be used in joint
> activity for reasoning and problem-solving. (pp. 69-70)

The *Thinking Together* programme functions on the basis of several principles.

The first of these is that the teacher and students explore what it means to have a

productive discussion and, together develop a set of ground rules so that

productive discussions can occur in the classroom (pp. 70-1). The second is

discussions involve dispute as children disagree with and challenge one another,

but there is an understanding that, in challenging each other's ideas, no one is

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being personally attacked. Students are also encouraged to reach consensus within groups (pp. 72-3). The third is the teacher's role is to model "exploratory ways of talking", as he/she guides students in how to use language effectively to explore ideas collaboratively and co-construct knowledge (p. 74).

Mercer and Littleton (2007) conducted research to explore the impact of their *Thinking Together* approach on the learning and development of children of various age groups in the UK. In control classes, the *Thinking Together* programme was not used and these classes proceeded as normal, by following the National Curriculum; in target classes, the programme was implemented. Various aspects of development of students in both groups were assessed, using a variety of tools including standardized tests, video recording of group activities, and whole-class *Thinking Together* lessons. Furthermore, they looked at audio recordings of interviews with teachers and students (pp. 84-9). An analysis of the data revealed that students in the target classes were using language more effectively as "a tool for collective reasoning" after the implementation of the *Thinking Together* programme (p. 84). Researchers concluded that "we could see that the target children came to use more exploratory talk and their increased use of this kind of talk was associated with improved joint problem-solving" (p. 84). When given *Raven's Progressive Matrices* (a standardized assessment in the UK), used to measure non-verbal reasoning (p. 84), children of a range of ages in the target groups were more successful at completing the problems on this

assessment individually (p. 85) and scored higher on this assessment (p. 93) than children in control groups. After the implementation of *Thinking Together* lessons in target classes, there was an increase of students' use of words associated with exploratory talk such as "because", "agree", "if", and "I think" (p. 87). An increase in the use of these words led researchers to conclude that the *Thinking Together* programme "had changed the ways the children talked, and had done so in the direction intended by the intervention" (p. 87). When working in groups, the discussion of children in target classes was of an exploratory nature, in that children were asking one another for opinions and ideas, challenging these, and working collaboratively to reach consensus (p. 91). Children in target classes also spoke in longer utterances than children in control classes, after the implementation of the *Thinking Together* programme. These findings suggested more thought and idea development as "the more children explain and justify their views, the longer their utterances will tend to be" (p. 92). It therefore appears that students benefit from explicit instruction in using classroom talk and from the implementation of programmes that target classroom talk.

Similar findings come from Gillies and Khan (2008) whose work confirmed that the quality of talk was more developed and demonstrated a deeper level of thinking when students had been taught how to use exploratory talk. For example, the talk of the children in these classrooms indicated higher-level

thinking responses, they elaborated more in their responses, and they explained

their thinking in greater detail. Gillies and Khan drew the following conclusion:

"teachers can promote the quality of students' discourse by explicitly teaching

those communication skills that challenge and scaffold students' higher-level

thinking and learning during their small-group discussions" (p. 337). Therefore,

the evidence suggests that, when teachers target oral communication skills

through explicit instruction, the quality of talk and student learning improves.

Instructional practices. The literature also suggests teachers'

instructional practices may influence the quality of student-student interaction and

individual thinking skills. Webb et al. (2008) explored the ways in which teachers

probed their students' thinking for further explanation by looking at the oral

interactions that occurred during math lessons from three different classrooms.

The instructional practices that teachers employed differed in the three

classrooms. In all three classrooms, teachers asked students to explain their

thinking when students were answering questions; however, in one of the

classrooms, the teacher consistently asked for further explanations from her

students (p. 372) even if students initially provided correct and complete answers

(p. 372). Webb et al. explain that, "Teacher 3 'unpacked' student work and

explanations whether or not they were clear and correct" and pushed her

students "to clearly describe their thinking and verbalize a correct explanation" (p.

373). All three teachers gave their students time to work together in pairs but

Teacher 3 gave her students more opportunities to work together in pairs to solve math problems (p. 373). Furthermore, Teacher 3 reminded her students when they were working together in pairs that they needed to "explain to each other" (p. 374). During pair activities, Teacher 3 also "listened closely to what students said and asked questions intended to help students clarify and make explicit each step in their thinking" and "she modeled how students should explain to each other" (p. 376). Students in all three classroom were given a written assessment and were interviewed. Students in the classroom with Teacher 3 "scored the highest" on the written assessment and the individual interview (p. 376). The authors of this study concluded that "while all teachers asked students to explain their thinking, teachers differed in *how* they probed student thinking" (p. 377, their emphasis). This research demonstrates that various instructional strategies can have an impact on student learning.

Current State of Classroom Talk

As discussed above, the literature clearly suggests that teachers can have a significant impact on children's learning through targeted teaching practices and promotion of particular types of talk. One might ask, then, are these forms of talk being promoted and used effectively? What does the oral interaction look like in today's classrooms?

Patterns of oral interaction in today's classrooms. The literature suggests that classroom talk is not used as effectively as it might be in our

current educational practices. In 1986, Wells wrote about the language

experiences of children at school in his book *The Meaning Makers: Children*

learning language and using language to learn. He compared the language

experiences of children at school to their experiences of using language at home.

His comparison revealed that many schools were much poorer sites of language

development than homes: that at school there was a disproportionate number of

teacher to student utterances (three teacher utterances to one student utterance),

that children did not speak as much with an adult at school as they did at home,

they did not get as many turns to speak, they did not ask as many questions, and

they did not start the conversation as often as the adult. In addition, teachers

were less likely than parents to encourage children to develop and extend their

thoughts. Based on these findings, Wells concluded that "schools are not

providing an environment that fosters language development. For *no* child was

the language experience of the classroom richer than that of the home" (p. 87, his

emphasis).

More recent literature on classroom talk suggests that we have not made

significant progress in how talk is currently used in the classroom (Alexander,

2008; Mercer & Dawes, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Gilles, 2010; Reznitskaya,

2012). Many authors refer to the common use of the IRE (Initiation/Response/

Evaluation) or IRF (Initiation/Response/Feedback) structure of discourse in

classrooms (Cazden, 2001; Alexander, 2008; Clifford & Marinucci, 2008; Mercer

& Dawes, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Gilles, 2010; Reznitskaya, 2012). This structure of oral interaction is often criticized for its use of artificial questions that do not extend thinking but, rather, only require students to provide short, predetermined answers (Cazden, 2001, p. 46). Cazden (2001) uses the analogy of a computer's "default option" to illustrate the natural tendency of teachers to fall back on this form of oral interaction (p. 31).

Black and Wiliam (2009) describe this manner of interacting with students as one which "involves the teacher asking students to supply missing words or phrases in the teacher's exposition of the material" (p. 11). Mercer and Dawes (2008) write of the IRF pattern of talk that "This type of exchange is still extremely common today" (p. 57). The IRF, they explain, is founded on a variety of "conversational rules" that have become implicitly understood and accepted by students and teachers in the classroom: the teacher decides who will speak, the teacher asks the questions, the teacher provides the feedback, students answer the teacher's questions in short utterances, students do not speak out of turn and only speak when they have been chosen to speak by the teacher (pp. 57-8). Black and Varley (2008) refer to these "conversational rules" as "the hidden rules of classroom discourse" that students understand and accept: "the teacher decides the topic of discussion and then asks questions which she already knows the answer to" (p. 214). Barnes (2008) discusses the limitations of such an approach to talk in the classroom, that it is used to manage students and keep

their attention but it does not enable children to develop deeper understandings in their learning (p. 13). Alexander (2008) discusses the difficulties of changing classroom talk, and that that the IRF pattern of oral interaction is "remarkably resistant to efforts to transform it" (p. 93). Elbers and Streefland (2000) contend that the IRE/F pattern of oral interaction relates to social identities that are established in the classroom, that the "teacher is in authority and has every right to ask questions and to check whether the pupils can reproduce what he or she has taught them" (p. 38).

Alexander (2008) also describes unsuccessful attempts in British and American schools to get away from the IRF pattern of oral interaction. These attempts have resulted in teachers engaging in what Alexander refers to as "pseudo-enquiry" (p. 93). As opposed to asking closed questions, with pseudo-enquiry, teachers ask a series of open questions. These questions, however, are "unfocused and unchallenging" and the talk is as limited and ineffectual as the talk that results from the IRF pattern of oral interaction (p. 93).

Alexander (2008) lists the characteristics of the classroom talk he heard from recordings of British primary classrooms. Among these characteristics, he noted that teachers moved quickly from one student to the next to keep up the pace of the lesson; they asked closed questions instead of open-ended and legitimate ones; when wrong answers were given, they were dismissed instead of being used to extend and deepen understanding; and feedback was only used to

praise the child (p. 105). Alexander writes of the unnatural qualities of this type of talk, that students "are dominated by listening, bidding for turns, spotting 'correct' answers, and other coping strategies that anywhere outside a school would seem pretty bizarre" (p. 105).

It is important to note, however, that Alexander (2008) also suggests that this type of talk is not observable in every classroom. What characterizes classroom talk in British and American schools, he explains, does not apply to classroom talk in other places of the world. For example, in observations of talk in Russian classrooms, Alexander noted a more collective approach to classroom talk, in which there were fewer sequences of exchanges between teacher and students and, therefore, longer ones. Because not every child was expected to speak during every lesson, the teacher could interact with fewer children longer, in order to "probe children's thinking" (p. 106).

Alexander (2008) makes reference to governmental attempts to change oral interaction in UK classrooms, suggesting that "pedagogical change in the realm of interaction is extremely slow, and that basic interactive habits are highly resilient" (p. 107). Even though "pedagogical reforms" in the UK have placed more of a focus on oral interaction and the government suggests they have made progress in this area of education, Alexander is skeptical. He refers to numerous findings of Smith et al. (2004) from their study of the impact of government reforms. Smith et al. found that, despite attempts to reform classroom talk, there

was still an infrequent use of open questions, a lack of longer interactions between student and teacher during which teachers "probed" the thinking of students, and brief student responses to questions of three words or less and lasting only five seconds (as cited in Alexander, p. 108).

The use of talk in group situations. While the preceding section has addressed the predominant state of oral interaction between teachers and students, it is also relevant to look at the oral interaction among students, in group situations. The literature suggests that the talk that occurs in group situations, similar to the talk that occurs between teachers and their students, is often not productive in the majority of today's classrooms. While talk could be used as a resource to enable students to collaborate with and learn from one another, there is little evidence to suggest that it is used effectively for these purposes. Mercer et al. (2004) explain that "Children are rarely offered guidance or training in how to communicate effectively in groups" (p. 361). Mercer and Dawes (2008) write that research has shown that when students are left on their own to work together "their talk is often not productive; some children will be excluded from discussions and the potential value of collaborative learning is squandered" (p. 57). This notion of how children work together is also explored by Mercer and Littleton (2007) in their book, *Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking: A sociocultural approach.* They explain that recent studies have addressed the issue of children "working *in* groups but rarely *as* groups" (p.

26, their emphasis). They write that, "Whilst they may be seated in close proximity, children frequently work alongside each other rather than with each other" (p. 57). Mercer and Littleton make a distinction between children interacting with one another versus children interthinking. Students may interact in group situations, by disagreeing with each other and taking turns talking; they do not, however, necessarily think together in a collaborative way to accomplish a task (p. 57).

Gillies and Khan (2008) cite similar findings from research on how children work together in group situations. They describe the characteristics of "high-level discourse", or the productive use of talk in group situations. Among these characteristics, they list the following: exchanging ideas, explaining and justifying these, making speculations, inferring, and coming up with conclusions (p. 323). The research they refer to, however, shows that students involved in group work seldom use talk in this manner, that they rarely "engage in high-level discourse or explanatory behaviour" on their own (p. 323).

Barriers to Implementation of Effective Use of Talk

A review of the literature discussed above provokes the following questions: why do teachers fail to use classroom talk in a way that might encourage greater thought? Why does the IRE/F pattern of oral interaction remain so pervasive in today's classrooms? What are the challenges that teachers face in using talk effectively to promote learning in their classrooms?

Traditional views of the teacher's role. Wells (1986), Simich-Dudgeon (1998), and Mercer and Littleton (2007) suggest that we teach in the manner we were taught. A failure to recognize the value of classroom talk may, in part, result from our own experiences as students in classrooms "where talk was discredited as not being conducive to thinking and learning, or was seen as a discipline problem" (Simich-Dudgeon, 1998, p. 3). Wells (1986) reiterates this point by suggesting that "we have probably unconsciously absorbed the belief that a teacher is only doing his or her job properly when he or she is talking - telling, commanding, questioning, or evaluating" (p. 118). Gilles and Pierce (2003) refer to public perceptions of the teacher's role, standing in front of students and providing instruction for the whole class. They suggest that there is reluctance to deviate from this, by having students work in group situations, because "when an entire classroom of students is engaged in small group work, some principals, parents, and even fellow teachers continue to believe that the teacher is not *teaching*" (p. 71, their emphasis). Mercer and Littleton (2007) also suggest that too much talk makes teachers nervous because there is still the perception that a quiet classroom is indicative of *good* teachers who are in control of their students (p. 24). Therefore, traditional views of the role of the teacher have resulted in a more didactic style of instruction, in which the teacher does most of the talking, the students listen quietly, and the classroom is silent.

Alexander (2008) provides another reason for the persistence of the IRF pattern of oral interaction in classrooms, at least in British schools. He suggests that pedagogy in the British educational system dictates that there should be "equal distribution of teacher time and attention among all the pupils" and that all students should have the chance to speak in every lesson (p. 106). The only way to allow a greater number of students to participate in each lesson is for the teacher to ask a number of closed questions and to go from one student to the next so that every student has the opportunity to speak and to be heard by the teacher. In a typical average classroom of 30 students, the teacher does not have the time to probe each individual students' thinking and extended oral interaction is not feasible.

Transmission models of teaching and learning. Another issue brought up in the literature relates to how knowledge is perceived. Some writing in the field of education are critical of the transmission model of teaching (Barnes, 1976; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992; Lindfors, 1999; Wells, 1999; Eun, 2010). Lindfors (1999), for example, argues against the view of knowledge as an object that can be given to someone and finds it problematic that the term "delivering instruction" (p. 114) is used to describe what teachers do. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) write about the "transmission and reception" teaching model in which the teacher exerts and maintains control in deciding what will be taught and what texts will be used (p. 27). Eun (2010) feels that educators need to "recognize that

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knowledge is something that is co-constructed and co-created in the process of solving problems rather than an established piece of fact that is transmitted from one person to another" (p. 408). Barnes (1976) explains that some see "knowledge as the possession of trained adults, who have achieved it through years of study of a discipline" (p. 100) and find the notion of children learning on their own absurd. When we treat knowledge as a concrete entity that can easily be passed along, delivered, or given from teacher to student, there is an inevitable failure to recognize the potential of talk in the learning process.

In opposition to the transmission model is the constructivist view of learning (described earlier in this chapter on p. 22). Barnes (2008) explains that, "learning is seldom a simple matter of adding bits of information to an existing store of knowledge - though some adults will have received that idea of learning from their own schooling" (p. 3). Instead, the constructivist theory of learning suggests that the learner constructs understandings of new concepts based on his/her own individual experiences (p. 3). If we want to see changes in how talk is perceived in the classroom, educators need to re-conceptualize their notions of the learning process by rejecting the view of knowledge as something that can be passed along from the teacher to the student. This is perhaps difficult for some teachers because few of us were taught according to constructivist principles. Instead, we were tested and evaluated based on our memorization and control of factoids. If, however, we embrace a constructivist theory and the idea that

learning is the result of a process of active construction by the individual and co-construction through collaborative interactions with others, dialogue plays an important role in the intellectual growth of our students. On the other hand, if educators continue to subscribe to a theory of learning in which knowledge is seen as something that can be delivered from teacher to student, the value of dialogue in learning will continue to be misunderstood.

External pressures. One might also attribute a weakness in many educators to acknowledge the value of thoughtful dialogue to external factors such as time constraints, centrally-controlled curriculum, and accountability measures. Wells (1986) writes that these pressures cause teachers to become more "didactic" in their manner of teaching in order to get through a lofty curriculum (p. 117). It is less time consuming to spoon feed information to students than to engage them in thoughtful classroom talk. In order to teach everything in the curriculum and quicken the pace of instruction, Black and Wiliam (2010) write that teachers resort to asking straightforward questions and "questions of fact" that require little thinking on the part of students (p. 86). Solomon and Black (2008) suggest that external pressures influence what teachers do in their classroom. They explain that, "the strong emphasis on 'performance' is likely to further perpetuate unequal access to the kinds of exploratory talk which have been identified as being valuable to children's learning" (p. 87). Alexander (2008) claims that efforts to generate in classrooms

the kind of talk that promotes learning are undermined by high-stakes testing: "In a culture of high-stakes testing, which the UK government insists is here to stay, competition replaces collaboration while coaching for recall against the clock subverts speculation, debate and divergence" (p. 119). Engel (2011) writes that "In an effort to meet current state and federal standards, many public schools are consumed with training children rather than educating them" (p. 636). In the current educational climate, there is such a strong emphasis on achieving high scores on standardized tests that teachers are pressured to cover curriculum quickly and, as a consequence, may avoid spending time on lengthy classroom discussions.

In their article, *The Paradoxes of High-Stakes Testing*, Madaus & Russell (2010/11) discuss the impact of high-stakes testing on teaching skills: it "can degrade teaching skills by reducing teaching to narrow test preparation" (p. 22). They also refer to comments made by *The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy*. They write that:

> The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy
> also describes how pressures to improve scores on reading and
> math tests can narrow teaching to test preparation. The
> Commission warned that the high stakes attached to test use are
> "...driving schools and teachers away from instructional practices
> that would help to produce critical thinkers and active learners".
> (p. 26)

In Ontario, for example, where EQAO is the standardized test that is administered, instead of spending time working with children to develop their oral

communication skills, many teachers may feel they should be devoting their time to preparing their students for assessment in the three subject areas that are tested: reading, writing, and mathematics.

What is lacking in teacher education. Mercer and Dawes (2008) attribute the problem of classroom talk and a lack of progress, in part, to the education that teachers receive. They suggest that "people involved in teachers' training and development, do not have a clear understanding of how this improvement can be achieved" (p. 56). This point is reiterated by Mercer and Littleton (2007) who write about why many children tend not to use exploratory talk (discussed on p. 35 of this chapter) when working together in group situations. They suggest that "This may be because of a lack of clarity on the part of teachers", that when teachers ask students to engage in a group discussion, they do not understand that students do not know what is expected of them (p. 66). Part of the problem, therefore, seems to stem from a general lack of understanding from all: the people who develop teacher education programs and teach in them, the teachers, and, finally, the children.

As discussed in a previous section of this chapter (on p. 39), Gillies and Khan (2008) conducted a study in which they explored the impact of teacher education, in the area of oral communication and communication strategies, on the talk of students. The talk of students in target classes, in which extensive professional development had been provided for the teachers, was better than in

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control classes, in which teachers hadn't received as extensive professional development (p. 337). Their findings suggest that one of the reasons we are not seeing the level of talk we would like to see in classrooms is because teachers are not being provided with pre-service preparation and adequate professional development in the area of oral communication.

Lack of explicit instruction of oral communication skills. Another reason as to why classroom talk is not being used sufficiently to promote learning is, perhaps, due to an erroneous assumption that students naturally have the ability to engage in discussions in which talk is used effectively for learning. Mercer and Littleton (2007) contend that children need explicit instruction in how to engage in productive discussions. In their explanation as to why children tend not to use exploratory talk when working in group situations with their peers, they suggest that it is because children do not know how to do this (p. 66). Gilles (2010) reiterates this point, that teachers mistakenly send off their students to work in group situations, without providing them with guidelines: "Since the students have been given few guidelines and no practice, many students either don't know what to talk about, dominate the conversation, or fall silent" (p. 11). We tend to assume children will know how to use language effectively and, due to this assumption, do not address these skills explicitly. Mercer and Littleton (2007) feel that, "A prime aim of education should therefore be to help children

learn *how* to talk together such that language becomes a tool for thinking collectively and alone" (p. 68, their emphasis).

To support the idea that most students do not know how to talk together in a manner that encourages collaboration and promotes learning, Maybin's (2006) research explored the talk of British children in and out of class. Although she discovered that children were able to use talk in different ways and for a variety of purposes, there were no examples of exploratory talk found in her data. Maybin's findings provide further support of the argument that children do not naturally have the ability to engage in the kind of talk, such as exploratory talk, that promotes learning and cognitive development.

Mercer and Littleton's (2007) own research also provides support for the idea that children need to be taught how to use talk effectively. As described in an earlier section of this chapter (on p. 40), Mercer and Littleton (2007) explored the impact of implementing the *Thinking Together* program, an approach to teaching oral communication skills to children in the UK. Mercer and Littleton found that, in target classes, in which lessons of the *Thinking Together* program were implemented, the quality of talk improved and children were able to use exploratory talk more effectively than children in control classes (p. 84).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, research conducted by Gillies and Khan (2008) is further proof that students need to be taught, through explicit instruction, how to use talk effectively. Briefly (as this study is discussed in more

detail on p. 39), Gillies and Khan discovered that there was a higher quality of talk among students in target classes in which teachers had been provided with professional development in the area of oral communication (p. 337). This may have occurred, in part, because the teachers in these classrooms had received specific professional development pertaining to communication strategies. Gillies and Khan also suggest, however, that the talk was of a higher quality because the children in target classes had been "trained to engage in Exploratory talk" and that, due to this training, "had been sensitized to the importance of interacting in a focused way with their peers" (p. 337). These findings would suggest that explicit instruction in how to use talk might improve the quality of oral interaction among students.

Alexander's work (2008) also recognizes the need for instruction in the area of classroom talk. He writes of the challenges we still face in education in "attempting to encourage what, in British classrooms, is in effect a radical transformation of the inherited culture of classroom talk" (p. 117). Like Mercer and Littleton and Gillies and Khan, he believes that more attention needs to be given to "the systematic building of children's capacities to narrate, explain, instruct, question, respond, build upon responses, analyse, speculate, explore, evaluate, discuss, argue, reason, justify, and negotiate" (p. 117) and that students need opportunities to learn to use talk in these targeted ways. One of the reasons for a lack of significant change in the area of classroom talk might be because we fail

to recognize and appreciate the complexities of talk and to understand that students don't necessarily have the skill set to effectively use talk to serve all of the functions mentioned above.

Furthermore, in considering the complex nature of multiple ways in which talk can be used effectively, we know that not all children bring the same language experiences from home into the classroom. If we are expecting students to use talk in a variety of complex ways, without teaching them how to do this or modeling the ways in which talk can be used, one might suggest that we are assuming that children have been exposed to these functions of language at home. Mercer and Littleton (2007) raise this point in their book. They write that, "Although life will provide most children with a rich and varied language experience, in some homes rational debates, logical deductions, reflective analyses, extended narratives and detailed explanations may never be heard" (p. 2). Mercer and Littleton continue by asking the following question: "How can children be expected to incorporate such ways of using language into their repertoires, if they have no models for doing so?" (pp. 2-3). We do our students a disservice when we expect them to know how to use language effectively without providing proper instruction and modeling. While some students may get this at home, we know that not all of our students receive such exposure in the home setting.

To sum up, the literature suggests that talk is not being used effectively in classrooms to promote learning and the oral interaction among students and teachers is not as rich as it might be. The research shows that interactions among teachers and students consist largely of brief exchanges, teachers do not sufficiently probe the thinking of their students, the IRE/F pattern appears to be the norm, and, in general, teachers are talking more than their students. Furthermore, in group situations, too many students have difficulty interacting in ways that will enable them to use use talk effectively to co-construct meaning with one another. Certain forms of talk, such as collaborative, accountable, and exploratory talk, are described as being beneficial to student learning. Research has shown that these forms of talk are not being sufficiently used in classrooms. There are numerous reasons to explain the current state of classroom talk. These include a lack of professional development for teachers in the area of oral communication, a lack of explicit teaching of oral communication skills, traditional views of the teacher's role and how knowledge is acquired, and external pressures such as an extensive curriculum to cover and standardized testing.

Assessment Practices: In General and of Oral Communication

Assessment is an essential component of the learning process. What follows in the proceeding sections is a description of general assessment practices and how one might apply these to the assessment of oral communication.

Clarification of Terms Related to Assessment Practices

Various forms of assessment are referred to in the literature. These include assessment for, of, and as learning, convergent and divergent assessment, and formative assessment. These terms are defined in the sub-sections that follow.

Assessment for learning, of learning, as learning. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010), assessment is defined as "the process of gathering information that accurately reflects how well a student is achieving the curriculum expectations in a subject or course. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning" (p. 28). To improve student learning, assessment should have as its goal:

> the development of students as independent and autonomous learners. As an integral part of teaching and learning, assessment should be planned concurrently with instruction and integrated seamlessly into the learning cycle to inform instruction, guide next steps, and help teachers and students monitor students' progress towards achieving learning goals. (p. 29)

The Ontario Ministry of Education makes a distinction between three forms of assessment: assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning (p. 31). The teacher plans instruction based on curriculum expectations for each subject area (such as language, mathematics, science, social studies, etc.) provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education. During his/her planning, the teacher uses these three forms of assessment at various stages of the learning process to serve different purposes. Assessment for learning is used

to determine students' current understanding and possible next steps to get them to where they are expected to be in their learning. Both diagnostic and formative assessment practices can be used in assessment for learning. Diagnostic assessment occurs before instruction begins. It is used by teachers to gauge students' current understanding of concepts in the curriculum yet to be covered to determine how ready they are to learn new things and in order to plan appropriate instruction. Formative assessment occurs during instruction, to determine how students' learning is developing in their understanding of concepts being covered in class (p. 31).

Assessment as learning is a second form of assessment. This is used to enable students to develop an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as learners to allow them to set personal goals to progress in their learning. Assessment as learning is achieved through formative means of assessment, or assessment that occurs, as I have said, during the course of instruction (p. 31). Assessment of learning occurs at the end of a unit of study and is used to summarize and evaluate how students have grasped the concepts covered from the curriculum. For assessment of learning, the teacher uses summative assessment practices to gather information, such as a test at the end of the unit. Assessment of learning appears as grades on report cards (p. 31). It is important to note that assessment does not determine *what* teachers teach in Ontario schools; rather, it shapes *how* teachers cover a set of established expectations,

predetermined by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and listed in curriculum documents. By assessing what students know before beginning a unit of study, for example, a teacher might determine a need to revisit curriculum covered in previous grades. By assessing what students know during a unit of study, the teacher is able to determine whether or not he/she needs to revisit a concept or can proceed with something new.

Convergent versus divergent assessment practices. Purposes of assessment, typically, suggest that assessment should be used to guide instruction, to determine next steps, and to help students develop an awareness of their strengths as learners as well as gaps in their learning. Torrance and Pryor (2001) discuss two views of assessment, convergent and divergent. When teachers use convergent assessment practices, they want to find out "*if* the learner knows, understands or can do a predetermined thing" (p. 617, their emphasis). Convergent assessment is judgmental and evaluative (p. 617). It is my understanding that this form of assessment is summative in nature in that it seeks to evaluate the student's state of understanding at the end of a unit, after curriculum expectations have been covered in class. Its goal is not to determine the student's needs so that he/she can progress in his/her learning or to inform the teacher of what to do to help the student progress; instead, its primary function is to inform the teacher of what the student already knows. Torrance and Pryor suggest that convergent assessment practices serve the teacher, in that

they involve "assessment *of* the learner *by* the teacher" (p. 617, their emphasis).

In contrast to convergent assessment practices, divergent assessment, suggest

Torrance and Pryor, "aims to discover *what* the learner knows, understands or

can do", in order to inform both the teacher and the learner (p. 617, their

emphasis). Because divergent assessment is descriptive and formative, as

opposed to judgmental and summative, the student can use it to reflect on his/her

current state of understanding and identify gaps in learning and particular areas

for improvement. Torrance and Pryor suggest that divergent assessment is

consistent with a social constructivist view of learning. They refer to Vygotsky's

zone of proximal development (described on p. 20 of this chapter) when

suggesting that, "The implications of divergent teacher assessment are that a

constructivist view of learning is adopted, with an intention to teach in the zone of

proximal development" (p. 617). Therefore, when one subscribes to a

sociocultural and constructivist view of learning, the teacher perceives

assessment as valuable to both the student and the teacher. The student is able

to determine what is needed and how to progress; the teacher is able to

determine the student's current state of understanding and what needs to be

done to help that student move forward. Torrance and Pryor sum up the

difference between these two theories of assessment, by highlighting how

divergent assessment practices can be used to inform both teacher and student

and to guide instruction: "assessment is seen as accomplished jointly by the

teacher and the student, and oriented more to future development rather than measurement of past or current achievement" (p. 617).

Formative assessment. Black and Wiliam (2010) also discuss ways in which assessment can be used to guide instruction and shape teaching, by providing information to "modify teaching and learning activities" (p. 82). Black and Wiliam discuss benefits of using formative assessment practices and assert that this type of assessment is "at the heart of effective teaching" (p. 82). They explain that assessment is formative when it is used "to adjust teaching and learning" (p. 83). Black and Wiliam suggest research has shown how feedback given in the form of marks and grades is not beneficial to learning (p. 86). They cite Sadler (1989), who contends that feedback should be descriptive and should provide the student with information about "the *desired goal*, evidence about *present position*, and some understanding of a *way to close the gap* between the two" (as cited in Black & Wiliam, p. 85, his emphasis). Black and Wiliam claim that, for assessment to be beneficial to learning, students also need to be able to self-assess, that "pupils should be trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve" (p. 85). For assessment to have an impact on student learning, therefore, it must provide students with information about their current state of understanding as well as feedback on what they need to do to progress in their learning.

Assessment of Oral Communication

In order to attempt a systematic approach in the area of oral

communication skills, it is necessary to have an effective method of assessing

starting skills and measuring changes that occur. However, assessment of any

learning can be tricky and assessment of oral patterns particularly so.

Challenges in assessment of oral communication skills. Based on the

definitions of various forms of assessment and their value in promoting student

learning, assessment should be used to provide students with information about

their understanding of concepts explored in class, gaps in their learning, and

steps they can take to fill those gaps. For teachers to be able to use assessment

to provide students with a clear understanding of what they can do, cannot yet

do, and need to do to progress in their learning, they need to have a clear

understanding of what they expect of their students. In short, teachers need to

know what success in the different areas of the curriculum looks like. Success in

one area of the writing curriculum, for example, might mean that the student is

able to edit work carefully for spelling and grammar mistakes. One might argue

that one of the challenges in assessing oral communication is that teachers do

not have a clear understanding of what success looks like in areas of the oral

communication curriculum. Does success mean that students are able to listen

carefully to their peers? Does it mean that they frequently answer questions in

class? Does it mean that they display confidence when they participate during

discussions? Does it mean that they don't speak out of turn or interrupt others? Does it mean that they convey their ideas clearly and develop these? Also, the notion of assessing how students talk has a much less tangible quality than assessing achievement in other subject areas such as reading, writing, and mathematics. The challenge is to assess a subject area in which the output and evidence of learning is as intangible as the spoken word. Furthermore, there is a qualitative component in assessing oral communication. Teachers need to assess cognitive development and guess at what is occurring inside the student's mind, as evidenced by how they convey their ideas through the spoken word. Finding an assessment tool to accurately measure this qualitative aspect of oral communication presents a challenge.

Thompson (2006) assumes that assessment of oral communication is less than adequate because teachers tend to assess the behavioural aspects of oral communication skills, such as whether or not students are able to contribute to discussions in a confident manner, as distinct from assessing the clarity, complexity, and logic of their thinking (p. 208). Thompson explains that this is problematic as "behavioural or grammatical approaches to spoken English deny its essentially cognitive character" (p. 208). Mercer, Edwards, and Maybin (1988) find it troubling that the notion of "oral assessment" is often ambiguous, whether it is that "children's oral performance is being assessed in order to judge their competence as effective communicators, or that their talk is being used to judge

the extent of their understanding of curriculum content" (p. 123). Teachers need an assessment framework for oral communication that separates the behavioural from the cognitive aspects of oral communication. Although both aspects are important in the development of oral communication skills, neither can be addressed properly when they are lumped together.

Some recommended practices for assessment of oral communication skills. Some in the field of education have raised the question of how one might assess oral communication (Dudley-Marling & Searle, 1991; Wilkinson, 1991; Education Department of Western Australia, 1994; Thompson, 2006; Parr & Campbell, 2007). Thompson (2006) addresses some of the problems in how oral communication is assessed. He cites Mercer's suggestion (2000) that there is a need, in this field, to develop a model of assessment that allows students to progress in their learning and argues that this will improve the teaching of oral communication skills:

> The way in which any curriculum is delivered will
> tend to be driven and shaped by the way in which it is assessed.
> A high quality of teaching in the field of oracy will depend
> on the range, scope and quality of its method of assessment.
> Assessment quality is also crucial for learners themselves.
> To develop as speakers, children need a suitable and
> accessible model of progression so that they can understand
> how to improve and form an idea of why - within a range of
> speech genres - some talk is more effective than other talk.
> (as cited in Thompson, p. 208)

Thompson proposes a "sociocognitive assessment model" (p. 208) that would focus on assessing "the quality and content of student thinking" (p. 219),

as demonstrated in students' use of oral communication skills to convey their own ideas and challenge those of their peers. Thompson also recommends incorporating some form of peer assessment into an assessment framework of oral communication, to help students develop their abilities for "metacognitive self-analysis" (p. 217). Thompson provides an example of peer assessment, in the form of questions that students might reflect on during and after group discussions, such as, "Have we expressed our points clearly during small group discussion? Have we given appropriate examples and reasons to support our arguments? Have we made comparisons, used analogies, quoted and evaluated evidence?" (p. 217). Furthermore, Thompson contends that assessment of oral communication should include a group focus, to assess how students interact with one another in group situations: "the assessment of talk should have both small group and individual focus. If cognition is socially situated, then there are bound to be problems if cognitive outcomes are *always* identified at an individual level" (p. 217, his emphasis).

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) provides some guidance in assessing oral communication skills in *A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4 to 6, Volume Four, Oral Language.* They explain that:

> Accountable talk, or focused discussion, provides many opportunities for teachers to assess the students' achievement of oral communication expectations, as well as their knowledge and understanding of content in all curriculum subject areas. Teachers observe the students' participation and interaction in focused discussion and listen

> to what they say, using checklists and anecdotal records to
> record their observations. (p. 80)

A checklist is provided for teachers to use, which lists various *look-fors* of oral

communication skills and, specifically, accountable talk. Some of these look-fors

include whether or not students are listening attentively, taking turns, seeking

clarification from their peers, challenging the thinking of others, probing ideas that

are presented, and elaborating on ideas (p. 81). A teacher and/or student might

use the checklist in the following manner:

> to assess what is working well and what needs to be
> addressed, modified, or changed to improve focused
> discussion. For example, if "disagreeing politely" is an issue,
> the teacher plans a series of lessons in which disagreeing,
> arguing, and supporting a position are modelled, practised
> with teacher guidance, and discussed. (p. 82)

Self-assessment is also encouraged. A list of questions is provided to allow

students to reflect on their oral communication skills. These questions include:

"Do I listen to others?; show respect for the ideas of others?; agree/disagree

politely?; contribute comments?; ask questions to seek clarification?; explain my

point of view?" (p. 82).

In their book, Parr and Campbell (2007) also provide a self-assessment

tool for talk. They identify three aspects of oral communication to allow students

to reflect on their own oral communication skills: how the student did as a

speaker, as a listener, and as a collaborator. A list of different criteria are provided

for each of the three categories. For example, as a speaker, students are

required to reflect on whether they spoke so that they could be heard, how much they contributed to the discussion and whether this was too much or not enough. As a listener, students are required to reflect on whether they listened to everyone, and thought about what others were saying. As a collaborator, they are required to think about whether or not they provided reasons for disagreeing with the opinions and ideas of others, whether they extended the ideas of their peers, and whether they provided reasons and justified their thinking when they voiced their own opinions and ideas (p. 151).

Summary

In conclusion, a review of the literature pertaining to classroom talk indicates that talk can promote learning by enabling students to co-construct knowledge with their peers and deepen their own understandings. One might suggest, based on the literature, that talk in some classrooms is not being used sufficiently to promote learning. Furthermore, the assessment of oral communication presents challenges, in that distinctions are not made between the behavioural aspects of oral communication and students' proficiency at using talk to learn and co-construct knowledge with their peers. Based on the sources I've explored in this chapter, I have come to believe that several things need to occur in the field of education to transform how talk is currently handled in the classroom. First, teachers need to be made aware, through professional development, of how various forms of talk, such as collaborative talk,

accountable talk, and exploratory talk, can be used to promote learning. Second, teachers need to provide explicit instruction for their students on how to engage in talk that is productive. Third, an assessment framework needs to be developed for oral communication, which incorporates formative assessment practices, self-assessment, and peer assessment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Selecting the Setting and Choosing the Research Participants

The purpose of my research was to examine the impact of a systematic approach to instruction on the quality of oral interaction in my own grade 3 classroom. The school in which I taught was a medium-sized, kindergarten to grade 6 school of approximately 330 students in the suburbs of a major city in Southern Ontario. Our school was located in the middle of a mixed working class and middle class neighbourhood consisting of newly built homes, apartment buildings, and older homes. We had a culturally diverse student population: roughly half of our students were Caucasian and the other half of our students were from other groups including Asian, Middle Eastern, and East Indian. At the time of my research, the school had one part-time ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher who serviced approximately 19 children working at various stages of language acquisition.

Some children came from two parent families with both parents working. The parents with whom I had had contact during my years of teaching at this school were, generally, supportive of the teachers and of school-wide initiatives. I found them willing to do whatever was asked of them to support the learning of their children at home.

When I began my data collection, I had just completed my 14th year of teaching and my 6th year of teaching at this school. In this school, I had taught in both the primary and junior divisions, from grades 2 to 6.

The students at our school were mostly well-behaved. We did not have to deal with many behavioural issues and found that our students were quite respectful of one another and of the teachers. Our students were also active participants in extra-curricular activities. A variety of extra-curricular activities were provided for students, including sports, drama, and art.

The participants in this study were the grade 3 students in my class for the school year 2011/12. I started the year with 19 students. A new student joined our class in October and left our school in December. One of the boys in my class was a student I had taught the previous year, in my grade 2/3 class. Several of the students also knew me because I had taught them science and social studies the year before: during the school year 2010/11, I had taught most of the grade 2 students at our school science and social studies.

According to profile information compiled for EQAO purposes (EQAO is the standardized assessment given to all grade 3 students in Ontario), during the school year of 2011/12, there were 46 students in grade 3 at my school. Nineteen of these students were in my class. Of these 46 students, 0% were classified as ELL (English Language Learners receiving support from an ESL teacher) and 83% were born in Canada. Of the 17% who were not born here, 2% had been in

Canada between one and three years and 15% had been in Canada for three years or more (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2013).

In preparation for this study, I submitted a research proposal to my school board's *External Research Review Committee*. My school board granted me conditional acceptance to carry out my proposed research pending approval notification from York University's *Research Ethics Board*. I received final approval to carry out my research from both my school board and York University at the end of September 2011.

In October, a consent form was sent home to all the parents of my grade 3 students (see Appendix A). Before the consent form was sent home, I discussed my intentions with the parents of my students who attended our *Meet the Teacher* night in September. The consent form that was sent home described my dual role as classroom teacher and researcher, my intentions to audio record the children twice a week, the ways in which these audio recordings would be used, and how non-participation would be handled if parents did not consent to have their children audio recorded. Students were also made aware of what I intended to do. Before I sent home the parental consent forms, I prepared a minor assent script (see Appendix B) to read to my students.

I did not use any tests, questionnaires, surveys, or interviews. I did take observational notes during whole class and small group discussions and used these as field notes.

Implementation of Data Collection

The collection of data involved audio recording discussions on a weekly

basis over the course of 5 months. Descriptions of how I organized the data

collection process, topics of discussion that occurred during the data collection

period, the logistical issues related to audio recording students, and how the

audio recorded material was analyzed, are described in the proceeding sub-

sections.

Organization of Data Collection Period

The objective of this research was to explore the impact of targeted

interventions on the development of oral communication skills of grade 3

students. Data collection occurred during a 19-week period, beginning in mid-

October and ending at the beginning of March. On a weekly basis during this time

period, two types of discussions were audio recorded: small group discussions

and discussions involving the whole class. These discussions were transcribed

and targeted interventions were implemented to address identified gaps in oral

communication skills.

At the beginning of the data collection period, 19 students were organized

into four groups of four and one of three (it should be noted that this changed

during the data collection period as a new student joined the class at the end of

October and then left the class at the end of December). Because children were

organized into five small groups, the 19-week data collection period was divided

into four phases, each consisting of four or five weeks, to ensure that all students were audio recorded once in a small group discussion during every phase. Students were placed in heterogeneous groups and a variety of things were considered such as cognitive abilities, student personalities, and group dynamics.

Discussion Topics for Audio Recordings

All small group and whole class discussions were based on texts and addressed a variety of reading expectations from the Ontario language curriculum (2006). Topics of discussion included explorations of various themes presented in different texts, connections between texts based on similar themes, connections between themes and personal life experiences, the author's message, and other possible titles for texts. I made the decision to only audio record discussions that pertained to the subject area of reading to facilitate the comparison of discussions. I felt it would be easier to compare discussions of the same nature as opposed to comparing discussions in which tasks were varied such as, for example, discussions occurring during science and math periods.

Several different genres of text were chosen for our discussions. These included a variety of picture books, novels, song lyrics, and non-fiction texts such as newspaper articles and biographies. Texts were chosen with similar themes to allow students to make text-to-text connections and with themes I anticipated grade 3 students would be able to relate to. I also chose texts that dealt with issues we often discussed in class, such as perseverance and determination, the

dangers of spreading rumours, fairness, good sportsmanship, keeping promises, and helping others. Lastly, I wanted to ensure that the school experience for this group of grade 3 students be similar to that of my students in previous years. Therefore, some of the books I chose for topics of discussion had been used and had been successful in previous years.

Data Collection Procedures

I used my computer to record the oral interaction in my classroom. My computer was kept in a locked cupboard when it was brought to school. Otherwise, my computer was kept at my house. No one had access to my computer other than me. When material was transcribed, it was kept in a file on my computer. Throughout this process, audio recordings were transferred to CDs and these were kept at my house. Audio recordings were only shared with my thesis supervisor, Jill Bell, and other members of my Supervisory Committee. All audio recordings will be deleted from my computer and CDs will be destroyed once my thesis is completed.

All whole class discussions took place on the carpet area in my classroom. During these, students were seated in a circle and my computer was placed on a nearby desk. For small group discussions, I set up an audio recording area at the back of the classroom. I did not sit with the group being audio recorded but, instead, moved from group to group, offering some support, answering questions, and taking observational notes, as I normally would during any group activity.

Data Analysis Procedures

Weekly audio recorded material was transcribed and analyzed. I was looking at the transcribed material from a sociocultural perspective and, although my analysis methods were primarily qualitative, my research included a small component of quantitative research analysis. Mercer (2010) suggests that sociocultural research frequently involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods (p. 2). Sociocultural researchers, explains Mercer, "typically emphasize that knowledge and understanding are jointly created, that talk allows reciprocity and mutuality to be developed through the continuing negotiation of meaning" (p. 2). In looking at classroom talk through a sociocultural lens, as suggested by Mercer, I explored how a systematic approach to how I addressed oral communication might help my students use talk in order to co-construct meaning and understanding. Mercer lists questions that are considered through sociocultural research, which were relevant questions for the aims of my research, such as "How does dialogue promote learning and the development of understanding?", "What types of talk are associated with the best learning outcomes?", and "Does collaborative activity help children to learn, or assist their conceptual development?" (p. 2).

As one of my central research questions was whether or not the implementation of a systematic approach had an impact on the oral communication skills of my grade 3 students, my analysis of transcribed material

was qualitative in that I was looking for patterns of oral interaction to indicate that my students were building on each other's ideas, revoicing and appropriating the thoughts of others, disagreeing and agreeing with one another, and challenging each other's thinking. My research also had a small quantitative focus in that I looked at the length of student utterances, how often different students in the class participated, and how often they used certain words and phrases in their utterances.

Development and Use of Assessment Tool

I attempted to create a tool that might be used to carry out continuous ongoing assessment of classroom talk in order to provide timely and targeted interventions to address gaps in the development of oral communication skills. An initial draft of an assessment tool was developed for this purpose before I began audio recording class discussions. To create this initial draft, I deconstructed the oral communication expectations as listed in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1 - 8, Language* (2006). Among the expectations for oral communication listed in this document, it states that grade 3 students are expected to demonstrate attentive listening skills, to use questioning to "clarify information and ideas", to exchange and explore ideas, to work "constructively" with others, to paraphrase and build on what others have said, to demonstrate an understanding of "appropriate speaking behaviour" during "small- and large-group discussions" and "to contribute to understanding in large or small groups" (Ontario Ministry of

Education, pp. 64-5). I also used my previous experiences as a grade 3 teacher

to determine what students of this age group should be able to demonstrate

during small group and whole class discussions.

The first draft of my assessment tool contained the following six

categories: *Length of Utterance, Quality of Contribution and Evidence of Active*

Listening, Questioning, Development of Ideas, Etiquette, and *Vocabulary Usage.*

This draft was used to assess the first couple of transcriptions from audio

recorded material. After its initial use, revisions were made by adding some sub-

categories and eliminating some. For example, two more sub-categories were

added: *Sentence Complexity* and *Evidence of Tentativeness. Etiquette* was

removed as a category. Instead, the category of *Behavioural/Social Patterns* was

added, in which I could write down notes pertaining to any patterns of behaviour I

noted. A final version of the assessment tool was broadly divided into three

categories with several sub-categories for each (see Appendix C). The following

table provides a basic description of the final assessment tool.

Category	Sub-category	Assessment Foci
Speech Patterns	Vocabulary Usage	• use of building words or phrases such as "I agree", "I disagree", "I want to add that...." • use of specific words or phrases from other contributions
	Length of Utterance	• number of lines of speech in utterance
	Sentence Complexity	• use of complex sentence structures in utterance
Evidence of Cognition	Development of Ideas	• development of ideas by making connections to prior knowledge, other texts, and personal life experiences and by providing evidence to support thinking
	Evidence of Challenging and Questioning	• use of questioning to ask about minor issues, to challenge an idea, and/or to get others to wonder on a deeper level about issues being explored
	Quality of Contribution and Evidence of Active Listening	• use of paraphrasing • contribution of new ideas to the discussion
	Evidence of Tentativeness	• use of pause-fillers such as "um" and "ah", repetition of words, and/or pauses while speaking
Behavioural/Social Patterns	No sub-categories	• interrupting others, hedging during utterances, monopolizing the discussion, etc.

Table 1: Description of assessment tool

Timeline of Data Collection and Research

As stated earlier, the data collection period occurred over the course of a

19-week period, beginning in mid-October and ending at the beginning of March.

Although I did not do any explicit teaching of oral communication during

September, my students did engage in whole class and small group discussions

during this time. I was not able to begin audio recording at the beginning of the

school year as there was a policy at my school board that prohibited the

collection of data in schools during September. The extra month at the beginning

of the school year gave me time to get the required parental consent from the

parents of the students in my class.

Because my 19 students were organized into five small groups for their

discussions, I divided up the 19-week data collection period into four phases, with

the first three phases lasting 5 weeks and the last phase lasting 4 weeks. This

would ensure that during each phase, each student would be audio recorded

once in one small group discussion. The last phase lasted only 4 weeks due to

the school calendar and the March Break. Because of when March Break fell,

during the last phase two small group discussions were audio recorded in the

final week of the phase as opposed to one. The first phase of the data collection

period took place from Week 1 (of audio recording) to Week 5; the second phase

took place from Week 6 to Week 10; the third phase took place from Week 11 to

Week 15; the fourth phase took place from Week 16 to Week 19.

The first phase of the data collection period served as a diagnostic phase. During this phase, an assessment tool was developed (as described in the previous sub-section) to identify gaps in the oral communication skills of my grade 3 students (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). The table below provides a chronology of the implementation of my research.

Date	Action
Sept., 2011.	• gathered ethical permission from my school board and York University
Sept. / Oct., 2011.	• explained to parents of my students what I wanted to do for research • read minor assent script to students • sent home parental consent forms
Oct. 17, 2011.	• began audio recordings
Oct. / Nov., 2011.	• developed assessment tool
Oct. 17 - Nov. 18, 2011.	• first phase of audio recordings • started to implement interventions
Nov. 21 - Dec. 23, 2011.	• second phase of audio recordings • continued to implement interventions
Dec. 24 - Jan. 8, 2012.	• Winter Break
Jan. 9 - Feb. 10, 2012.	• third phase of audio recordings • continued to implement interventions
Feb. 13 - Mar. 9, 2012.	• fourth and final phase of audio recordings • continued to implement interventions
Mar. 12 - Mar. 16, 2012.	• March Break
Mar. - Sept., 2012.	• analysis of collected data
Sept. - June, 2013.	• write-up of thesis

Table 2: Timeline of implementation of data collection and write-up of thesis

Summary

To sum up, the research outlined in this section involved looking at the impact of a systematic approach on oral interaction. I was hoping that, in being systematic in my approach to the instruction of oral communication, I would witness more collaborative, accountable, and exploratory talk (as defined and described in Chapter 2) and the emergence of a community of learners. The systematic approach I used involved choosing oral communication expectations from the Ontario language curriculum, developing teaching materials and using explicit instruction to help students achieve these, audio recording students engaged in whole class and small group discussions, transcribing these discussions, and using these transcriptions as assessment pieces to track student progress and shape further instruction.

Chapter 4: Overall Patterns of Oral Interaction and Selection of Interventions

Process of Identifying Target Skills

As explained in Chapter 3, for my research I audio recorded small group
and whole class discussions in my grade 3 classroom during a 19-week data
collection period. These discussions were transcribed and selectively assessed to
identify areas for improvement in the oral communication skills of my students,
with the intention of implementing targeted interventions. In this chapter, I will be
describing patterns of oral interaction I observed the children to be using at the
start of the study, the process through which I decided on needed interventions,
and the ways in which these interventions were implemented.

Analysis of Oral Interaction

When I began audio recording my students in October, they were already
engaging in daily classroom talk for a variety of purposes. During our math
periods, for example, students were required to work with partners to solve math
problems. Partner work was followed by a debriefing session during which I
selected students to share their solutions with the rest of the class in order to
provoke talk about possible strategies for solving different math problems. In
addition to talk that occurred during math periods, every Friday students
participated in an event I called *Community Circle*. Community Circle was an
opportunity for students to share and explore social issues that had arisen during
the week. Students also had daily opportunities to work together during our

Writer's Workshop periods. During these periods, students worked on writing projects of their choice. Talk was encouraged; students were expected to brainstorm and discuss ideas with one another and to edit and revise pieces of writing together. Therefore, when the data collection period began, the children in my class were already accustomed to engaging in talk with one another.

It became clear, from the talk recorded during the first phase of data collection, that there were noticeable variations in the personalities and cognitive abilities of my students and that these affected their oral interactions. Socially, some students were more aggressive and confident than others, participating frequently, interrupting, interjecting, and talking over others. Other students were reluctant to speak, during our small group discussions as well as our whole class discussions. Some students demonstrated greater cognitive abilities than others, paraphrasing and building on the contributions of others, developing their ideas effectively, and posing questions to clarify and challenge what their peers had said. Other students had difficulty expressing their ideas and developing these and did not pose questions, paraphrase, or build on previously stated ideas.

Of the 11 discussions from the first phase of audio recordings, six were whole class discussions and five were small group discussions. Students were placed in small groups at the beginning of the data collection period. These small groups remained the same for the first two phases of audio recordings and were changed once, mid-way through the data collection period. Every student

participated in all discussions, for a total of 11 discussions, but each student was only audio recorded during one of their small group discussions. Therefore, each student was audio recorded in seven discussions in total: six whole class discussions and one small group discussion. Twenty students were present during these discussions. It should be noted, however, that one of my students had just arrived in Canada from China and was classified as a Stage 1 *English Language Learner*, meaning that he spoke and understood very little English. This obviously affected his ability to participate fully in our discussions. Because some of my students were able to speak Mandarin and communicate with him, this student was strategically placed in a small group with one of my Mandarin-speaking students.

Development of ideas. One aspect of oral communication that I explored was how thoroughly students developed their ideas. To develop their ideas, I was expecting students to explain their thinking clearly by citing examples from the texts we were reading, and to make connections to prior knowledge, personal experience, and other texts. An analysis of how students developed their ideas revealed that few were able to consistently develop their ideas in an effective manner. Almost half of my students made few or no attempts to develop their ideas. This may have been because they were not aware of how to develop an idea effectively. Another reason might have been because students were able to develop their ideas but chose not to. This is shown in the following table.

Development of Ideas	# of Students (out of 20)
students who developed their ideas effectively most of the time	1
students who developed their ideas effectively some of the time (and made attempts at other times)	8
students who made few attempts to develop their ideas	8
students who consistently made unsuccessful attempts to develop ideas	1
students who didn't participate (could not assess this skill)	2

Table 3: Students' development of ideas

Paraphrasing. Another aspect of oral communication for analysis was whether or not students were paraphrasing during our discussions. I viewed students' use of paraphrasing as evidence of their attentive listening skills and whether or not they were able to appropriate the contributions of their peers by putting these into their own words. In the 11 discussions that were audio recorded during the first phase, I counted 47 paraphrases. Most of my students were not paraphrasing with consistency, as is illustrated in the table below.

Paraphrasing	# of Students (out of 20)
students who paraphrased consistently	2
students who paraphrased some of the time	10
students who only paraphrased once	3
students who never paraphrased	5

Table 4: Students' demonstration of paraphrasing

Use of building phrases. In looking for evidence of attentive listening skills, I also made note of students' use of what I termed *building phrases*.

Building phrases are words students use in their utterances to indicate that they

are referring back to a previous contribution of one of their classmates.

Specifically, I wanted to see whether or not students were using phrases such as

"I agree with", "I disagree with", or "I want to add to what (student name) said". I

found a total of 40 occasions during which building phrases were used. About half

of my students used a building phrase at some point during the 11 discussions

that were transcribed; however, some only used a building phrase once or twice.

Only a handful of children used building phrases with any consistency. This is

displayed in the table below.

Use of Building Phrases	# of Students (out of 20)
students who used building phrases in most discussions	1
students who used building phrases in some discussions	4
students who rarely used building phrases	7
students who did not use a building phrase in any discussion	8

Table 5: Students' use of building phrases

Questioning skills. I also explored questioning skills. I was looking for

evidence of three types of questions: 1. simple questions posed to elicit factual

information related to minor issues; 2. questions posed to clarify or challenge

what someone had said; 3. deeper-level thinking questions posed to get others to

revise their thinking, consider other possibilities, delve more deeply into the

issues brought up in the texts we were reading, and wonder about how they

might react or feel in a similar situation to the people and characters in the texts

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we were reading. It should be noted that I started to work on questioning in the

middle of the first phase of data collection. In audio recorded material, I

discovered approximately 33 questions that fell into one of the aforementioned

categories. Most of these 33 questions were minor questions of fact or questions

posed to clarify or challenge. I found minimal evidence that children were

demonstrating the skill of posing deeper-level thinking questions. Four students,

however, were either successful at generating a deeper-level thinking question or,

at least, attempted to come up with one. For example, in one conversation, we

were exploring an article about a carpenter who had lost the use of his arms due

to polio. One student asked his peers to consider how difficult life would be if you

did not have the use of your arms. He asked "How would you feel if you lost

yours arms? What would you do if you had no arms?" (Nov. 9, 2011). I was

looking for more of these types of questions: questions that would require

students to wonder beyond what was stated in the text and to place themselves

in the position of the people and characters they were reading about. The table

that follows illustrates that the majority of my students did not demonstrate

effective use of questioning.

Questioning	# of Students (out of 20)
students who posed or attempted to pose deeper-level thinking questions	4
students who mainly posed questions to clarify or challenge the ideas of their peers	3

Questioning	# of Students (out of 20)
students who posed simple questions of fact	4
students who did not pose any questions	9

Table 6: Students' use of questioning

Although my students did not ask many deeper-level thinking questions, I found it encouraging that some of my students were posing questions to clarify what others had said and that a few were attempting to pose deeper-level thinking questions.

In addition to posing questions to clarify ideas brought up during discussions, a few students also challenged the ideas of their peers with statements beginning with "I disagree with". I found, however, that these challenges were related to minor points as opposed to challenges in order to get their peers to revise their thinking.

Student participation. The number of students who participated by speaking during our discussions varied. Clearly, some topics were of greater interest to students than others and provoked more participation. The following table displays the number of students who spoke in each of the 11 discussions that occurred during the first 5 weeks of audio recordings.

Week/Date	Type of Discussion (whole class or small group)	Number of Students Who Spoke
Week 1 (Oct. 17)	whole class	13 out of 20
Week 1 (Oct. 18)	whole class	12 out of 20

Week/Date	Type of Discussion (whole class or small group)	Number of Students Who Spoke
Week 2 (Oct. 25)	whole class	11 out of 20
Week 2 (Oct. 25)	small group	4 out of 4
Week 3 (Oct. 31)	whole class	7 out of 20
Week 3 (Nov. 1)	small group	4 out of 4
Week 4 (Nov. 9)	whole class	17 out of 20
Week 4 (Nov. 11)	small group	4 out of 4
Week 5 (Nov. 15)	small group	4 out of 4
Week 5 (Nov. 16)	whole class	14 out of 20
Week 5 (Nov. 17)	small group	2 out of 4

Table 7: Participation in small group and whole class discussions

Although the number of students who spoke in some discussions appears high, such as November 9th during which 17 out of 20 students had something to say, not every student's participation could be characterized as equal. Some students participated more often, and with longer and more utterances, while other students only participated once, with shorter utterances of one or two lines of speech. The participation of students, by speaking, is illustrated in the table below.

Participation (by speaking)	# of Students (out of 20)
frequent participation, with numerous utterances, in all discussions	5
frequent participation in most discussions	3
some participation in some discussions	8
minimal participation	1

Participation (by speaking)	# of Students (out of 20)
no participation	3

Table 8: Participation during whole class discussions

Participation in the small group discussions varied from group to group. In 4 of the 5 small groups, every group member participated. In one group, two group members did not speak. These two non-participants were present but did not speak in any of our whole class discussions either. In another small group discussion, one student who did not speak during any of our whole class discussions did speak in his small group. One student who only spoke once in one whole class discussion participated in her small group discussion with more utterances than her other three group members.

Similar to the whole class discussions, I would not characterize the participation in small groups as equal among group members. In some groups, there were noticeable differences between the number of utterances per group member. For example, in one group two students participated with 60 and 63 utterances while the other two members of this group only participated with 20 and 10 utterances.

Hedging and signs of tentativeness. Lastly, I looked for signs of tentativeness in students' speech. Some students, I noticed, used *hedges*. Hedges are phrases that may be used for a variety of purposes and can be interpreted in different ways. A student who hedges might use phrases such as "I

sort of agree with" or "I kinda think that". Hedges may be indicative of a speaker's

desire to soften a claim out of politeness or due to uncertainty or a lack of

conviction about his/her claim. A student might be aware of the complexities of

what he/she is saying and have difficulty coming up with a definitive statement or

opinion because he/she can see so many possibilities. A student might also

hedge to buy time: the student is thinking through his/her ideas in the process of

sharing these with others. Although not a sign of tentativeness, a hedge might

also indicate condescension: the speaker talks slowly and in a patronizing

manner in order to speak down to his/her audience. In the 11 discussions from

the first phase of audio recordings, I noticed that the majority of my students did

not hedge. A couple of students hedged frequently in many of their utterances.

The table below shows the number of students who hedged.

Hedging	# of Students (out of 20)
students who hedged frequently	2
students who hedged a little (once or twice)	4
students who never hedged	14

Table 9: Students' hedging during discussions

Although most of my students did not hedge, there were other signs of

tentativeness in their speech. About half of my students, 9 out of 20, were

tentative as they spoke in that they paused often, used "ums" and "ahs", and

repeated words. This might have suggested that students were thoughtful in what

they were saying and were thinking through their ideas as they voiced these to

the class. One might interpret these signs of tentativeness as students engaging in exploratory talk (described in Chapter 2 on p. 35). As Barnes (1976) explains, when engaging in exploratory talk the speaker is not concerned with presenting information neatly and in a "polished" manner (p. 108). Rather, the speaker is trying "out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them" (Barnes, 2008, p. 5).

As the above tables make evident, before interventions, there were several patterns of oral interaction exhibited by my students. Only one student demonstrated the ability to develop her ideas consistently. Only two students were paraphrasing consistently during our discussions. Most of the children were not using building phrases. Almost half the class did not question at all and there was little evidence of deeper-level questioning. There were variations in levels of participation as well: some students shared ideas frequently and were very vocal while other students were quiet.

Selection of Interventions

In choosing aspects of oral interaction to target in my instruction, I considered the patterns of oral interaction that I noted from transcribed material from the first phase of audio recordings, the oral communication expectations as listed in the Ontario language curriculum, and areas of instruction that were relevant to school-wide initiatives. I also chose areas of oral communication that targeted both social and cognitive dimensions of oral communication.

Factors Considered in Choosing Interventions

My selection of interventions was based on the following: 1. I identified the skills demonstrated by only a minority during the first phase of data collection, focused on the skills that my higher functioning students were demonstrating, and compared this to the performance of my other students; 2. I explored the expectations listed in the Ontario language curriculum to determine what my students needed to be able to do by the end of grade 3; 3. I considered school-wide foci; 4. I drew on experience from previous years of teaching.

Patterns of oral interaction of higher functioning students. Assuming that what some of my higher functioning students could already do was possible for the rest of the group, I used this as a gauge to determine the capabilities of a grade 3 student. This made it more likely that the expectations I set for my students would not be unrealistic or too high. An analysis of the data I collected from the first phase of audio recordings revealed that my higher functioning students were able to paraphrase the contributions of their peers, generate deeper-level thinking questions, and develop their ideas effectively and thoroughly by citing examples from the text and making connections to personal experiences and other texts. On the other hand, the majority of children in my class were not able to consistently develop their ideas effectively; almost half did not paraphrase or paraphrased infrequently; almost half did not pose any

questions at all and the majority of students were not generating deeper-level thinking questions.

Ontario language curriculum. To choose appropriate interventions, I also looked at the Ontario language curriculum. As stated earlier in the previous chapter, grade 3 students are expected to develop attentive listening skills, to exchange ideas and work "constructively" with others, to question in order to clarify the ideas of others, to paraphrase the contributions of their peers, and to demonstrate an understanding of "appropriate listening behaviour" and "appropriate speaking behaviour" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, pp. 64-5). My analysis revealed that many of my students were not demonstrating the skills they required to be successful in achieving these expectations. Therefore, I felt it necessary to target aspects of oral communication such as paraphrasing, questioning, and the development of ideas. Paraphrasing would provide my students with an understanding of appropriate listening behaviours: students would be required to listen attentively to their peers in order to paraphrase. Students needed to develop their questioning skills in order to use this skill to clarify and challenge what others had said. If I focused my instruction on helping students develop their ideas clearly and effectively, this would allow them to exchange and build on ideas. Furthermore, my students needed to understand our purposes for engaging in discussions. Based on my analysis of student participation, it was evident that some students were more actively involved in our

discussions than others. My students needed to develop an understanding that all students in the class deserved to have the opportunity and encouragement to voice their ideas and that listening to the ideas of others, as well as speaking and contributing one's own ideas, was an important aspect of oral communication.

Consideration of school-wide foci. I also considered school-wide foci in identifying interventions. At the time of my research, my school was part of a cluster of schools that was focusing on how to teach questioning to students in order to develop deeper-level thinking skills. I was chosen as one of two teachers from our school to work with two other schools to explore the instruction of questioning skills. Some of this work involved reading professional resources and developing lessons on questioning. This encouraged me to focus on the development of questioning skills as one of my interventions. Another school-wide initiative involved an instructional strategy for math instruction called *the three-part math lesson.* In the three-part math lesson, students were presented with math problems to solve in collaboration with their peers. A large component of the three-part math lesson involved teaching students how to use talk to work collaboratively to develop problem solving strategies. To work together, students required the skills to listen attentively, exchange ideas, and question one another to clarify thinking.

Teaching experience. Lastly, in the identification of target skills, I drew on my experiences from previous years of teaching. The year prior to beginning my

research, I had also taught grade 3 students. Before that, I had experience teaching grades 4, 5, and 6. All of my experience from years of teaching various age groups allowed me to develop a good understanding of what I could expect of grade 3 students and of appropriate interventions that would enable them to achieve the expectations as outlined in the Ontario language curriculum.

Social and Cognitive Aspects of Targeted Oral Communication Skills

Based on the considerations described above, I chose as targeted interventions to focus on the following:

• paraphrasing

• questioning

• development of ideas

• exploring purposes for speaking and listening

These chosen areas of intervention addressed both cognitive and social aspects of oral communication.

In providing instruction on questioning, I would be addressing a cognitive gap in the oral communication skills of my students. I wanted to see more students posing questions to clarify ideas presented during our discussions. I also wanted students to generate *what if* questions during our discussions to encourage wonderment about possibilities they had not previously considered, to place themselves in the positions of the characters and people they were reading

about, and to provoke deeper explorations of issues emerging from the texts we were reading.

Paraphrasing as an intervention addressed both cognitive and social aspects of oral communication. To paraphrase the contribution of another, students needed to develop attentive listening skills, a social component of oral communication. To paraphrase effectively, students needed to develop the ability to put into their own words what someone else had said, a cognitive skill. I wanted to see students paraphrasing more consistently. Paraphrasing would also encourage more collaborative and accountable talk (as defined in Chapter 2 on p. 30 and p. 33) by getting students to appropriate the ideas of others and build on these. Furthermore, I wanted to see some of my quieter students participate more actively during our discussions. I often heard students suggest the reason for their non-participation was that they did not have any ideas of their own to share. I felt that, in focusing on paraphrasing, I could convey to students that one way of getting more actively involved in a discussion was to paraphrase the contributions of their peers.

As a third intervention, I wanted to provide instruction on developing ideas. Idea development addressed cognitive aspects of oral communication. My goal in focusing on idea development was to encourage all students to contribute ideas during our discussions and also effectively develop these by making connections

to personal experiences and other texts, by providing examples to support their thinking, and by explaining their thinking.

Lastly, I felt one of my interventions had to address the need for students to understand the purposes for engaging in classroom talk. This intervention would focus on a social component of oral communication. I often used the adjective *productive* with students to describe our discussions. I explained to students that, in productive oral interaction, a product was co-constructed through talk: a shared and deeper understanding of the topics we were exploring together. Students needed to be aware that, in order for a discussion to be productive, all participants needed to be involved, to be listening attentively to one another, to remain on task, and to understand that the purpose of classroom talk was not to display individual knowledge but, rather, to generate ideas and examine these together, as a community of learners.

Implementation of Interventions

A number of interventions, therefore, were identified to enable students to develop their oral communication skills. These interventions were implemented at various points throughout the 19-week data collection period primarily through explicit teaching and the use of tools that I designed. A large component of my interventions also involved social engineering on my part: I structured whole class discussions in a certain way, strategically placed students in small groups and changed these during the data collection period, and introduced a group

assessment tool to manipulate small group discussions. The ways in which I implemented my chosen interventions is described in the proceeding sub-sections.

Explicit Teaching of Identified Target Areas

I used explicit instruction to address interventions. Several components were involved in explicitly teaching each skill. These included: providing students with a rationale for why the skill was being taught, demonstrating the skill through teacher modeling, and allowing students time to practise the skill with help from the teacher and independently.

In addressing the skill of questioning, I explained to students that it was important to pose questions during discussions to clarify and challenge the ideas of others. Deeper-level questioning was necessary in order to delve more deeply into the texts we were reading. Questioning could also be used to help others develop their ideas thoroughly. I suggested to students that, if their classmates did not develop their ideas effectively, they could use questioning to encourage them to further develop their ideas. I stressed that, in a community of learners, we were all trying to help one another co-construct knowledge and deepen our understandings of the issues we were exploring. Toward the end of the data collection period, I introduced the role of *questioner* to our discussions. One student was chosen during each discussion to be the questioner. It was the job of

this student to ask questions if any of his/her peers had not developed their ideas thoroughly.

To illustrate the difference between certain kinds of questions, I categorized questions as either *Understanding and Remembering* questions (simple factual questions) or *Thinking and Wondering* questions (deeper-level thinking questions). I put together numerous lessons during which I modeled for students how to generate questions and then analyze these in order to determine whether or not they were deeper-level thinking questions. Students were also given many opportunities to categorize, analyze, and generate questions on their own.

I viewed the ability to generate deeper-level thinking questions not only a skill but also as a state of mind. I chose texts that, I was hoping, would inspire curiosity in my students so that they would wonder about the characters and people in the texts we were reading and about the issues raised in those texts.

When I introduced paraphrasing to students, I explained what it meant to paraphrase, and I explored with students the reasons for paraphrasing during a discussion: to highlight an important or good idea, to build on a previous contribution, to agree or disagree with what someone else had said. Again, I modeled for students how to paraphrase by using sample utterances I had created and showing students how I might put these into my own words. Students were given chances to practise paraphrasing with partners. On cards, I

created a series of sample utterances. In pairs, one student read the utterance and the other student had to paraphrase it.

To teach students how to develop their ideas, I started by explaining that when we wanted to make our ideas convincing we needed to explain them clearly by making connections and using examples to support our thinking. I created several examples of good utterances and, with students, we deconstructed these to determine what made them good. We discovered that good utterances used the word "because", the speaker made some sort of connection either to a personal experience or another text, and the speaker referred back to the text and cited examples. Students had opportunities to deconstruct sample utterances and come up with questions they might ask in order to help the fictional speaker develop his/her ideas.

To help students develop an understanding of the purposes of classroom talk, I introduced students to the notion of *productive talk*. I identified productive talk as talk during which everyone had a chance to voice opinions, students disagreed and agreed with each other, and the goal of which was to help one another develop understanding and knowledge. Together, we explored what productive talk looked like and sounded like. We also created a list of norms for our classroom talk. We decided that, in our oral interactions, we needed to encourage everyone to speak, listen carefully to what everyone said, agree and disagree respectfully, sit in a circle, and work together to generate ideas.

Tools Created to Address Target Skills

In addition to using explicit instruction to address target skills, I developed a variety of tools to help students. For example, in order to get my quieter students to participate more actively in our classroom talk, I introduced the use of a journal called a *Discussion Journal* mid-way through the data collection process. Each student was given a notebook to be used as a Discussion Journal. Before each whole class discussion, students were given a few minutes during which to write down ideas about the discussion topic. I would also provide students with time to write in their Discussion Journals mid-way through each discussion. Discussion Journals were available for students to use during their small group discussions if they wished. I was hoping that, if students had a chance to write down what they were going to say, it would be easier for them to participate.

I created cards that I called *Paraphrase Cards*. These cards were handed out to different students prior to our whole class discussions. A student who was handed one of these cards was expected to paraphrase once during the discussion, and then pass along the card to another student.

Lastly, I introduced a paraphrasing activity to students. I made up a number of different utterances based on texts we'd read throughout the year and typed these onto pieces of construction paper to create cards. I also called these *Paraphrase Cards*. If students had finished their work, they could take these into

the hallway with a partner and practise paraphrasing with each other. One student would read the utterance on the card and the other student would be expected to paraphrase this utterance.

Social Engineering

Throughout the data collection period, I organized the structure of whole class and small group discussions to create what I felt would be optimal conditions for oral interaction. For example, instead of students sitting on the carpet area facing me, I had students sit in a circle, facing one another. This was done in an effort to take the focus off me, the teacher, and place it on the students. I also wanted to move away from a traditional approach to turn-taking, in which the teacher always chose who would speak. Instead of me choosing who would speak, I only chose the first student to speak. That student would then choose the next student and so on. Students could not have a second turn to speak until everyone who wanted to speak had had a first turn. This rule was established to prevent one or two students from monopolizing the discussion.

During the first phase of data collection, I observed that group dynamics were having an impact on the participation of my quieter students. I decided, therefore, to reorganize small groups mid-way through the data collection period. As mentioned earlier, I found that some of the more vocal students in the class tended to monopolize their small group discussions. I felt that my quieter students might have found it intimidating to voice their opinions in these conditions. I tried

to place some of my quieter students in groups with their less vocal peers to see if this would encourage more active participation.

I created a group assessment tool to influence the oral interaction during small group discussions. I felt that during these discussions students were sometimes off-task, they interrupted one another, and not everyone was encouraged to speak. The group assessment tool was in the form of a checklist that groups completed after small group discussions. A mark was assigned depending on how many items on the checklist could be checked off. Items on the checklist included the following: nobody interrupted anyone; everyone was encouraged to share at least one idea; we accomplished the task at hand; we were always polite with each other; we resolved our problems independently; the teacher did not need to come to talk to us; we were never off-task.

Timeline of Interventions

Interventions were implemented at various points during the 19-week data collection period. The table below provides a timeline of when the different interventions occurred.

When Intervention Occurred	Intervention	Description of Intervention
Weeks 4 and 5	worked on questioning	• explored different types of questions • students worked on developing deeper-level thinking questions
Weeks 7 to 10	explored the purposes of classroom talk	• discussed why we engage in classroom discussions • defined the term productive talk • co-created norms for classroom discussions

When Intervention Occurred	Intervention	Description of Intervention
Week 11	changed small groups	• small groups were changed to allow students to work with other classmates
Week 11	introduced Discussion Journals	• students were given notebooks in which to write down their ideas before and mid-way through discussions
Week 12	taught paraphrasing	• looked at why we paraphrase, what it means to paraphrase, and how to paraphrase
Week 12	revisited questioning	• looked at the different kinds of questions (Understanding and Remembering questions and Thinking and Wondering questions) • worked with students on categorizing and generating deeper-level thinking questions
Week 13	introduced Paraphrase Cards	• started handing out Paraphrase Cards to different students before our whole class discussions; a student who received one of these had to use this card by paraphrasing once during the discussion
Week 14	worked on development of ideas	• taught students how to develop their ideas • looked at and deconstructed examples of good utterances in which ideas had been developed • developed criteria for developing ideas
Week 15	introduced group assessment tool	• each group was given a group assessment checklist to complete at the end of small group discussions
Week 17	the role of questioner was introduced to our discussions	• one questioner was chosen during our whole class discussions • if someone did not develop his/her ideas thoroughly, it was the questioner's job to ask questions in order to help this student develop his/her ideas further
Weeks 15 to 19	reviewed questioning	• reviewed questioning by teaching students how to analyze different questions
Weeks 15 to 19	reviewed paraphrasing	• students were given opportunities to practise paraphrasing with one another

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When Intervention Occurred	Intervention	Description of Intervention
Weeks 15 to 19	reviewed developing ideas	• students were given opportunities to deconstruct examples of utterances and generate questions one might ask to encourage further development of ideas

Table 10: Timeline of interventions

Summary

As explained in this chapter, various factors were considered in deciding upon areas of oral communication to target. I used transcribed material from the first phase of audio recordings to identify the strengths of my students, as well as aspects of their oral interaction that needed improvement. I looked at what we were focusing on at the school level, such as the three-part math lesson and questioning skills. I also needed to ensure that the areas I had identified for targeted intervention aligned with grade 3 expectations, as listed in the Ontario language curriculum. To implement these interventions I used explicit instruction, created tools to help my students master the required skills, and engineered the structure of our classroom discussions.

Chapter 5: Results of Interventions

As explained in Chapter 4, I chose to target and provide explicit instruction in the following areas of oral communication: paraphrasing, questioning, development of ideas, and exploring the purposes for speaking and listening. This chapter describes the impact of these interventions on the oral communication skills of my students.

Categorizing Students According to Patterns of Oral Interaction

The successful use of oral communication skills involves both cognitive and social components. When I began to look at the patterns of oral interaction exhibited by my 20 students (20 students were in my class during Phase 1, but one of these students left at the end of December) during the first phase of audio recordings, it became clear that they demonstrated varying levels of skill in each of these components. It also became evident as the analysis proceeded that the impact of the various interventions was affected by these strengths and weaknesses in the children.

There were 20 children in the class and, of course, to some degree each child showed an individual pattern of response to the interventions. However, the various responses did fall into clustered patterns that reflected the social and cognitive skill levels of the children. In order to explore and report on how my interventions affected each combination of skills, I therefore categorized children into four groupings, based on their social and cognitive strengths and needs. I

recognize that this categorizing of students inevitably oversimplifies a complex

situation, but it allows for a valuable discussion of the important role played by

social and cognitive factors in oral classroom performance. These four groupings

are described as follows:

- **A. Students who were strong on both cognitive and social dimensions:**
These students demonstrated the cognitive ability to paraphrase and develop
their ideas. They were socially strong in that they were eager to participate,
demonstrated interest in our discussions, enjoyed considering and debating the
ideas of others, and were confident. These students had a tendency to assume a
leadership role in group discussions.

- **B. Students who were strong cognitively but not strong socially:**
These students possessed the cognitive ability to paraphrase and develop ideas
but they did not always show this ability during our discussions. They were
socially weak in that they were not always willing to listen to and consider the
ideas of others. At times, they were disinterested in discussions and not willing to
put forth their best effort.

- **C. Students who were strong socially but not strong cognitively:**
These students exhibited cognitive challenges in that they had difficulty
developing their ideas and paraphrasing. They were socially strong in that they
were eager to participate, attempted the skills I taught, and were willing to listen
to, consider, and debate the ideas of others.

- **D. Students who were weak on both cognitive and social dimensions:**
These students demonstrated minimal or no participation during our discussions.
They did not demonstrate the cognitive abilities to develop ideas, paraphrase, or
pose deeper-level thinking questions. They were not confident learners and did
not appear to be interested in considering or debating the ideas of others.

Introduction to Focal Students and Patterns Demonstrated During Phase 1

Inevitably, with 20 children, there were 20 different patterns of response to

the interventions. No two children responded identically. However, there were

broad patterns of response which appeared to reflect the key dimensions of oral

activity, both cognitive and social. In order to bring these groups to life, and allow for a detailed examination of the data showing response patterns, I have chosen to present these results by selecting four focal children who were broadly representative of other children sharing the same patterns of social and cognitive strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of the study. I will offer an analysis of the focal children's performance at the start of the study, and later outline the ways in which they responded to the various interventions. Throughout, unless stated otherwise, it should be assumed that other children in the same group displayed similar patterns.

Due to privacy concerns, I am only able to divulge general information about each of the four focal students. All these students had been in the country for at least 5 years and had completed their schooling from kindergarten to grade 3 in Ontario. Two of the children, whom I have identified as Katherine and Katelyn, came from homes in which English was spoken as the primary language. The other two children, whom I have identified as Benjamin and Jason, came from homes in which another language was spoken as the primary language.

In the following sub-sections, I describe my four focal students and the patterns I observed in their oral communication skills during the first phase of audio recordings.

Katherine (Group A)

The first of my focal students is Katherine. She fell into Group A, as described in the preceding section, as a student who was strong on both cognitive and social dimensions of oral communication. Katherine was 8 years old at the beginning of grade 3 and turned 9 toward the end of the school year. She came from a home in which English was spoken as the primary language and had a younger sibling who was not yet at school age. I would characterize Katherine as a very capable student. In comparing her to other grade 3 students I had taught in previous years, I found that Katherine's oral communication skills were advanced. A very vocal participant during our discussions, she clearly enjoyed opportunities to share her thoughts and opinions. In group situations, Katherine tended to take control, at times becoming aggressive and acting the role of teacher. I would sometimes observe her trying to explain a concept to a student the way a teacher might: breaking down the question, rephrasing it in simple language, and modeling how to come up with the answer. Katherine did quite well academically but when she struggled with something, such as a concept we were learning or an activity we were doing, she could become easily frustrated and give up.

During the first phase of audio recordings, Katherine was involved in seven recorded discussions (six whole class discussions and one small group discussion) and she participated actively in all of these. During our whole class

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discussions, Katherine was always eager to speak and consistently participated with one or two substantial utterances of more than four lines of speech. She would have participated more if allowed. In addition to her one or two substantial utterances, Katherine would sometimes interject or blurt out short utterances. The following are examples of the percentage of lines she spoke during some of the whole class discussions (which involved 20 students) from the first phase: approximately 16% (Oct. 17, 2011); approximately 13% (Oct. 31, 2011); approximately 15% (Nov. 9, 2011). Katherine would even sometimes indicate to me that she had more to say as I was trying to wrap up the discussion, by telling me "um Ms. Schwartz I want to say something" (Oct. 31, 2011), or asking "Can we go around the circle one more time?" (Nov. 9, 2011).

Katherine also participated actively during her small group discussion: she contributed 22 utterances. Katherine did not, however, monopolize the discussion as her participation was on par with one of her other group members.

Katherine was one of my few students who consistently developed her ideas effectively during our discussions. Some of my other higher functioning students demonstrated the skill of developing their ideas some of the time, but not as consistently as Katherine. During Phase 1 of audio recordings, I made note of 23 ideas Katherine introduced during our discussions. Of these, Katherine effectively developed 15, attempted to develop four, and made no attempts to develop four. Katherine's thorough manner of developing her ideas is illustrated

in the following example. Katherine described how she felt after reading a text about a man who did not have the use of his arms but became a carpenter:

> um I I I feel kinda upset and I I I feel kinda upset and mad and
> kinda mad because
> I'm upset that the armless carpenter's parents or Asantiyahu's
> parents weren't that nice to him because parents should
> his parents should have supported him and should've helped him
> because ah instead they just told him to go and beg
> and I'm mad because they they they didn't cause I'm mad
> that they cause because they're not ashamed of themselves
> and they should be because it's their own son
> and then he like they made and then just because of them he
> went and traveled to a different country by himself
> and I'm happy a little now too because um he met his wife
> and his wife was really nice and his wife spots his talent
> and his wife said change your life around
> and I'm I mean if this is a true article and I really hope that
> I don't know how long this was ago
> I don't know if it's now or I don't know but I hope he is having a
> good life wherever he is
> (Nov. 9, 2011)

One can see how Katherine elaborated on so many of her feelings by citing examples from the text.

There was evidence to suggest that Katherine was an attentive listener. For example, I noticed 11 occasions during which Katherine referred back to a previous comment made by another student by using a building phrase such as "I agree" or "I disagree". Although other students in Group A also used building phrases, they did not use them as often as Katherine. Even in Phase 1, before any explicit instruction on this issue, Katherine also demonstrated the ability to paraphrase.

One area in which Katherine struggled during Phase 1 was questioning. I was looking for three types of questions: simple questions of fact, questions posed to challenge or clarify ideas, and deeper-level thinking questions. In Katherine's utterances from Phase 1, I only found two questions and both of these were simple questions of fact. Katherine's group was exploring a text about a 100-year-old man who ran a marathon and Katherine wondered about the following:

> I wonder that um I wonder is how why his wife and his son died
> cause it says in this text they died
> and it says that he followed them
> but like how did he follow them and like why did they die
> how did they die

At this time, I had already started to work on questioning with the class and we had been doing some activities which involved generating deeper-level thinking questions, or what I referred to with students as *wondering* questions. Katherine followed the above utterance with a statement in which she erroneously labeled her question a wondering question. Please note that words inside double parentheses are my own notes.

> nobody knows
> that's why it's a wondering question
> because nobody knows how they died right
> I mean if it said in the text then obviously we'd know
> but it doesn't say in the text how his wife and son died
> and it also says that he followed them
> how did he follow them
> did he go on a plane with them or did he ((rest of phrase is inaudible))

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or what happened
(Nov. 15, 2011)

As this excerpt demonstrates, Katherine did not make effective use of questioning to challenge or clarify the contributions of her peers or to provoke deeper-level thinking. She also, initially, did not exhibit a clear understanding of the difference between a simple question of fact and a wondering question. Although she was correct that I told students that wondering questions are not answered in the text, and one might suggest that wondering about death qualifies as deeper-level thinking, the answer to the question of how his wife and son died would not have deepened her understanding, or that of her peers, of the issues raised in this text. That is why it was not a deeper-level thinking question.

Most of the students categorized in Group A also had difficulty with questioning although two students from this group did pose a couple of deeper-level thinking questions. One student also posed many questions to challenge the ideas of his peers but did not pose any deeper-level thinking questions.

Katherine was also tentative in her oral interactions, often using pause-fillers such as "um" and "ah" and pausing throughout her utterances. She also hedged frequently (I made note of 21 hedges), using phrases such as "it's kind of actually", "actually kind of", "I kind of agree with", and "it kind of reminded me of". As discussed earlier, signs of tentativeness and hedging can be interpreted in numerous ways. Students might be hedging to soften a claim they are making out of politeness or because they are unsure or lack conviction about this claim

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(Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2001, p. 19). One might also interpret a hedge or the use of "ums", "ahs", and pauses as indicative of a student who is thinking through ideas: the student is unsure of an idea he/she is sharing and buys time to work it out in his/her mind while vocalizing it to others. A hedge might also be a sign of condescension. I can only make a guess as to the reason for Katherine's hedges and tentativeness. Katherine might have been buying time to think through her ideas as she was sharing these with the class. I suggest this as a possible interpretation because of what I knew of Katherine's personality. Katherine was, generally, thoughtful and I think she wanted to make sure she conveyed her ideas accurately to her classmates and that what she said was what she really felt and meant. I also wonder, however, if her hedges indicated a need for my approval and reassurance that she was on the right track. I suggest this as a possible reason as I had noted this behaviour in Katherine in other areas of her learning.

Another pattern that emerged from exploring Katherine's oral interaction during Phase 1 was her desire to be recognized for her contributions to the discussion. This was a pattern I only noted in Katherine and one other student in Group A. One example of this occurred in Week 4. I highlighted a question posed by one student, to suggest that this was a question students might want to respond to. Katherine interjected several times to let everyone know she had already answered this question. Overlapping speech in the following passage is indicated by the use of square brackets. The speech in one set of square

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brackets overlaps the speech underneath this, in the next set of square brackets.

Words inside parentheses are parts of utterances I could not hear clearly and

deciphered by guessing.

Teacher	Christopher had an interesting question [what]
Katherine	[I answered] it (that's what I did)
Teacher	Christopher can you mention your question again to the class?
Christopher	how would you feel if you lost your arms? [what would you do if you] had no arms?
Katherine	[(that's what I said)]
Christopher	[because he was] specially trained as a child learning how
Katherine	[(I answered)]
Christopher	learning how to use his feet for everything (Nov. 9, 2011)

Katherine thrived on praise from the teacher and, perhaps, also wanted to show

her peers what she knew. I believe it was important to her that everyone be

aware of which ideas were hers.

During Phase 1, Katherine also demonstrated leadership qualities during

her small group discussions. For example, in the following utterance, because

several group members were speaking at once and interrupting one another,

Katherine told her peers:

okay one at a time
we'll go this way
so Katelyn then Curtis then Sam then me
and then we'll go the other way okay?
kay so let's start with Katelyn
Katelyn go
(Nov. 15, 2011)

One might suggest that Katherine was assuming the role of teacher here, by deciding on the sequence in which group members would speak.

Based on what I noted from Phase 1, Katherine's oral communication skills were quite good. Nonetheless, there were certain skills that she needed to develop. In particular, I wanted her to develop her questioning skills: to use questions more effectively to clarify and challenge the ideas of her peers and to provoke deeper-level thinking. I also felt it was important for Katherine to develop an understanding that the purpose for engaging in classroom talk was not to play the role of teacher or display her individual knowledge but, rather, to share her ideas, consider other ideas, and generate ideas with her peers, as part of a community of learners.

Benjamin (Group B)

I will be discussing Benjamin as my next focal student. Benjamin fell into Group B, as a student who was cognitvely strong but socially weak. Benjamin was 8 years old at the beginning of grade 3. He turned 9 mid-way through the school year. English was not the main language spoken in his home. He had no siblings. Benjamin was a creative and capable student who participated frequently during class discussions. Although he enjoyed voicing his own thoughts during discussions, he did not always listen as attentively as he might to others; he had the tendency to become easily distracted. During small group discussions, Benjamin had trouble, at times, working cooperatively with his group

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members. He was adamant about his ideas and, sometimes, did not appear to want to listen to or consider the ideas of others. Although I found Benjamin to have a lot of potential, I sometimes felt he lacked consistency in the effort he put forth and in the quality of work he produced.

During the first phase of audio recordings, Benjamin participated in most of our whole discussions, contributing with at least one utterance per discussion. Benjamin's utterances, however, were usually short: less than four lines of speech. Benjamin was very vocal during his small group discussion that took place during Phase 1, participating with more utterances than the other group members: I counted 19 utterances for Benjamin. His three fellow group members participated with 15, 8, and 4 utterances.

Benjamin contributed eight ideas in total to the discussions that occurred during the first phase of audio recordings. Often, Benjamin did not make attempts to develop his ideas, stating his ideas quickly and in short utterances. Of the eight ideas that Benjamin introduced to our discussions during Phase 1, he effectively developed two, attempted to develop one, and did not attempt to develop five. For example, in the following utterance, Benjamin said that a story about a carpenter who did not have the use of his arms reminded him of someone, without explaining why:

> it reminds me of I have a neighbour and she she has a remote
> control wheel chair
> but both of his [sic] legs are all cut off
> (Nov. 9, 2011)

During another discussion, Benjamin stated what he felt was the big idea:

> the big idea is a promise is a promise
> done
> (Oct. 25, 2011)

Benjamin provided no explanation, or even attempted an explanation, as to why he thought this was the big idea of the text.

I believe Benjamin was capable of developing his ideas effectively. Further on during the same discussion mentioned in the preceding paragraph, I intervened and asked each group member to explain in more detail the big ideas they had come up with. With this request, Benjamin developed his idea of "a promise is a promise" as the big idea of the text:

Benjamin	well because in the word story at this part
	((sound of pages being turned as Benjamin looks
	through the text))
	look the lion's looking at him
	because he was talking to the mouse and said ah if
	you let me go I will like I will save you one day
	and he let him go
	and then he was walking and the hunter came
	and he tripped over the wire
	got caught
	and then the mouse came and rescued him
Teacher	okay
Benjamin	so his promise wasn't broken
	(Oct. 25, 2011)

With some prompting, therefore, Benjamin was able to develop his ideas.

In terms of questioning, another skill I was assessing, Benjamin did not pose any questions during the first phase of audio recordings.

Benjamin had a tendency during our discussions to be inattentive and easily distracted. As stated earlier, one of the ways in which I assessed attentive listening skills was by looking at the number of times students paraphrased and used building phrases. I made the assumption that students who were not using building phrases and paraphrasing may not have been listening to or following the discussion; however, students may have been listening but chosen not to paraphrase or use building phrases. During the first phase of audio recordings, Benjamin only paraphrased the contributions of others twice. Unlike Benjamin, some of the other students in Group B did paraphrase more than Benjamin. Benjamin did not use any building phrases. Because Benjamin had difficulty sitting still, was very fidgety, and would often find things to play with that were close by as we were gathered in our circle on the carpet area, I interpret his lack of paraphrasing and the fact that he did not use building phrases as a result of his inattentiveness.

Benjamin was quite inflexible when he believed his idea was the correct idea. In his group discussion during Phase 1, for example, the task was to come up with the big idea of a text entitled *The Lion and the Mouse*. Benjamin felt there were two big ideas, that "a promise is a promise" and "to respect the environment". Although his peers brought up other possible ideas, Benjamin remained adamant about his two big ideas, restating them several times throughout the discussion. He did not say that he disagreed with another idea, or

explain why he felt his ideas were better than other ideas that were presented,

and he did not appear willing to even consider or acknowledge these. Instead,

Benjamin interrupted and spoke over his peers as they were sharing their ideas.

This is illustrated in the example that follows. Please note that "Student ?" in this

passage indicates that I was not sure of who was speaking.

Allison	when the lion got trapped um he couldn't get up but like the mouse the mouse could like get through the rope so it's like [small things] could make a big difference
Benjamin	[(respect the environment)]
Daniel	well I think that um if somebody's in trouble you have to help them
Student?	I think -
Benjamin	or respect the environment ((said loudly)) (Oct. 25, 2011)

Benjamin even interrupted me to shout out something:

Teacher	is there a way you could put all of your big ideas together? think about that because your big ideas sound to me -
Benjamin	respect nature (Oct. 25, 2011)

The way Benjamin interrupted others and blurted out his ideas, without

considering what others were saying, indicated to me that he did not have an

understanding of what it meant to have a discussion with his peers and the

purposes for which one engages in a discussion: to explore ideas together, to

listen to what others have to share, and to develop common understandings and

reach some form of consensus. Although not as adamant about their ideas as

Benjamin, the other students categorized in Group B did not appear to be

interested in exploring the ideas of others. Like Benjamin, after offering their own ideas, they did not engage with or debate the ideas presented by their peers.

I noticed some signs of tentativeness in Benjamin's speech. Occasionally, he used some "ums", "ahs", and pauses in his speech. Sometimes, however, he did not pause at all or use any "ums" and "ahs" and stated his ideas concisely and quickly. I did not make note of the use of any hedges in his speech during the first phase of audio recordings.

There were many aspects of Benjamin's oral communication that I wanted to target in my interventions. Three specific areas for improvement were his questioning skills, his idea development, and discussion etiquette. Based on Benjamin's abilities in other areas of the grade 3 curriculum, I felt he was cognitively capable of developing both the skills of questioning and idea development. With some instruction, I was hoping Benjamin would recognize the value of questioning to challenge and clarify the contributions of others and also to extend the thinking of his peers. I was also hoping he would see the importance of developing his ideas effectively, if he wanted to convince others of those ideas. I believe he already had this skill as, with my encouragement, he demonstrated that he was able to develop his ideas quite effectively. Lastly, I was hoping that Benjamin would develop a better understanding of what it meant to engage in a productive discussion: that participation in a discussion means

listening to and compromising with others, in order to reach consensus, develop common understandings, and co-construct meaning.

Katelyn (Group C)

Katelyn is the next focal student I will be discussing. She fell into Group C, as a student who was socially but not cognitively strong. Katelyn was 8 years old at the beginning of grade 3 and turned 9 at the end of the school year. She was the only child in her family. English was spoken as the primary language in her home. Katelyn was social, confident, at times aggressive, and outgoing. She was a frequent participant in all our discussions and enjoyed sharing her thoughts and ideas. Although social in nature, Katelyn struggled cognitively; she had difficulty grasping new concepts and processing information. Despite her learning challenges, Katelyn demonstrated perseverance and determination. I never found that she was discouraged and she was always willing to try whatever was asked of her.

During the first phase of audio recordings, Katelyn's vocal nature was clear. Katelyn was involved in seven recorded discussions in total: six whole class and one small group discussion. During the six whole class discussions in which she was involved, she participated with at least one utterance in 5 out of 6 discussions, typically speaking in longer utterances of over four lines of speech. Katelyn was also very vocal during her small group discussion, which took place during Week 5. I counted more utterances for her during this discussion than two

of her fellow group members. In fact, Katelyn was in the same small group as Katherine (the student discussed in the sub-section above) and both girls participated with 22 utterances.

One area in which Katelyn struggled was in her development of ideas. During Phase 1, Katelyn introduced 12 new ideas during our discussions; she was unable to effectively develop any of these. She attempted to develop eight of these and made no attempts to develop four. In one utterance, pertaining to a text we had read about a 100-year-old man who had run a marathon, Katelyn attempted to describe something that surprised her in the text:

> so what surprised me is that he's a hundred
> and one other thing that surprise me is that he he he walked
> he he's with he's a vegetarian in his diet and up to ten miles of
> walking and running per day to for he could to his house
> and that and that like even the I like like um like ah
> it's like it's like I like it's like it's not really that I don't like people
> who aren't vegetarian
> I like it but I like ah I still like him
> (Nov. 15, 2011)

One can see how difficult it was for Katelyn to express herself clearly. Although what she was saying may have been logical to her, this utterance was difficult to follow. She flipped back and forth between ideas and went from explaining that it surprised her that he was 100, to being surprised that he walked, to referring to his vegetarianism, to going back to discussing that he walked and ran each day, and concluded with a statement that she liked him, even though he was a

vegetarian. I interpret Katelyn's inability to express her ideas and develop these

clearly as consistent with her learning difficulties in other areas of the curriculum.

Another pattern I noticed during Phase 1 in Katelyn's speech was her use

of pause-fillers such as "um" and "ah". In her utterances, she also repeated words

and phrases numerous times and tended to pause frequently. Although other

students in Group C also exhibited these signs of tentativeness, they did not

appear as tentative as Katelyn. In my transcriptions, I indicated pauses with

backslashes (//). One backslash indicated a pause of 1.5 to 2 seconds, two

backslashes a pause of 3 seconds, three backslashes a pause of 4 seconds, four

backslashes a pause of 5 seconds, and five a pause of more than 5 seconds.

The following utterance illustrates Katelyn's pauses, use of "ums" and "ahs", and

how she repeated words and phrases:

> um I think / if someone is in trouble / you should help them
> it should be there
> like that should be should go to respect because you're respecting
> others (and helping them)
> and / and um // and a promise is a promise I don't really think that
> should be there
> because because / how do that how do that really make a promise
> cause // like making a promise // because cause just / how do you
> know
> they're making a promise
> (Oct. 25, 2011)

I believe this pattern of oral interaction demonstrated that Katelyn was having

trouble organizing her thoughts in her mind and this made it difficult for her to

voice her ideas clearly and coherently. As explained before, there are many

reasons a student may pause or use words that indicate tentativeness. Because I had witnessed Katelyn's difficulties in other subject areas and various aspects of her learning, I viewed her tentativeness as a sign of cognitive struggle. This is, however, only one possible interpretation.

Some of the time, Katelyn paraphrased and used a building phrase, to indicate attentive listening skills. I made note of four paraphrases and three building phrases during the Phase 1. Katelyn, at times, could be easily distracted and I often had to refocus her attention when I noticed she was not listening. This may have been one of the reasons she did not paraphrase or use building phrases as often as she might have. The other students in Group C used even fewer paraphrases and building phrases than Katelyn. For some of these students, this may have indicated inattentiveness, like Katelyn. For others, given my knowledge of these students, paraphrasing may have presented cognitive challenges.

Another area in which Katelyn had difficulty was in her use of questioning. Katelyn did not pose any questions of fact or to challenge or clarify during the first phase of audio recordings. She did, however, attempt to pose one deeper-level thinking question. The following utterance is from a discussion during which students were discussing the 100-hundred-year-old marathoner:

> I don't know how to put this but how if he keeps doing it doing it
> how do you think what do you think when is he going to live up to
> like is he going to live up to is he going to live forever?
> (Nov. 15, 2011)

Although this was not a great deeper-level thinking question, I would characterize it as a good attempt to pose a *what if* question and to get her group to consider what might happen if the man from this text continued to live a healthy lifestyle by exercising and running marathons.

There were several aspects for development of Katelyn's oral communication skills. In particular, my analysis of her oral interaction during the first phase of audio recordings revealed three potential areas of focus: idea development, questioning skills, and attentive listening skills. First, I wanted to see Katelyn developing her ideas in a more thorough and clear manner. Second, I wanted her to pose more questions; she was one of my few students who attempted a deeper-level thinking question during Phase 1 and I was hoping to see her pose more of these questions if provided with some instruction on questioning. Lastly, I wanted to help Katelyn develop her skills as an attentive listener during our discussions.

Jason (Group D)

Jason is the fourth student I will be discussing. Jason fell into Group D, as a student who was both socially and cognitively weak. Jason was 8 years old at the beginning of grade 3. He turned 9 toward the end of the school year. Jason had no siblings. English was not spoken as the main language at his home. Jason had a lot of trouble speaking during discussions or answering questions in class. Occasionally, I would try to encourage Jason to speak by asking him

questions that I knew he could answer and in subject areas, such as math, in which he demonstrated strengths. Jason, however, still had difficulty answering these questions. He also had trouble talking to me one-on-one. He never asked questions if he was unsure about something, for example, about an assignment he was expected to complete. When I had conferences with him about his writing or his reading, he had difficulty answering my questions and carrying on a conversation with me. Although he did not talk to me or participate during learning activities, such as class discussions or lessons, he did not appear to have trouble talking to or socializing with his friends during non-instructional times, such as when he was playing outside at recess.

There is little to say about Jason's oral communication skills during Phase 1. He did not participate at all during our whole class discussions. At the end of each of these, I routinely went around the circle and asked any students who had not participated if they had anything to contribute. Jason always answered no to this question. Jason did not actively participate during his small group discussion either. During this discussion, his fellow group members were talking about what to do if someone was hurt and having a heart attack. Jason's only contribution was to ask "a heart attack, who having a heart attack?" (Nov. 17, 2011). Because of Jason's minimal participation, I was not able to assess his ability to develop ideas, question, paraphrase, use building phrases, etc.

There may have been several reasons for Jason's non-participation that require consideration. He may have found speaking publicly in academic situations to be intimidiating. Also, he may have struggled cognitively with some of the ideas and issues we were exploring during our discussions. It is also possible that Jason did possess the oral communication skills I was looking for but chose to be silent due to resistance to what I was doing.

After observing Jason's oral communication skills during the first phase of audio recordings, some of my chosen interventions were meant to target the issue of non-participation. For example, I introduced Discussion Journals as a tool that students could use to write down their ideas before they had to share these out loud. I thought this might make it easier for reluctant, or shyer, students to participate. I also reorganized students' small groups mid-way through the data collection period when I noticed that, in some of my groupings, the more aggressive students were overpowering some of the quieter students. Furthermore, I emphasized to students on numerous occasions that everyone had good ideas and should be encouraged to share these. Lastly, one of the reasons I chose to teach paraphrasing was to provide my quieter students, who may have been nervous about sharing their own ideas, with a way of becoming more involved in our discussions by paraphrasing the ideas of others. I mention these interventions to show that some of these were chosen with students like Jason in mind.

Therefore, it was clear after assessing the oral communication skills of my four focal students that each had varying social and cognitive abilities. Below is a table summarizing my findings from Phase 1.

Name	Group	Strengths in Oral Communication Skills	Target Areas
Katherine	A	• frequent and active participation in all discussions • effective development of ideas most of the time • consistent use of paraphrasing (in almost all discussions) • thoughtful in her contributions to discussions (indicated by signs of tentativeness)	• questioning skills • understanding of purposes of discussion
Benjamin	B	• frequent participation in most discussions • had cognitive ability to develop ideas effectively (but did not always demonstrate this ability without encouragement from the teacher)	• development of ideas • use of paraphrasing and building phrases • discussion etiquette and understanding of purposes of discussion
Katelyn	C	• frequent and active participation in all discussions • a willingness to attempt skills I was teaching • confidence	• development of ideas • use of paraphrasing and building phrases • questioning skills
Jason	D	• unable to determine strengths due to minimal participation in all discussions	• more active participation in discussions

Table 11: Summary of findings from Phase 1

Progress Throughout Data Collection Period

As described in the preceding sub-sections, each of my four focal students demonstrated variations in their oral communication skills and exhibited different strengths and areas for improvement. The proceeding sub-sections describe the

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impact of my interventions on the development of the oral communication skills of these four students throughout the remainder of the data collection period.

Katherine (Group A)

Many aspects of Katherine's oral communication skills remained consistent throughout the 19-week data collection period. Katherine continued to actively participate in discussions. She continued to develop her ideas quite effectively: in Phase 2, Katherine effectively developed 13 out of 16 ideas; in Phase 3, she developed 7 out of 11; and in Phase 4, she developed 6 out of 10. Katherine also continued to demonstrate attentive listening skills: she used building phrases (I made note of 22 building phrases in total in Phases 2, 3, and 4) and paraphrased (I made note of 23 paraphrases in total in Phases 2, 3, and 4). Katherine also continued to hedge as she spoke, although there was a progressive decrease in the number of hedges throughout the data collection period: I noted 17 hedges in Phase 2, 11 in Phase 3, and 9 in Phase 4.

There are a couple of differences in how some students in Group A responded to the interventions, in terms of paraphrasing, developing their ideas, and use of building phrases. One student, for example, was able to develop his ideas quite effectively during Phase 1 but demonstrated difficulty in developing his ideas in Phase 4. One student who paraphrased and used building phrases consistently in Phase 1 demonstrated a decrease in her use of paraphrasing and building phrases in Phases 3 and 4.

Although Katherine did not pose a significantly higher number of questions in Phases 2, 3, and 4, she did ask a few questions and was able to generate some good deeper-level thinking questions. As described earlier, Katherine only posed two questions in Phase 1, both of which were simple questions pertaining to factual information. In Phase 2, Katherine posed a couple of questions to clarify what another student had said, during her small group discussion in Week 8. When another group member suggested that two characters from a text they were discussing were nice, Katherine asked "How were they nice?" (Dec. 7, 2011). During Phase 3, she posed a question to challenge another student in Week 12, who stated that he did not think Norman Bethune was a hero. Katherine asked "Why isn't he a hero to you Zachary?" (Jan. 19, 2012). In a conversation about Rosa Parks in Week 15, Katherine shared a good deeper-level thinking question with the class. In the following utterance, Katherine wondered what might have happened if the laws regarding African Americans in the United States had been the same in Canada:

> but what happened if those laws reached Canada
> what if those laws did reach Canada
> and well yes Martin Luther King would help but Rosa Parks
> also kinda helped a lot too
> I'm just wondering what would happen if those laws reached
> Canada before
> and Martin Luther King and no- and nobody stood up for the rights
> what would happen?
> (Feb. 10, 2012)

In the fourth phase of audio recordings, I started to assign the role of questioner to various students during our whole class discussions. The questioner's job was to pose questions to help their peers extend their thinking. I chose Katherine to be a questioner during one of our discussions. During this discussion in Week 17, Katherine asked three deeper-level thinking questions to get her peers to wonder about different issues raised by a text called *Subway Mouse*. In this text, a mouse named Nib followed his dreams, despite others who tried to discourage him and several obstacles he encountered. Katherine asked one student if there ever was "a time in your life when you didn't turn back on something or ever give up?" (Feb. 24, 2012). She asked another student if he had "a dream that you hope you can do one day?" (Feb. 24, 2012). In the following utterance, she posed a question to get the class to think about connections they might make between this text and other texts we had read:

> I have a question for the class
> um do you think that maybe you can be like Nib or another hero
> we've read about?
> or another person we've read about? and do sort of something like
> they did?
> (Feb. 24, 2012)

During this discussion, she also tried to help a student further develop his ideas by asking "Zachary could you give some details from the text that um how he persevered?" (Feb. 24, 2012). These examples show that Katherine was beginning to wonder on a deeper level about issues in the texts we were reading and was sharing her wondering questions with peers to provide them with

opportunities to extend their thinking. She was also using questions to clarify and challenge what others had said. Even though she did not do this consistently or frequently during our discussions, the examples provided above suggest that she had developed this skill.

I also wanted to look at whether or not Katherine was able to give up some of her control during our discussions. As part of my teaching of oral communication skills, I organized different activities to give students opportunities to explore the purposes of classroom talk. I also often told students that, in a community of learners, we were all teachers and students, by which I meant that we all had things to share with and teach one another and we all had things to learn from one another. I wanted Katherine to develop an understanding that her role in our discussions was to co-construct meaning with her peers and not to control them or manage the discussion. Instead of Katherine becoming less controlling, however, I noticed that she became more controlling. Clearly, my interventions pertaining to the purposes of classroom talk had empowered Katherine, but not in the way I had intended. Instead of developing an understanding that *being a teacher* meant sharing ideas with others, Katherine perceived *being a teacher* as managing and controlling her peers. Katherine became progressively more controlling and even started to mimic me by using phrases with her classmates that I would often use.

During a group discussion in Week 8, for example, Katherine immediately assumed the role of teacher, telling her classmates the order in which everyone would speak: "um so we'll go this way so everyone will have a chance to speak" (Dec. 7, 2011). When one of her group members was unsure of what she wanted to say, Katherine asked "D'you wanna pass and then we'll come back to you?" (Dec. 7, 2011). When this student indicated she was ready to share, Katherine said:

> yeah we said we'd come back to you
> now if you have an idea (we can come back)
> (Dec. 7, 2011)

Katherine continued to use *teacher-like* phrases that indicated she was managing her group, such as "Who was it last time before we left?" and "Okay Sam do you have anything to add?" (Dec. 7, 2011). Here, Katherine was emulating what I would often do during our whole class discussions: determine which direction in the circle we would go to allow students to share their ideas, suggest that we would come back to students if they weren't ready to share their ideas, and give students opportunities to pass if they had nothing to add to the discussion.

In Phase 3, Katherine took this one step further, by copying the structure of our whole class discussions. By this time, I had introduced Discussion Journals to students: notebooks in which students could write down their ideas before and during our whole class discussions. In Katherine's group discussion, which

occurred in Week 12, she decided her fellow group members woud begin by

writing in their Discussion Journals:

> take two minutes to just write down in our Discussion Journals
> annnnnnnd go
> um Daniel come
> we're going to write
> you have two minutes to write down (that)
> (Jan. 19, 2012)

I would stop discussions mid-way through to give students another opportunity to

write in their Discussion Journals. Katherine also stopped the discussion and said

to her group members "Let's just take two minutes or one one minute to just write

in our Discussion Journals before we um finish our discussion okay?" (Jan. 19,

2012). When the two minutes were up, Katherine instructed the group to put

"pencils down, we're going to fin- finish our discussion" (Jan. 19, 2012). This is

what I said to the class after I had given them time to write in their Discussion

Journals; I would insist that they put their pencils down to refocus their attention.

Katherine ran her small group discussion the same way I ran our whole class

discussions, by giving her peers some time to write in their Discussion Journals,

stopping the discussion mid-way through to give them more time to write in their

Discussion Journals, timing them doing this activity, and telling them to put down

their pencils.

In Week 19, Katherine continued to play the role of teacher. She

immediately assumed control of her group by deciding that, for today's

discussion, they would not write in their Discussion Journals. She explained that:

> um okay I guess um let's um guys today um we're gonna switch it
> around
> we're not gonna write in our Discussion Journals
> (Mar. 8, 2012)

"Switch it up" was a phrase I would use when I was deviating from our normal

routine. Katherine then began scolding two of her group members for their

behaviour and even threatened to separate them if they did not stop

misbehaving:

> okay if you get three strikes then I'm not gonna let you sit
> I'm gon- not let you sit together okay? ((inaudible word))
> Daniel you're gonna sit there
> Linda you're sitting there and Zachary's sitting there
> (Mar. 8, 2012)

What was perhaps most interesting about Katherine's behaviour was the reaction

of her peers. Instead of questioning her or challenging her right to determine who

would sit next to whom, they seemed to accept her role as disciplinarian. For

example, Zachary asked her a question to clarify what she had said: "But like if

he gets three and I still have one do we switch?" (Mar. 8, 2012). All of the above

examples show that Katherine was very empowered, as a result, perhaps, of my

interventions. When I referred to all the students in the class as *teachers*, with

ideas to share with and teach one another, Katherine misinterpreted what I

meant. In Katherine's view, her role as teacher was to discipline and manage her

peers.

Although the other students in Group A continued to assume a leadership role during their small group discussions, they did not evolve as *teacher* in the same way and to the same extent as Katherine.

Katherine had good oral communication skills when I started audio recording our discussions at the beginning of the data collection period and this remained consistent throughout the data collection period. One area of difficulty for Katherine, that I noted during the first phase, was her questioning skills. There was minimal evidence of questioning during Phase 1 and Katherine did not pose any deeper-level thinking questions. Although she continued to question infrequently during the remaining three phases of data collection, she posed a few deeper-level thinking questions. When chosen to be the questioner, she also asked questions to help her peers develop their ideas more fully. This evidence suggests to me that she was able to question effectively. The other area of Katherine's oral communication skills in which I had hoped to see a change was in how she controlled and managed her peers in her group. This did change, but not as I had hoped. Instead of Katherine becoming less controlling, she became more controlling as the data collection period progressed.

Benjamin (Group B)

In the second, third, and fourth phases of audio recordings, Benjamin remained actively involved in our whole class discussions. In fact, he participated in every whole class discussion in each phase, often with two utterances.

Benjamin also remained very vocal during his small group discussions. For example, during his small group discussion in Phase 2, Benjamin participated with approximately 72 utterances; during Phase 3, he participated with approximately 51 utterances; during Phase 4, he contributed approximately 80 utterances to the discussion.

One of the aspects of Benjamin's oral communication where I was hoping to see improvement was in the development of his ideas. As stated earlier, Benjamin often stated his ideas without developing these. He was capable, however, of developing his ideas nicely, with encouragement from the teacher. I noticed some improvement in this area. Although he did not always express his ideas effectively, in Phases 2, 3, and 4, he started to show consistent attempts to develop his ideas. By Phase 4, Benjamin was either developing his ideas effectively or, at least, trying to explain the reasoning behind his thinking, instead of stating his opinion or idea quickly and without elaboration. For example, in Phase 4 he introduced 17 new ideas to the discussions. He effectively developed seven of these and he made attempts to develop nine of these. The following utterance, from Week 18, illustrates how Benjamin effectively developed an idea in which he made a connection between two texts, *Fireflies* and *Lily and the Paper Man*:

> and I think this book reminds me of *Fireflies* too
> because he cause that the boy needed to give up the fireflies but he
> was happy and sad like Lily

because he was happy that they were happy that (they) but he was
a little bit sad because he couldn't keep them
and Lily was a little bit sad (because she needed to) gave away
give away the quilt
and he [sic] was happy because the (man) was happy
(Mar. 2, 2012)

One can see a longer utterance here, in which Benjamin explained his thinking

and provided elaboration. Although he did not always demonstrate the effective

development of all of his ideas, he was starting to demonstrate that he was

making more attempts to develop these. In Phase 1, he did not make attempts to

develop five of his ideas; in Phase 2, he did not make attempts to develop 4 out

of 11 ideas; in Phase 3, he made attempts to develop all but two of his ideas; in

Phase 4, he made attempts to develop all but one of his ideas. Benjamin

demonstrated more of an improvement in this area than the other students in

Group B. There was not a significant change in how the other students in this

group developed their ideas.

Another area for improvement in his oral communication skills was

questioning. Benjamin did not ask any questions during the first phase of audio

recordings. As well, during Phase 2, he did not pose any questions. During Phase

3, he posed a couple of questions, but no deeper-level thinking questions. He

posed one question to clarify something: the group was discussing the concept of

heroes and one boy told a story of someone who had saved his life, after which

Benjamin asked "How?" (Jan. 12, 2012). In the same conversation, the group

was discussing Norman Bethune and Benjamin posed the following question: "I

wonder why did he try to swim across the harbour when he was ten?" (Jan. 23, 2012). During Phase 4, Benjamin asked a couple of questions. For example, during one discussion, the task of Benjamin's group was to write down what they were wondering about, after reading a text called *The Subway Mouse*. Benjamin came up with the question "Why did Nib want Lola to go with him?" (Feb. 24, 2012). Later, one group member suggested that the two characters of *The Subway Mouse*, Nib and Lola, did not get married at the end of the story, even though it showed a picture of them with their baby mice children on the last page of the text. Benjamin asked this group member "How can Lola get babies without marrying?" (Feb. 24, 2012). In Week 19, I chose Benjamin to be the questioner during one of our discussions. Although, in this role, Benjamin only posed one question by asking "Curtis how did how did Norman Bethune and Lily help?" (Mar. 9, 2012), it was a good question in order to help one of his peers develop his ideas more fully. Even though he was posing more questions than he had during the first phase of audio recordings, Benjamin was not demonstrating the use of questioning to express his sense of wonder about issues in the texts we were reading. He was not asking deeper-level thinking questions and only posed a few questions to clarify the contributions of his peers. Benjamin may have been able to use questioning in the ways I had identified (to wonder about issues and clarify and challenge the ideas of others) but he was not demonstrating this in his oral interactions with others. It is also possible that the

texts I chose for the class were not topics of interest to him and, therefore, did not

inspire him to wonder.

One area of Benjamin's oral communication skills in which I saw a

noticeable change was in his use of building phrases. As stated earlier, I found

that Benjamin was often inattentive during our whole class discussions. To see if

he was more attentive, I looked at his use of building phrases and paraphrases.

In the first phase of audio recordings, Benjamin only paraphrased twice and he

did not use any building phrases. In the second, third, and fourth phases,

Benjamin used building phrases more consistently. I made note of Benjamin's

use of two building phrases in Phase 2, six building phrases in Phase 3 (one

building phrase in every whole class discussion during this phase), and 10

building phrases in Phase 4. Benjamin used at least one building phrase, and

sometimes two, in all of his discussions during Phase 4. One might speculate that

the increase in Benjamin's use of building phrases was due to an improvement in

his listening skills. Benjamin paraphrased more during Phase 3, but not during

Phases 2 and 4. I counted a total of 10 paraphrases during these three phases:

two during Phase 2, five during Phase 3, and two during Phase 4.

I did not observe a significant change in the number of times Benjamin

paused and used "ums" and "ahs" in his speech. In Phase 1, Benjamin's use of

"ums" and "ahs" was inconsistent. I did notice a slight increase in the number of

times he hedged. Benjamin did not hedge at all during the first phase of audio recordings; he hedged twice in Phase 3 and once in Phase 4.

In Phase 1, I found that Benjamin was inattentive to his classmates during group discussions. He did not appear interested in considering or debating the ideas of his peers. I focused a lot of my teaching on the purposes for classroom talk and, also, on discussion etiquette. As a class, for example, we discussed what productive talk looks like and sounds like. I also had students come up with classroom norms for our discussions. During Phase 2, I observed similar behaviours to what I had observed in Phase 1: Benjamin continued to interrupt his peers and seemed adamant about his ideas and unwilling to consider and/or accept the ideas of his peers. The group's task during one discussion, from Week 7, was to articulate the big idea for a song entitled *Your Heart Will Lead You Home.* Benjamin was adamant that the big idea was that "you will never be alone" (Nov. 30, 2011). He restated this many times throughout the discussion: "the big idea is your heart will lead you home and you'll never be alone", "yeah but you're never alone", "you'll never feel alone", "you will never be alone", "no but the big idea is you will never be alone" (Nov. 30, 2011). Two of Benjamin's group members felt the big idea had to do with friends and thinking about your friends to make you feel happy. After briefly acknowledging this idea, Benjamin still appeared unwilling to consider the idea of friendship as worthy of discussion or further exploration:

Allison	it's just um I think the big idea is how it says 'just think of your friends the ones who care'
	ah I think the big idea is like if you're lost it says here 'just think of your friends'
	I think that the big [idea]
Benjamin	[but] why do you think of your friends?
Daniel	why?
Benjamin	because you're all alone
Student?	yes
Benjamin	so that's the big idea
Allison	(with no one to be with you so) -
Benjamin	they're alone
	that's the big idea
	(Nov. 30, 2011)

Benjamin also overlapped someone's speech and interrupted someone. In this small group discussion, I made note of seven times when he interrupted someone and six times when he overlapped the speech of one of his peers.

In his group discussions that occurred during Phases 3 and 4, Benjamin continued to interrupt a little and to overlap the speech of his group members. In Phase 3, he interrupted twice and overlapped the speech of another group member six times. In Phase 4, he interrupted someone three times and overlapped speech 11 times. In Phases 3 and 4, however, students were regrouped with different peers. For Phases 1 and 2, Benjamin had been grouped with two quieter girls and another boy. During Phases 3 and 4, Benjamin was grouped with two other boys who were very vocal during discussions. In Benjamin's new group, the two other boys also interrupted him and there was a lot of overlapping speech, as group members talked over one another.

When Benjamin was placed in a new group with different classmates, he

appeared a little more accepting of the ideas of others. For example, in his small

group discussion of Phase 4, the group's task was to generate deeper-level

thinking questions that related to the big idea of a text entitled *The Subway*

Mouse. In this text, two mice journeyed to a place called *Tunnel's End*. Benjamin

disagreed with a question suggested by another group member, "Why did ah Lola

really want to go with ah Nib to Tunnel's End" (Feb. 24, 2012), because he did

not feel it related to the big idea of the text. The group had decided the big idea

was perseverance. This group member explained his thinking and presented his

argument as to why it related to the big idea: the two mice persevered together.

Benjamin listened attentively to his classmate's argument, paraphrased what was

said, and then agreed and was willing to accept his question. This is illustrated in

the following utterance:

> I think if the big idea is perseverance and teamwork that might go
> with the big idea because ah Lola wanted to do teamwork with Nib
> if she wanted to go with her [sic]
> but if you guys agree that the big idea of perseverance and
> teamwork then you can write that question down
> (Feb. 24, 2012)

Benjamin was able to compromise with his group members, a skill he did not

demonstrate in his other small group discussions. There might be two reasons for

this. As described earlier, I had done a lot of work with students on the purposes

of classroom talk and how to work with one another in a productive manner.

Benjamin may have been developing an understanding of the importance of

listening to and considering the ideas of others. I also think, however, that group

dynamics played a part in Benjamin's willingness to consider the ideas of his

peers. During the first two phases of audio recordings, Benjamin's group

members were quieter and not as aggressive. Benjamin was also cognitively

stronger than his other group members. In his new group, during Phases 3 and 4,

I deliberately placed Benjamin in a group of students who were cognitively as

strong as Benjamin and who were also vocal and not afraid to voice their

opinions and disagree with others. Although Benjamin demonstrated a

willingness to compromise in the above example, this is only one isolated

incident. I did not find any other examples similar to this one in any of the small

group discussions during the 19-week data collection period. Similarly, the other

students in Group B did not appear more interested in debating or considering

the ideas of their peers as the data collection period progressed.

I think there was some change in Benjamin's oral communication skills. He

was able to develop his ideas a little more effectively by the end of the data

collection period and he also made more attempts to develop these. There was

one instance during which Benjamin was more a little more willing to consider the

ideas of his group members and reach a compromise, perhaps as a result of

changing groupings mid-way through the data collection period or focusing on the

purposes of discussion as one of my targeted interventions. I also think Benjamin

developed better listening skills as he was using building phrases consistently by

the end of the data collection period. One area in which I did not see any improvement was in his development of questioning skills.

Katelyn (Group C)

During the rest of the 19-week data collection period, Katelyn continued to be a vocal participant during our discussions. During Phases 2, 3, and 4, Katelyn participated with at least one utterance in most whole class discussions and, sometimes, two or three utterances. She also continued to speak in longer utterances, usually of over four lines of speech. In her small group discussions, she remained quite actively involved, participating with approximately 13 utterances in her small group discussion during Phase 2 (this was a shorter discussion), 41 during Phase 3, and 37 during Phase 4.

I was hoping that some of my teaching would help Katelyn develop her ideas more effectively. As described earlier, although Katelyn introduced many new ideas to our discussions during Phase 1, she did not demonstrate that she was successfully able to develop any of these. In Phases 2, 3, and 4 she continued to struggle with this skill. There was some improvement in this area: she successfully developed 2 out of 10 ideas in Phase 2, 0 out of 5 ideas in Phase 3, and 4 out of 12 ideas in Phase 4. These results might suggest that she was starting to develop this skill. The following is an example of an utterance from Phase 4, during Week 19 of the data collection period. In this example, Katelyn was able to develop her ideas more successfully. Students were exploring a text

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about a man who was homeless, selling newspapers on the street, and begging

for money. Katelyn's utterance followed several other utterances during which

some of the students had started to question whether or not the man really

needed the money because he was poor or whether he was trying to trick people

into giving him money. One can see from the following utterance that Katelyn was

able to articulate her thoughts quite clearly, stay on topic, and provide some

elaboration:

> oh um I I would like to question everyone in the class cause
> doesn't it kinda remind you like sometimes when you like going
> somewhere
> like when you're going on the train or outside somewhere
> going outside you see these little pe- (you see) people playing
> these instruments
> like they don't have any money
> (this is) kinda text-to-world and text-to- te- text-to-self
> um um it's like people people play instruments to get money like
> they're poor
> but I never think thought that until now because if they were poor
> they wouldn't have enough money to buy the instruments
> so you shouldn't always fall for it because they might be tricking you
> it's like you can still give them some money to to s- for for
> to buy things or to get a job or they can get the money that you're
> giving them to people like people who don't have money
> so sometimes you shouldn't fall for it
> sometimes you should
> (Mar. 9, 2012)

Although there were many other instances during Phases 2, 3, and 4 in which

Katelyn continued to demonstrate difficulty in developing her ideas, I believe

there was a slight improvement in this area by the end of the data collection

period. While some students in Group C also showed a slight improvement in this

area, there were some students in this group who did not demonstrate improvement.

I noted signs of tentativeness during Phase 1 in Katelyn's oral interaction in her use of "ums", "ahs" and pauses. This pattern persisted and Katelyn also started to hedge more in her speech: I made note of two utterances in which Katelyn hedged in Phase 1. During the rest of the data collection period, there were 20 utterances during which she hedged: five hedges during Phase 2, eight during Phase 3, and eight during Phase 4. These signs of tentativeness may be interpreted in several ways. Katherine, the student discussed earlier from Group A, also demonstrated signs of tentativeness. I interpret Katherine's hedges as an indication that she was carefully thinking through her ideas. Katelyn's tentativeness may have also been because she was thinking through her ideas carefully. On the other hand, given Katelyn's learning challenges in other areas of the grade 3 curriculum, I interpret her tentativeness as, perhaps, a sign that she was having difficulty organizing her ideas in her mind and was, therefore, unable to articulate her thoughts clearly. This is, however, only speculation on my part.

I also wanted to see Katelyn develop her attentive listening skills. One of the ways in which I assessed attentive listening was in students' use of paraphrases and building phrases in their speech. Katelyn did not paraphrase more during Phases 2, 3, and 4. In fact, she paraphrased less. In the first phase, I noted four paraphrases; in Phase 2, I noted two; in Phase 3, there were no

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paraphrases; in Phase 4, Katelyn paraphrased three times. There was not a significant increase in Katelyn's use of building phrases. In Phase 2, she used four building phrases; in Phase 3, she used two; in Phase 4, she used four.

There were some notable differences in some of the other students' use of paraphrasing and building phrases in Group C. Although some demonstrated similar patterns to Katelyn, some paraphrased more and used more building phrases than they had during Phrase 1.

I saw some improvement in Katelyn's use of questioning. I do not, however, believe that Katelyn had fully developed her questioning skills. Instead, there was evidence to suggest that she was questioning more and only beginning to develop this skill. Katelyn posed just one question during Phase 1 and this was an attempt at a deeper-level thinking question. Although Katelyn did not pose any deeper-level thinking questions during Phases 2, 3, and 4, she did pose six questions in total during these phases: four of which were questions to challenge or clarify what someone else had said, one of which was a simple question of fact, and one question in which she attempted to express something she was wondering about with a deeper-level thinking question. In Week 18, for example, the task was to come up with a range of titles for a book we had read in which the protagonist, Nib, journeyed to a place callled *Tunnel's End*. One of her fellow group members suggested the title *Tunnel's End Surprise*. Katelyn challenged this title by asking "But what does it do to make it a surprise?" (Feb. 29, 2012).

Another group member then told Katelyn that it was a surprise because no one knew about it. Katelyn responded to this with another question: "Then how did Nib know about Tunnel's End?" (Feb. 29, 2012). During Week 10, Katelyn asked a question to clarify what another student had said, when he suggested that a character from a book I had read to the class was embarrassed. Katelyn asked "How do you know that in *Suki's Kimono* she feels a little embarrassed?" (Dec. 19, 2011). Katelyn was, therefore, beginning to use questioning to clarify statements and challenge her peers.

Katelyn also used the phrase "I wonder" in a couple of her questions. For example, during one discussion from Week 11, she wondered the following: "I'm wondering why he works at a hospital but doesn't live in New York" (Jan. 11, 2012). During Week 13, we were discussing a book entitled *Canadian Heroes*, which was a compilation of biographies of famous Canadians. Katelyn wondered the following: "I won- I wonder why um I'm thinking why did um I'm thinking if all the people in *Canadian Hero* died" (Jan. 26, 2012). Although Katelyn had not really posed what I would consider to be wondering questions here, she was attempting to express wonder and ask questions about points brought up in the texts we were reading. I interpret the increase in the number of questions that Katelyn posed after Phase 1 as indicative that she was beginning to recognize the purposes for asking questions during a discussion: to challenge and clarify the ideas of others and also to express wonder in order to explore the ideas

presented in texts. I would not, however, conclude that she had mastered the skill of posing deeper-level thinking questions.

I believe the evidence suggests that there was some improvement in Katelyn's oral communication skills. At the end of the data collection period, she was still struggling with developing her ideas, although she was most successful in developing her ideas in Phase 4, effectively developing 4 out of 12 ideas during this last phase of data collection. She also began to question more, posing six questions in total during Phases 2, 3, and 4.

Jason (Group D)

Unfortunately, none of my interventions appeared to improve Jason's oral communication skills. During Phases 2, 3, and 4, he continued to be a non-participant during our discussions, making it very difficult to judge whether or not there had been any impact on his cognitive skills. What is notable, however, is how Jason's peers reacted to his non-participation. There was a difference in how the other students started to treat Jason: they were encouraging him to speak.

During Jason's small group discussion in Phase 1, his fellow group members did not include him or attempt to involve him at all in their conversation. The one question Jason did make, when he asked who was having a heart attack, was ignored by the others.

During his small group discussion that occurred during Phase 2, however, Jason was treated differently by the members of his group. In Week 9, two texts

were being discussed in Jason's small group, *Suki's Kimono* and *I Like Myself*.

Right before students got into their groups, I had reviewed some anchor charts I

had created with students, for which we had generated ideas as to what

productive talk looks and sounds like. Groups were then supposed to complete a

placemat activity during which each member had to fill out a portion of a page

that was divided into sections, by writing down his/her thoughts about the texts. I

had given students some topics to help guide their thinking, such as writing down

things that were special about them, as our two texts were about celebrating the

unique qualities of individuals. Jason was struggling to come up with ideas to

write down on the placemat. At the beginning of the activity, one of Jason's group

members voiced his frustration with Jason, because Jason never contributed

anything to the group discussions: "But every group we have he doesn't write

something" (Dec. 16, 2011). Jason's other group member then tried to help

Jason, by asking him "What topic do you want to do first of all?" (Dec. 16, 2011).

When Jason responded that he wanted to write about what was special about

him, his peers started trying to help him come up with aspects of himself that

were unique. They asked him questions such as "What are some things you like

about yourself?", "What are some things that are unique about you?", and "What

are you good at?". They continued to prompt Jason with questions, by asking him

if he was good at hockey, if he had any pets, and if he had any siblings (Dec. 16,

2011). This demonstrated that Jason was viewed differently during this

discussion, not as a quiet student who had nothing to contribute but as another member of the group who needed assistance.

In Week 15, Jason was also treated differently from the way he had been treated by his fellow group members during Phase 1. At this point, students had been organized into new small groups, so Jason was with three different peers. I had given students a group assessment tool I had created. This assessment tool consisted of a checklist of criteria the group was expected to achieve. At the end of each discussion, group members were asked to give themselves a mark, depending on how many items on the checklist they could check off. If they were able to check off every item, their group could achieve the highest mark. One of the items on the checklist was that every group member contributed at least one idea to the discussion. The group's task for this discussion was to put together a presentation on a famous Canadian; Jason's small group was putting together a presentation on Nellie McClung. The group was trying to decide what information about Nellie McClung was important enough to share with the rest of the class and to include in their presentation. Throughout the discussion, Jason's classmates tried to get him to participate. They said "Jason do you wanna talk?" and provided him with ways he might want to participate, such as "D'you wanna paraphrase what someone says?". They asked him questions to get him to participate, such as "D'you think it's important that she can play soccer?" and "She married him in eighteen ninety-six after a five year courtship and gave up

her teaching, that's very important isn't that Jason?" (Feb. 8, 2012). They also

encouraged him by telling him "We never heard from you before" and "We all

have great ideas, we want to hear yours" (Feb. 8, 2012). The group became

frustrated with Jason because they knew that if he did not participate they would

not be able to check off one of the items on the group assessment tool: that

everyone in the group had participated. Julie's frustration was evident as she

pleaded with Jason later in the discussion to speak, "Please speak Jason, Jason

please speak, you have good ideas", and told him the group would not get the

highest mark possible on the group assessment tool if he did not speak, "We

won't get a four or an A" (Feb. 8, 2012). I then intervened, telling the group I

would give their group a check mark for encouraging Jason to speak, even if he

had not participated by voicing an idea. My attempt to give everyone the

opportunity to participate, by introducing the group assessment tool, had

backfired a little. It was not my intention for group members to feel pressured into

getting others to speak and then, as a result of this pressure, badger quieter

group members to speak. This clearly occurred in Jason's small group during

which, by the end of the discussion, his classmates were pleading with him to

speak so that they could get a good mark. On the other hand, I would also

suggest that it made group members more aware of one another and of the

importance of encouraging others to speak.

In Jason's small group discussion during Phase 4, his group members continued to encourage him to speak. By this point, I had revised the group assessment tool: the wording of one of the points about all group members participating had been changed from "all group members must share at least one idea" to "all group members must be encouraged to speak". Jason's fellow group members continued to encourage him to speak, by asking him twice if he had anything to share early on in the discussion. When Jason replied no, he was given a suggestion as to how he might participate: "you can paraphrase". Another student provided some ways in which Jason could begin his contribution: he could start with the phrase "I would like to highlight or I would like to paraphrase". Another member asked Jason if he agreed or disagreed with previously stated ideas, "Who do you agree with, do you like Amy's Julie's idea or mine?" (Feb. 29, 2012). After encouraging Jason to speak, and therefore achieving this criteria on the group assessment tool, the group did not forget about Jason. One student checked in with Jason a little later in the discussion to ask him "Would you like to paraphrase?" (Feb. 29, 2012). Therefore, even though they only had to encourage Jason once to get the highest mark on the group assessment tool, Jason's group members continued to encourage him to participate. I would conclude that my group assessment tool was successful as Jason was not ignored in his small group.

Nonetheless, Jason's oral communication skills did not demonstrate improvement throughout the 19-week data collection period. Despite interventions which were meant to target non-participants and the shyer students of my class, such as the introduction of Discussion Journals, the group assessment tool, lessons on paraphrasing, and the reorganization of small groups mid-way through the data collection process, Jason remained quiet during all discussions. Even though Jason's oral communication skills did not change, the way in which students interacted with him did. Jason's group members started making more of an effort to include him in the discussion.

Therefore, there was some improvement in the areas I had targeted for three of my focal students; however, there were also some areas in which I had hoped to see improvement and I did not. Below is a table summarizing the progression of my four focal students.

Name	Group	Target Areas	Progress During Data Collection Period
Katherine	A	• questioning skills • understanding of purposes of discussion	• continued to participate actively, develop ideas effectively most of the time, use building phrases, paraphrase, and be thoughtful in contributions to discussions • was beginning to demonstrate the ability to pose deeper-level thinking questions and questions to clarify the contributions of others • continued to take on the teacher role and manage her peers in small group discussions

Name	Group	Target Areas	Progress During Data Collection Period
Benjamin	B	• development of ideas • use of paraphrasing and building phrases • discussion etiquette	• made more consistent attempts to develop his ideas • effectively developed some of the ideas he introduced during last phase of audio recordings • did not demonstrate improvement in questioning skills • progressively used building phrases more frequently throughout data collection period • demonstrated slightly better discussion etiquette and became a little more willing to listen to and consider the ideas of others
Katelyn	C	• development of ideas and voicing her ideas clearly • use of paraphrasing and building phrases • questioning skills • attentive listening skills	• continued to participate actively • was beginning to develop some of her ideas a little more effectively by the end of the data collection period • did not paraphrase more and only a slight increase in the use of building phrases • was beginning to question a little more to challenge and clarify what others had said but was unable to generate deeper-level thinking questions
Jason	D	• more active participation in discussions	• did not participate more actively in Phases 2, 3, and 4 of data collection period • no improvement in oral communication skills

Table 12: Progress of focal students

Summary of Progress

In the preceding pages, I have outlined in some detail the individual

starting points in terms of skills and the reaction to interventions of four focal

students. Not every child in the given group responded in the same way. It was

possible to see patterns of response that were shared by the majority of children

in each group and, by a close analysis of the focal child for each group, I have

tried to make these patterns evident. However, I am not claiming that every child in the group necessarily demonstrated the same responses to every intervention. Some children were less responsive, some children continued to have greater or lesser success and, as we would expect, each child performed individually. Nonetheless, social and cognitive skills are clearly important in the development of acceptable oral communicative interaction, as I shall discuss in the final chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

Conclusions from Results of Research

When I began my research, I was interested in exploring the implications of a systematic approach on the oral communication skills of my grade 3 students. Through the use of ongoing assessment and explicit instruction in targeted areas of oral communication, I attempted to implement a systematic approach, and tracked both its feasibility and its effects. I also set out to create a community of learners in my classroom, through students' increased use of collaborative, exploratory, and accountable talk. My thesis work has led to me arrive at certain conclusions regarding instruction in the area of oral communication.

Although some aspects of creating and using an assessment tool for oral communication were advantageous both to my own professional learning and to my instructional practices, there were also problems. During the data collection period and the implementation of interventions, several issues arose. These include the unintended impact of some of my interventions, personal struggles with defining my own role during discussions, challenges in being systematic, and the impact on other subject areas of such a strong emphasis in my classroom on oral communication. Furthermore, interventions meant to target social and cognitive aspects of oral communication did not affect all students in the same way. Some students demonstrated improvement in some areas of their oral

interaction and others did not. These topics are discussed in the sub-sections below.

The Advantages of, Limitations, and Challenges in the Creation of an Assessment Tool

There were advantages to creating a tool for the assessment of oral communication. For example, designing an assessment tool resulted in a better personal understanding of the social and cognitive aspects of oral communication and allowed me to identify areas I needed to target in my instruction. It was challenging, however, to create an assessment tool that was comprehensive enough to address all aspects of oral communication but also one that a teacher could easily use.

Advantages in creating an assessment tool for oral communication. Current assessment of classroom talk is inadequate, partly, due to a failure on the part of educators to separate the social/behavioural aspects of oral communication from the cognitive aspects. My thesis work indicates that a lack of distinction between these two aspects leads to an inaccurate assessment of oral communication skills. Thompson (2006) supports this notion, suggesting that assessment of oral communication is problematic because teachers tend to focus on the behavioural aspects of oral communication as opposed to the quality of student thinking, conveyed through what they say (pp. 207-8). Similarly, Mercer, Edwards, and Maybin (1988) suggest that it is often not clear what is being

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assessed in terms of oral communication, whether it is "their competence as effective communicators, or...the extent of their understanding of curriculum content" (p. 123).

In short, this suggests that teachers might tend to focus more on *how* students speak as opposed to *what* they say when they speak. The students who participate frequently, who speak with confidence, who do not interrupt others, and who, generally, demonstrate good etiquette during discussions, therefore, tend to receive high marks for their oral communication skills. This would be applicable to my own teaching practices: in previous years of teaching, I tended to focus more on the behavioural/social aspects of oral communication and neglected the cognitive piece.

Creating and using a formal assessment tool improved my instruction in the area of oral communication as it enabled me to clarify in my own mind those aspects of oral communication that were behavioural/social and those that were cognitive. It also allowed me to identify where my students were struggling in the cognitive aspects of their oral communication skills. In previous years of teaching, the behavioural/social aspects of my students' oral communication skills were obvious: I could easily identify those students who were not listening during our discussions, who were interrupting others, etc. I could do this without an assessment tool as these aspects of oral communication were clear. I would, therefore, address these aspects of oral communication in my teaching. The

cognitive aspects of oral communication were not as easily identifiable without a formal assessment tool and, for this reason, were largely ignored in my teaching. The quality of my instruction in the area of oral communication improved as I developed a clear understanding of my students' strengths and gaps in all aspects of their oral communication skills, both social/behavioural and cognitive.

Challenges in creating a comprehensive assessment tool. I used existing tools provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education for the assessment of oral communication to help me create a tool that I felt was comprehensive and would allow for the kind of in-depth analysis of oral communication I wanted. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) provides some guidance in the assessment of oral communication skills, in the form of checklists and lists of look-fors. A list of look-fors in this area includes whether or not students are listening, taking turns, seeking clarification from their peers, challenging the thinking of others, probing ideas that are presented, and elaborating on ideas (p. 81). Self-assessment is also encouraged. A list of questions is provided to allow students to reflect on their oral communication skills. These questions include: "Do I listen to others?; show respect for the ideas of others?; agree/ disagree politely?; contribute comments?; ask questions to seek clarification?; explain my point of view?" (p. 82). Although these look-fors and questions provided me with some direction, I needed an assessment tool that would measure not only frequency of participation, whether or not students were

interrupting one another, whether or not they were asking questions, etc. but also the length of their utterances, whether or not they were using building words and phrases, the types of questions they were asking, whether or not they were attempting to develop their ideas, and how they were developing these. It was a challenge to develop a comprehensive and, at the same time, usable assessment tool.

Limitations of the assessment tool. After undergoing several revisions (described in Chapter 3), the final assessment tool still had limitations. Despite my initial goal of creating a community of learners in my classroom, in which students were co-creating knowledge together, my assessment tool focused more on individual participation as opposed to group co-construction of ideas. Thompson (2006) suggests that the ways in which students work together to co-create knowledge should be considered in any assessment of oral communication, that assessment of oral communication "should have both small group and individual focus. If cognition is socially situated, then there are bound to be problems if cognitive outcomes are *always* identified at an individual level" (p. 217, his emphasis). My assessment tool did not adequately address the progression of the class as a whole and focused more on individual development of oral communication skills. For example, I do not think my tool measured or tracked the ways in which my students worked together with ideas and built on these, developed common understandings, and co-constructed knowledge.

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Instead, it focused more on the individual's ability, as demonstrated through his/ her performance during our discussions, to paraphrase the utterances of others, use building words to indicate he/she was listening and adding to the ideas of peers, explain his/her thinking fully and clearly, and introduce questions to the class.

A second limitation was that it was not entirely suitable for teacher use. My assessment tool was successful in that it was comprehensive enough to provide a good indication of individual strengths and areas for improvement in oral communication. After using it myself, however, I concluded that it would be difficult for a teacher to use because it contained too many aspects of oral communication that one needed to consider. After attempting to use it for the diagnostic assessment of the oral communication skills of my students, I found it extremely time-consuming. The final tool (in Appendix C) consisted of three main sections, eight categories for the three main sections, and fifteen sub-categories of the eight categories. Using the tool to assess the oral interactions of my students, based on all eight different categories, became an arduous task.

Teacher-related Issues

Various issues arose for me, as a teacher, throughout my research. Interventions had unintended effects, I struggled with defining my own role in the classroom, and I discovered that the systematic approach I had initially set out to

implement was not practical. There were also drawbacks to devoting so much time to the instruction of oral communication skills.

Unintended effects of interventions. My experiences indicate that the process of intervening in an attempt to improve oral communication is likely to have unexpected and unintended consequences. These may take the form of silencing children or distorting the natural patterns of oral interaction. Certain interventions that I implemented which were meant to improve the quality of oral interaction between my students had the opposite effect. For example, from my initial audio recordings at the beginning of the data collection period, I noticed that students were frequently interrupting one another during small group discussions. Students were randomly shouting out ideas, not listening to one another, and not building on the ideas of their peers. In order to minimize this, I created a group assessment tool. This was to be used at the end of each small group discussion, to allow students to reflect on and assess their oral interaction. This group assessment tool was in the form of a checklist. Groups could get top marks if they were able to check off every item on the list. One of these items was that no one interrupted anyone during the discussion. Unfortunately, instead of improving the oral interaction during group discussions, it stifled the talk. Group members were too afraid to speak, for fear of interrupting one another. Some groups developed the strategy of determining who would speak by going around the circle. One at a time, each participant would have the chance to voice an

opinion. After they spoke, they would need to wait until their turn came around again in the circle to speak. This prevented the kind of collaborative, exploratory, and accountable talk I wanted to see. Each group member had the chance to contribute an opinion or idea but then couldn't respond to what another student had said until it was their turn again. The spontaneity of good oral interaction was lost.

Another issue that arose during small group discussions pertained to participation. In order to encourage those students whose social challenges included a reluctance to speak, I added to the checklist of the group assessment tool that every group member had to contribute at least one idea to the discussion. The more vocal group members, who wanted to get top marks, began to badger their quieter peers into saying something. This frustrated the students who wanted to do well and get good marks and further silenced the quieter students: I think they felt so pressured to speak that they shut down completely. Getting the quieter students to speak also became the focus of the discussion. Instead of discussing the topic at hand, students spent their time trying to get everyone to say something.

Lastly, one of the rules I created during whole class discussions was that everyone who wanted to speak had to be given the chance once before someone could have a second turn. This intervention was put into place to prevent the more vocal students in my class from monopolizing the discussion. The problem

with this rule was that, if a student heard an idea they wanted to disagree with, challenge, or build on, they couldn't do this until everyone else had the chance to speak. While it prevented one student from monopolizing the discussion, it also prevented students from building on the ideas of their peers.

Defining my own role in discussions: teacher as authority figure versus teacher as facilitator. Sociocultural and constructivist views of learning suggest that, as educators, we need to create communities of learners in our classrooms. In order to create these communities of learners, the teacher's traditional role changes: the teacher is no longer the sole possessor of knowledge, with all the *right* answers. Rather, everyone in the class, students as well as teachers, become resources for one another in the learning process. Eun (2010) explains that, in a "culture that encourages collaboration" (p. 408) no individual, including the teacher, takes control or is responsible for the creation of knowledge; instead, learning is achieved through a process of co-construction (p. 408). Mercer and Littleton (2007) describe the teacher's role in the classroom, not as instructor or facilitator but, rather, as conductor: "someone who can use dialogue to orchestrate and foster the development of a community of enquiry in a classroom in which individual students can take a shared, active and reflective role in building their own understanding" (p. 74).

This notion of students working together as a community of learners, in which everyone assumes a joint responsibility for the creation of knowledge,

sounds ideal in theory. In practice, however, I struggled with defining my role in the community of learners. Elbers and Streefland (2000) discuss the difficulties that arose in their study of an eighth grade classroom in which teachers were trying to implement a community of inquiry approach to the instruction of mathematics. In this classroom, in order to create a community of inquiry, teachers and students assumed the roles of co-researchers. Elbers and Streefland explain that one of the difficulties for teachers was that they had to accept erroneous statements made by their students or co-researchers: they "had to accept them as suitable for further consideration. Therefore, the teachers did not always succeed in preventing misunderstandings and confusion" (p. 46). Similarly, I did not know when to intervene in our discussions, how to intervene, and whether or not this was appropriate. When I chose to intervene, I worried that I was exerting my role as authority figure. I felt that, inevitably, any opinions I offered would be seen by my students as the *right* opinions. I became quieter, therefore, as the data collection period progressed. There were times, however, when I questioned whether or not my silence was helpful. For example, in some discussions, there were obvious misconceptions on the part of the students. One discussion in particular comes to mind. We were discussing a text called *Lily and the Paper Man* about a girl who was afraid of a homeless man. During this discussion, my students went off on a tangent and began to question whether or not the homeless man in the story was, in fact, really homeless or whether he

was just pretending to be homeless to dupe people into giving him money. Clearly, it was not the intention of the author to suggest this man was pretending to be homeless. Our class discussion, however, turned into a lengthy debate about whether or not homeless people, in general, were only pretending to be homeless. Therefore, I question how teachers orchestrate (to use Mercer's and Littleton's word) discussion without asserting their authority or conveying the message to their students that their opinions are not valued.

The feasibility of my systematic approach. My research indicates that a systematic approach to oral communication, as I envisioned it at the outset of my thesis, is not practical. Initially, I wanted to create an assessment tool and use this to carry out continuous assessment of classroom talk in order to provide timely and targeted interventions to address gaps in the development of oral communication skills. I intended to apply the same instructional practices I use in other subject areas to my instruction of oral communication. One of the biggest problems with applying those same instructional strategies is one's reliance on transcribed material in oral communication. In order to have concrete assessment pieces, transcriptions of audio recordings were necessary. The process of transcribing and then coding each transcription using the assessment tool I had created became extremely time-consuming. Admittedly, despite my commitment to this process, I found I was not able to keep pace with the transcribing and coding of the recordings in a timely manner. While vacations and other school

breaks afforded me the opportunity to catch up on transcriptions, and all discussions were ultimately transcribed, the use of the assessment tool was employed more selectively to assess some of the transcribed material but not all. A teacher working full-time with all the obligations inherent in the delivery of a full classroom curriculum could not assess oral communication skills in the systematic way I had intended.

Drawbacks to a focus on oral communication. I devoted a lot of my classroom instruction time to oral communication and this came at a cost to other subject areas. One might argue that a focus on oral communication will lead to improvement in other subject areas such as mathematics, reading, and writing. For example, Mercer and Littleton (2007) reported increases in achievement in other subject areas of students in target classes in which teachers had devoted time to implementing a program called *Thinking Together*. The *Thinking Together* program consists of a series of lessons which focus on teaching students oral communication skills (their research is discussed in Chapter 2). I can not conclusively state that my students did better in other subject areas because of my focus on oral communication, as this was not the research I conducted. When my students took the province-wide EQAO test at the end of the year, their average scores were higher for this group of students than for my students in previous years. I was obviously pleased with their performance. Not all the

grade 3 students who completed EQAO, however, were in my class. Students from other classes in which there had not been such a strong focus on the development of oral communication skills also did well on EQAO. I hesitate, therefore, to use EQAO scores as a reliable indication of an increase in student achievement due to all the time I devoted to oral communication.

The Effect of my Interventions on Students

Overall, my students were very willing to take up the tools I created to address various oral communication skills and my interventions were met with enthusiasm by students. For example, I introduced Discussion Journals mid-way through the data collection period. Even though it was not my intention for these to be used at other times, students began to ask for these and use them when they were writing in their *Reading Response Journals*. Some groups began to allot time at the beginning of their discussions to write in their Discussion Journals. Most students enjoyed using these during our whole class discussions. Some students, however, were excited about using these when they were first introduced but then grew tired of using them. I introduced Paraphrase Cards: these were a set of cards I created on which I had typed pretend utterances pertaining to texts we had read together. In pairs, one student would read the utterance on the Paraphrase Card and their partner would have to paraphrase what was read. Students often asked to use these to practise paraphrasing after their other class work was completed. Although, generally, students reacted

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positively to my interventions and were willing to try whatever was asked of them, the impact of my interventions varied from student to student. It was also notable that social interventions were taken up more easily by students than interventions meant to target cognitive skills.

Differential impact of interventions on oral communication skills. The findings of my research indicate that, due to variations in cognitive and social abilities, students are affected differently by interventions meant to target gaps in oral communication skills. Successful oral communication depends on both cognitive and social components. Students must possess the social skills to listen to, consider, and debate the ideas of others to enable them to co-construct meaning with one another. Cognitively, they must have the ability to paraphrase and build on the ideas of others, to convey their ideas in a thorough manner, and to use questioning effectively in order to clarify and challenge the ideas of their peers and provoke deeper understandings of the issues being explored. Most of the students in my class were stronger in one of these components and weaker in the other. To analyze the impact of interventions on the oral interaction of my students, I decided to categorize them according to four groupings, based on their cognitive and social abilities. I discovered that the impact of my interventions varied according to the social and cognitive strengths and weaknesses of my students. Also, in some cases, students within groupings were affected differently.

Students who were strong in both cognitive and social dimensions exhibited good oral communication skills at the beginning and throughout the 19-week data collection period. One student from this group experienced difficulty in Phase 4 developing his ideas and another student used fewer paraphrases and building phrases as the data collection period progressed. In Phase 1, these students often assumed the role of leader within their small groups and they continued to take on this role in Phases 2, 3, and 4. One of the students (Katherine) was very empowered by my interventions and, specifically, the social interventions I implemented. She began to assume the role of traditional teacher during her small group discussions, by managing, disciplining, and controlling her peers. I did not observe this behaviour in my other higher functioning students. Although they continued to take on leadership responsibilities in their groups, they did not evolve as leaders in the same way as Katherine.

Some of the students who were cognitively strong but socially weak started to use more building phrases. Most of these students did not paraphrase more, as a result of my interventions. Benjamin, my focal student for this group, started to make more attempts when sharing his ideas to provide elaboration and explain his thinking. He still, however, demonstrated some difficulty with the skill of developing his ideas. The other students in this group did not show improvement in this area. Students in this group continued to demonstrate disinterest in engaging with, considering, and debating the ideas of their peers.

The students who were cognitively weak but socially strong continued to struggle in some aspects of their oral communication skills. Although these students tried everything that was asked of them, they continued to have difficulty with aspects of oral communication such as developing ideas and questioning. Some of the students in this group did not paraphrase more during Phases 2, 3, and 4 but a couple of them did. Most of the students in this group started to use building phrases more frequently than they had in Phase 1.

The only group of students in which I did not note any change were those who were weak in both the social and cognitive aspects of oral communication. These students did not demonstrate any improvement in their oral communication skills during the data collection period. For example, they continued to be silent during our class and small group discussions. Various interventions were specifically implemented to target the issue of non-participation (through silence), such as the introduction of Discussion Journals, instruction on paraphrasing, and changing small groups mid-way through the data collection period. Despite all of these attempts, these students remained silent. It was also impossible to gauge the effectiveness of my interventions on the cognitive aspects of these students' oral communication skills. Because any assessment of oral communication must be performance-based, these students may have possessed the cognitive abilities to paraphrase, to develop their ideas, and to question and challenge the contributions of their peers. I was unable to

assess whether or not they had developed those skills, however, because these students chose not to speak during our discussions.

Questioning was one area in which most of my students struggled. Overall, the interventions meant to target this area of oral communication did not have an impact on questioning skills. I spent the greatest amount of time focusing on questioning throughout the data collection period, working on this during Weeks 4 and 5, during Week 12, and during Weeks 15 to 19. The only group of students in which I saw some change was in my students from Group A. These students were starting to question more effectively in order to clarify and challenge, wonder aloud on a deeper level about issues in the texts we were reading, and help their peers develop their ideas more fully. Although some students were posing questions to challenge and clarify the ideas of their peers, most continued to have difficulty coming up with deeper-level thinking questions. This made me reflect on what it means to teach children to question on a deeper level. In thinking back on all of the discussions I audio recorded, I believe that deeper-level questioning is essential. During a couple of discussions, my students from Group A posed some wonderful deeper-level thinking questions and the oral interaction was of a higher quality. Deeper-level questioning, however, may not be something one can teach students. Instead, maybe this comes from the natural curiosity of children and only if they are presented with texts that inspire this curiosity. As teachers, we need to select reading materials

carefully and choose rich texts that will raise thought-provoking issues and encourage genuine wonderment. Furthermore, teachers to know their students, their backgrounds, their interests, etc. so that they can choose texts of interest. I think some of the texts I chose for our discussions were good choices. I think, however, that a lack of questioning during some discussions was because I chose texts that were not compelling to students.

Differential impact of interventions meant to target cognitive versus social skills. My research indicates that interventions meant to target the social aspects of oral communication are more easily taken up by students than those meant to target cognitive skills. For example, the group assessment tool I introduced to prevent students from interrupting one another and to get students to encourage their quieter peers to get more actively involved in discussions worked very well, in that students immediately stopped interrupting one another and began trying to get their peers to speak. In fact, it worked too well: students became afraid to speak, for fear of interrupting one another, and they began to badger their silent classmates into speaking. Generally, however, students became more aware of the need to listen to one another and to not interrupt. They also became more aware of the importance of providing everyone with an opportunity to voice their opinions. On the other hand, the interventions I implemented to target the cognitive aspects of oral communication, such as

paraphrasing, developing one's ideas thoroughly, and questioning, were not as easily picked up by my students.

Limitations of the Research

There were some limitations to my research. These include my exclusive focus on discussions pertaining to texts and to the reading expectations, as outlined in the Ontario language curriculum. The discussion topics based on texts may have also had an impact on the discussion that occurred. Furthermore, my research was only conducted with grade 3 students. Lastly, in my research, I did not take into account the language backgrounds of my students. Therefore, one might argue that I did not have a comprehensive understanding of their language abilities. These limitations will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

Focus on Reading Expectations and Topics of Discussion

I made the decision to only focus on discussions pertaining to the language curriculum and, specifically, reading. This decision was made to facilitate the analysis and comparison of transcribed material. I felt that comparing oral communication would be easier if all the discussions were of a similar nature. Had I audio recorded oral interaction from discussions in a variety of subject areas, such as those pertaining to science topics or math problem solving activities, my results might have been different.

My choice of discussion topics may have also had an impact on my results and on the quality of the oral interaction in my classroom. Because all

discussions pertained to reading, I focused on addressing the following reading expectations: using reading comprehension strategies, such as questioning, before, during, and after reading; making inferences about characters presented in texts; identifying the author's messages and making connections to other texts and personal life experiences; conveying personal opinions about the ideas presented in texts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, pp. 67-8). Due to my focus on these reading expectations, topics of discussion included developing new titles for books we read and explaining why these titles would be appropriate, debating certain issues brought up in the texts we were reading, defining the notion of hero, and speculating as to the author's message. These topics were of an abstract nature and might have made it more difficult for students to engage in discussion. Discussions related to science topics or based on math problem solving activities may have been less abstract and more accessible. Some of my quieter students, for example, may have been more actively engaged in discussions based on more concrete topics of discussions.

Age of Students

A limitation of my research was also in its focus on grade 3 students. Age may have had an impact on my findings. A group of older students, for example, might have reacted differently to my interventions. As described earlier in this chapter, the children in my class were very willing to try whatever was asked of them and my interventions were met with enthusiasm. One might argue that,

generally, younger students are more willing to do what is asked of them because it is important to them to try to please their teacher. If I had conducted this research with an older group of students, I might have encountered challenges in implementing my interventions, as older students might not have been as willing to participate in what I was doing.

Language Backgrounds of Students

Another limitation of this research was that I did not consider the language backgrounds of my students. My analysis of the development of oral communication skills did not take into account the language experiences of my students outside of school. Mercer and Littleton (2007) suggest that this consideration is important. They contend that we cannot expect that every child will know how to use language effectively, if they have not been exposed to this, both inside the classroom as well as outside the classroom, at home: "Although life will provide most children with a rich and varied language experience, in some homes rational debates, logical deductions, reflective analyses, extended narratives and detailed explanations may never be heard" (p. 2). One may conclude that the variations in language experiences of different students may have had an impact on their oral communication skills. For example, students exposed to the effective use of language at home may have possessed stronger oral communication skills due to this exposure. On the other hand, some of the students who struggled in their development of oral communication skills may not

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have had models for using language effectively at home. They may have also

come from households in which English was not spoken as a first language or in

which there was not a lot of discussion. An exploration into the language

backgrounds of my students would have added an important layer to this thesis.

Two of my focal students, whom I identified as Benjamin and Jason, came

from homes in which another language was spoken as the primary language.

Both Jason and Benjamin appeared to have command of the English language

for their interactions in social situations, such as on the playground at recess

time. While Benjamin was able to use English for academic purposes, Jason

struggled in this area. Although strong in mathematics, he demonstrated difficulty

in reading and writing. For children whose first language is not the dominant

tongue, it is well acknowledged that the development of BICS (basic

interpersonal communication skills) is likely to be more rapid than the growth of

CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) (Cummins, 2008; Purdy, 2008).

Despite his years in Canada, therefore, it is possible that some of the struggles

faced by Jason related to his language background.

Privacy concerns made it necessary for me to exclude from my research

any consideration of language backgrounds. I was not able to write about the

language backgrounds of students because I was working with a small group of

only 20 students. There were concerns that revealing too much information about

students would have breached confidentiality agreements and revealed student identities.

Possibilities for Future Research

There are many possibilities for future research that can be drawn from this thesis. These include further research into viable and effective ways of assessing oral communication, how to deal with issues of silence, and the impact of a focus on oral communication on other subject areas. These will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

Assessment of Oral Communication Skills

Further research is recommended into how to apply current assessment practices and theories to oral communication. Current assessment practices, as described by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) suggest using diagnostic assessment practices to diagnose where students are at in their learning, formative assessment practices to determine gaps in their learning and to shape instruction accordingly, and summative assessment practices to evaluate what students have learned (p. 31). Future research might look at developing new assessment tools for oral communication and exploring their impact on the development of oral communication. Future research might also explore assessment of oral communication skills with a group, as opposed to individual, focus.

Non-participation and Silence

Future research is recommended to examine the issue of silence and non-participation during discussions. This research might focus on those students who choose not to speak in our classrooms and the reasons for their silence. This might build on current research in the field of oral communication which has explored student identities and how these have an impact on student achievement. For example, Black and Varley (2008) conducted research into how "low ability" versus "high ability" students understood the purposes of classroom discussions, how they positioned themselves in the class in relation to other students, and how their self-perceptions influenced participation during discussions. Reninger and Rehark (2009) explored "the role of children's identities during discussions" (p. 270). Such research might delve into how the more vocal students perceive the purposes of small group and whole class discussions versus how the quieter students understand the purposes of these.

Impact of a Focus on Oral Communication Skills on Other Subject Areas

It would be valuable to explore the impact of a focus on the instruction of oral communication on achievement in other subject areas, such as reading, writing, and mathematics. This research might build on Mercer's and Littleton's (2007) findings in their exploration of the impact of a *Thinking Together* program. They discovered that students in target classes, in which the *Thinking Together* program had been implemented "gained significantly better scores in science and

mathematics than those in control classes, thus providing evidence for the effectiveness of the intervention in improving children's study of the curriculum" (p. 95). If instruction in the area of oral communication involves teaching children the skills to use language in order to explore ideas and co-construct knowledge with others, one might research whether or not students are able to transfer these skills to individual learning tasks.

Recommendations for Current Practices in Education

The findings of my research have led me to conclude that there are things that can be done in the field of education to improve the current state of classroom talk. My recommendations include the need for teachers to develop a better understanding of oral communication and how classroom talk can be used to promote learning, school boards to provide more professional development in this area, and teacher education programs to provide teacher candidates with an understanding of how to address oral communication in their classrooms.

Recommendations for Teachers

Writing from personal experience, I believe that most teachers do not have a clear understanding of the value of classroom talk and how it can be used to promote learning. It would be useful for teachers to collaborate with one another in order to explore oral communication. Teachers need to talk about talk in order to develop a better understanding of the importance of oral communication in the learning process. Reznitskaya (2012) suggests that, for classroom talk to change,

teachers need to explore and take a critical look at the kind of talk that is occurring in their classrooms (p. 455). At my school, I have participated in this form of exploration with colleagues in the subject areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. Together, we have reflected on our teaching, shared instructional strategies, discussed pedagogy, developed assessment tools, and co-created lessons. It would be valuable for teachers to have the opportunity to engage in this type of collaboration in the area of oral communication.

I would also suggest that teachers need to devote time to teaching oral communication skills. The literature I referred to in Chapter 2 of this thesis (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Gillies and Khan, 2008) suggests that students do not naturally have the ability to use talk effectively to co-construct knowledge, without some instruction. Despite my belief that students do need to be taught oral communication skills, I do not think that the instruction I provided in this area was entirely effective. Based on the results of my research, I would not conclude that my interventions had a strong impact on the oral communication skills of students. It would be valuable for teachers to discuss and develop instructional practices that might target skills such as paraphrasing, developing ideas, and questioning to enable students to engage in meaningful and productive discussions.

It would also be beneficial for teachers to track the oral communication skills of their students in a more formal manner. The systematic approach I

proposed at the outset of this thesis was not realistic. As discussed earlier, I found it very challenging to keep up with transcribing our classroom talk and using this to assess the oral communication skills of my students. I believe that teachers can still be systematic in how they address the curriculum expectations of oral communication. I contend this is possible, even without audio recording and transcribing oral interaction. The assessment tool I created might provide guidance to teachers in terms of multiple aspects of oral communication to assess. Teachers might only focus on one or two students per discussion. It would be viable to take notes and/or assess the oral communication skills of a couple of students at a time, without having to audio record or transcribe. This would allow teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their students and provide targeted interventions.

Teachers also need to watch out for students like Jason: those who have social challenges that result in a reluctance to speak. I was unable to get Jason to speak up during our discussions. Perhaps more talk among teachers is needed, in which teachers explore strategies to help the Jasons of our classrooms and break through their silence.

Teachers might also embed daily *discussion times* into their timetables. Although teachers integrate some talk into every subject area, I do not believe extended discussion times, in which students have long periods of time to talk in order to explore issues, are happening. I think most teachers, including myself,

have difficulty finding time for this because we feel there is too much curriculum to cover. It is a hopeful sign, however, that teachers are now being encouraged to focus less on specific expectations of the curriculum and more on overall big ideas in subject areas. A focus on fewer big ideas, as opposed to a larger number of smaller expectations in each subject area, might reduce the pressure felt by teachers and allow for more discussion time.

Recommendations for School Boards and Principals

School boards need to provide more professional development in the area of oral communication. It has been my experience that not as much professional development is offered in this area as in other areas of the curriculum. It would be beneficial for professional development to focus on how to assess oral communication, how different forms of talk, such as collaborative, exploratory, and accountable talk, can promote learning, and how to foster these forms of talk in the classroom. School boards might also distribute materials to schools to help teachers improve instruction of oral communication. One resource that is available in my home province of Ontario, *A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4 to 6, Volume Four, Oral Language* (2008), provides quite a good look at classroom talk. Unfortunately, I do not think teachers are using this resource. Local area school boards might promote resources that focus on oral communication by asking principals to ensure that all teachers have copies of

these and by providing some professional development in how to use and apply the ideas in these resources to teaching practices.

Furthermore, school boards need to acknowledge the importance of oral communication by including this in *board improvement plans*. Board improvement plans are developed by our board each year. They identify board-wide goals in different areas of learning, including literacy. Principals are required to create and submit *school improvement plans* as well, in which they identify school-wide goals. School improvement plans need to align with board improvement plans. Therefore, an effective way of encouraging more professional learning pertaining to oral communication would be to include this as a goal in board improvement plans.

At the school level, principals might also use *Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways* as a means of promoting professional development in the subject area of oral communication. In our family of schools, we are required to complete these each year. A Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway begins with the principal and teachers determining an area of need at their schools and identifying curriculum expectations for this area. Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway sessions are then organized. During these sessions, teachers share instructional strategies, create assessment tools together, and co-plan lessons. Although not all boards, and not even all families of schools within our board, do Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways, most boards encourage establishing forms of

teacher-directed professional development, during which teachers meet to explore topics of interest.

Principals also need to convey the message to their teachers that quiet classrooms are not necessarily the classrooms in which the most learning is happening. I think many teachers, including myself, worry about what their principals will think if they walk into a noisy classroom. Although I believe this attitude is starting to change, I think there is still the perception that a quiet classroom is a better classroom. Principals need to tell their teachers that they want to hear talk and noise in classrooms.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs

The work of Gillies and Khan (2008) suggests that when teachers are provided with professional development in the area of oral communication, the quality of classroom talk improves. It would be valuable, therefore, for teacher education programs to provide their teacher candidates with an understanding of oral communication and the ways in which talk can promote learning. It might be of value for teacher education to include courses on oral communication. These courses might address the purposes of classroom talk, the forms of talk that do promote learning, such as collaborative, exploratory, and accountable talk, the social and cognitive aspects of oral communication, how to assess oral communication skills, and how to target different aspects of oral communication through instruction.

It would also be beneficial for teacher candidates to be required to do an assignment in which they had to audio record and analyze oral interaction. This assignment might be done during one of their placements. I completed an assignment like this for a graduate course and this assignment led me to re-evaluate the oral communication in my own classroom and to explore the development of oral communication skills for this thesis. It is not an exaggeration to say that 20 minutes of audio recorded material from my grade 2/3 class led to a change, not only in how I addressed oral communication in my classroom but also in how I viewed my role as a teacher.

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Appendix A: Parental Consent Form

September, 2011.

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As you know, I am your child's classroom teacher. I am currently working on a graduate degree at York University. As part of my degree requirements, I am working on a thesis. For my thesis, I will be studying oral language use in the classroom. I am interested in exploring how talk in the classroom can be used as a resource to enable children to develop deeper level thinking skills. I am also interested in looking at how oral language can be used to create rich learning environments and communities of learners in which students are able to construct knowledge together. Such information will be useful to educators in developing strategies to better address the oral communication expectations, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*. The name of my study is 'A Study of Oral Language Use in a Grade Three Classroom: Implications of a Systematic Approach'.

To conduct my research, I would like to audio record the oral interaction that occurs during regular classroom activities. I would like to record the oral interaction in my classroom on a weekly basis over a five month period, from the beginning of October 2011 to the beginning of March 2012. I will be transcribing these audio recordings and using this data to explore the talk in my classroom. Audio recordings will be kept while I work on my thesis paper and then portions of transcribed material will be published in my final thesis paper. All audio recordings and other data that is collected will be destroyed once my thesis has been completed and successfully defended.

The information that I gather will be kept entirely confidential and all names will be changed in any transcripts or discussions. The children will not be asked to do anything other than their normal schoolwork. There are no conceivable risks to the children who participate, but their participation is entirely voluntary and they may withdraw at any time. Similarly, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your child's participation at any time. Should you choose to withdraw your child's participation, all data gathered as a consequence of their participation shall be destroyed. If I do not receive consent from all the parents in my class, my thesis topic will be revised and will not include analyses of whole class discussions. Instead, I will focus the discussion in my thesis paper on the oral interactions that occur in the smaller groups of children whose parents have agreed to their participation.

Although I will be serving as classroom teacher and researcher in this study, I want to assure you that there is no pressure for your child to be involved in this study. There will be no penalties and your child's learning, regular class

interactions, or assessments will in no way be impacted if you should choose to not have your child participate in this study. Also, your relationship or your child's relationship with York University or with me will in no way be influenced, now or in the future, by your decision to not have your child participate in this study.

The *External Research Review Committee* of the TDSB has granted approval for this study. The school principal has also given permission for this study to be conducted in your child's classroom. The research has also been reviewed and approved by the *Human Participants Review Sub-Committee*, York University's *Ethics Review Board* and conforms to the standards of the *Tri-Council Research Ethics Guidelines*.

If you have any concerns about this you can contact my thesis supervisor, Professor Jill Bell, Faculty of Education, York University, Ross Bldg., 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3, telephone (416) 736-2100 or the Graduate Programme in Education at York University, telephone (416) 736-5018. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone (416) 736-5914 or email ore@yorku.ca.

I appreciate your consideration of this request. Please feel free to contact me at school at (416) 396-6615 should you have any further questions. Please indicate on the attached PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM whether you permit your son/daughter to take part in this study. Your cooperation will be very much appreciated.

Yours truly,

Lisa Schwartz   Date:_____
(Teacher and Principal Investigator of this study)

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter outlining the research study that Lisa Schwartz is conducting in her classroom as part of her thesis work for York University. I understand that this includes audio recordings of the children and that transcribed portions of these audio recordings will be included in Lisa Schwartz's final thesis paper. I understand and am fully aware of the nature and extent of my child's participation in this project as stated in the attached letter.

I _____ consent to my child's participation in
        (fill in your name)

_____ conducted by _____.
  (insert study name here)   (insert investigator name here)

I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Parent's / Guardian's Signature: _____ Date: _____

No, I do not agree to allow my child _____ to participate.
                           (child's name)

Parent's / Guardian's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Minor Assent Script

Minor Assent Script

As you know, I'm your classroom teacher but I'm also a student at a university called York University. Right now, I'm trying to learn more about how the talk that goes on in our classroom helps students like you to learn and to think. I'm also learning how our classroom talk helps us to learn things together and helps us to create something called 'a community of learners' in our classroom. I would like to ask you to help me by being in a study so that I can learn about all these things. I'd like to explain to you what you'll be doing if you are in my study.

You won't need to do anything different from what you normally do. When we have class discussions, kind of like the discussion we're having now, or when you are working in small groups with each other, I'd like to record what you say to each other. I would like to record the things you say to each twice a week for five months, from now until the beginning of March. I will be listening to what I've recorded, to what you say to each other and I will be writing down what you've said. Then I'll be looking at what everyone in the class has said to see how you talk to each other, how you communicate with one another, and how you learn from each other. By being in this study, you will help me to understand how children are able to learn through talking to each other.

When I talk about this study with other people or write about this study, I will not use your names. I will change your names so nobody will know what you've said.

I will be sending home a permission form for your parents to sign to allow you to be in this study. They don't have to give their permission if they don't want you to be in this study. Also, if you don't want to do this, you don't have to. I will not be upset at all and no one else will be upset if you don't want to do this. If you decide not to participate or your parents don't want you to participate, it won't change your mark or your grades on the report card. Also, if you and your parents agree for you to be in this study and then you change your minds, that is fine as well.

Does anyone have any questions about this?

If you have any questions after I start doing this study, you can also ask me at any time.

Appendix C: Assessment Tool

STUDENT			Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Student 7	Student 8	Student 9	Student 10
SPEECH PATTERNS	VOCABULARY USAGE	Uses I agree, I disagree, I want to add that... in utterance										
		Uses a specific word or phrase from a previous contribution										
	LENGTH OF UTTERANCE	Utterance is equal to 1 to 2 full lines of speech										
		Utterance is equal to 3 or 4 lines of speech										
		Utterance is equal to more than 4 full lines of speech										
	SENTENCE COMPLEXITY	Use of complex sentence structure in utterance										
EVIDENCE OF COGNITION	DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS	Attempts to develop ideas but doesn't articulate thoughts clearly or develop ideas thoroughly										
		Develops ideas in a thorough manner by explaining thinking clearly and by making connections to prior knowledge, to personal experience, to other texts, and by providing evidence to support thinking										
	EVIDENCE OF CHALLENGING AND QUESTIONING	Provides small challenges or asks questions of fact about minor issues										
		Challenges an idea or asks a question to challenge an idea										
		Challenges oneself by asking or wondering about something related to topic of discussion in order to revise thinking or to further discussion by getting others to wonder										
	QUALITY OF CONTRIBUTION AND EVIDENCE OF ACTIVE LISTENING	Paraphrases a previous contribution and builds on this a little (provides some elaboration)										
		Contributes a new idea to the discussion										
	EVIDENCE OF TENTATIVENESS	Student uses ums, ahs, or repeats words										
		Student pauses / is hesitant										
BEHAVIOURAL / SOCIAL PATTERNS	NOTES											
OTHER	NOTES											