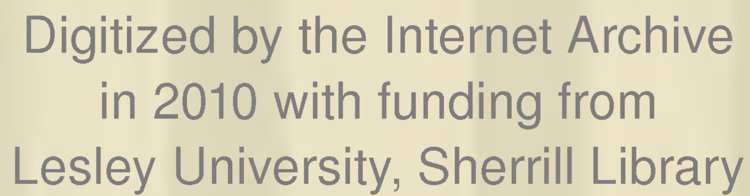
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TALK AMONG THE DRAGONFLIES AND DALMATIONS: AN INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN A PRE-KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

A DISSERTATION

Submitted by

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Abstract

A year-long ethnographic study of young children's language was conducted in a pre-kindergarten classroom. The investigation focused on the teachers' direct instruction and the children's emerging communicative competence in the rules and structure of group conversation. The class "Morning Meeting" was recorded once or twice a week for the entire school year; a subset of these recordings formed the data set for analysis. Of particular interest were communication behaviors that emphasized the growth of a sense of membership and community within the group as well as evidence that the children had learned conventions for turn-taking, topic maintenance, and solidarity. Results indicated that the children's communicative competence improved, and that they learned non-verbal signals as well as spoken conventions for group conversation.

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Children's voices are the soundtrack of classroom life. Laughter, exclamations, conversations, and songs create auditory texture and energy throughout a school building. For a year, it was my privilege to be a member of the pre-kindergarten community that is described in the following pages. The children and their teachers welcomed me each morning and allowed me to record their daily routines. I am grateful for their honesty, authenticity, and expressiveness, and to the parents for giving me permission to include all the children in my study. Without the willing and supportive participation of these families, this research would not have been possible.

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The Morning Meeting

*On a cloudy morning in late May, ten of Mrs. Young's eleven pre-kindergarteners are gathered around the classroom rug for their morning meeting (*Throughout this document, the names of the teachers and students have been changed to protect their privacy). It is time for the students to hear the morning message and review the schedule for the day. "Who can do the first line in our greeting?" asks Mrs. Young. "This is one we haven't done in awhile. You've seen it before. The first line in our greeting. Hannah?"*

Hannah reads the first line of the message on the white board: "Konichiwa, Butterflies."

Mrs. Young repeats the greeting: "Konichiwa, Butterflies. I haven't drawn the picture in so long, so I decided that I would draw the picture today instead of writing," she says.

Nestor pipes up with a question. "Is that Chinese?" he asks.

Mrs. Young responds, "Japanese. You were really close, though, Nestor."

"You know what?" asks Nial. "I went to a Japanese restaurant last night."

" Well, guess what?" says Nicholas. I know Jap—I kind of speak Japanese."

Mrs. Young picks up on this last comment. "What words do you know?" she asks Nicholas. "Or, what are some of the words you know?"

"Actually, it's really Spanish," Nicholas says.

"Oh, it's Spanish," says Mrs. Young, with a smile.

" Do you know what this means?" Nicholas continues. "Hola ninos."

" Hola ninos," repeats Mrs. Young. "I do, but what about..."she indicates the other children in the group.

"It means 'hello kids,'" says Nicholas.

"Or, 'hello, children,'" says Mrs. Young.

"I know how to count in Irina's language," says Caroline.

"Spanish," says Irina, while Caroline counts, "Uno, dos—"

"Well, it's not Irina's language," clarifies Mrs. Young, "because what other language does Irina speak?"

"English," says Irina.

"English," repeats Mrs. Young. "So it's one of the languages that Irina knows how to speak, right? But the language is Spanish."

Exchanges like the one above occur regularly in this pre-kindergarten classroom. Although a conversation about languages was not part of Mrs. Young's plan for reading the morning message, she allowed it to occupy several minutes of the morning's agenda that day. As an experienced teacher, Mrs. Young knows that at any moment in her classroom, one of her five-year-old students may speak up with a comment, question, or observation that bears a direct, indirect, or completely irrelevant connection to the business at hand.

To a casual observer, this conversation may not seem significant, but embedded in the discussion are foundational elements of social and linguistic competence that will

serve these children throughout their lives. The ability to make connections among ideas in a topic stream, the knowledge of what information is shared among members of the group, the awareness of how and when to suggest or expand on a topic, and to recognize one's own role, as well as the roles of others, in a group conversation—these conversational behaviors are practiced and reinforced in most social interactions.

I recorded the conversation about Irina's language in the late spring as part of a short-term study of children's discourse. In my analysis of that small data set (six recordings), I was struck by the relative sophistication that the children displayed in using language to establish connections with one another, to take turns, and to contribute to the ongoing discussion in the classroom. I also noted numerous instances when the teachers provided explicit instruction or guidance in the conventions and 'rules' of conversation. These observations led to further questions about the ways in which children learn social language skills in a classroom setting: How might a child's competence in group conversation contribute to the development of community? In what ways might direct instruction in conversational rules promote the children's emerging interactional skills?

Questions about emerging social and linguistic competence could not be considered from the recordings of children's talk I had collected in May and June; the conversational skills demonstrated in those morning meetings were the product of eight months of shared language experiences among the children and their teachers, and it would be impossible to determine which skills and behaviors had been taught and learned during the year. To begin to answer my questions, I wanted to observe a group of children throughout the process of learning and practicing ways of talking together. In order to learn more about the ways in which teachers guide children in the use of

language to form a community, I conducted a more comprehensive study during the next school year, beginning on the first day of school and tracking the children's progress throughout the year. The results of my research are presented in the following pages.

I: Developmental and Theoretical Context for This Research

This study is grounded in a set of assumptions about the social value of communication in the classroom. Many of these assumptions are based on Western cultural values of conversation and classroom behavior that will be examined in later sections of this document. Before placing this study in the context of culture and classroom, however, it is important to establish a developmental framework for understanding these children.

The participant group in this study is the pre-kindergarten class in a private elementary school in suburban Boston. The class consists of 22 children between four and five years of age, eleven boys and eleven girls. Ten of these children are younger siblings of students at the school; the other 12 represent new families joining the school community, although two of these children are the offspring of alumni. They are the youngest students in a school that culminates at 8th grade.

The children represent a variety of cultural, social, racial, and family backgrounds. Specific demographic data are presented in Chapter II, but one area of sociolinguistic diversity that was particularly interesting to me about this group was the range of linguistic experiences and conversational styles to which the children had been exposed before entering the class. Most of the children had attended preschool programs or day care centers. A few had been in the sole care of parents or nannies. Some come from homes where more than one language is spoken, while others speak English exclusively. Some children had begun to read. Others did not yet recognize all the letters in the alphabet. These differences are known and expected by the teachers each year as they welcome a new class. The teachers are aware that coming to school represents a

significant milestone for the children and for their parents. Regardless of the child care environment they have experienced up until now, the children's arrival in the pre-kindergarten classroom means that they are now going to "real" school.

Shirley Brice Heath, in her influential work *Ways With Words* (1983/1996), observed the linguistic transition that young children experience when they leave the familiar and known culture of their home environments and come to school. Heath noted, "Once beyond the preschool years, the children move into school, and descriptions of their language uses there must similarly focus on boundaries, limits, and features of communicative situations, and the significance of choices among language uses" (p. 7). Heath's work focused on sociolinguistic variations between poor and working class white and black families in the Carolina Piedmont region, and the impact that these differences had on the children's experiences when they came to school. Heath approached her investigation as a cultural study, focusing on the ways in which the teachers' linguistic backgrounds impacted their expectations and interactions with the children. My research expands on the "communicative situations" Heath examined, as well as the related linguistic behaviors and choices made within those situations. Rather than focusing on the ways in which the children's backgrounds differed, however, I chose to investigate the teachers' impact on the children's emerging conversational competence as a curricular element: How is it that children learn to navigate the often unspoken rules of group conversations? In what ways do the teachers identify, describe, and teach these skills?

The children's developmental stage is a relevant and dynamic factor in this analysis; as teachers interact with their students, they must be aware of the potentials and

limitations of the children's capabilities in social awareness, linguistic skills, and content knowledge. Identifying the elements of conversation that are teachable to this group of students, and determining methods and sequences for teaching these skills is a focus of this research.

The pre-kindergarten teachers in my research setting, Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis, have very clear goals for their students' social and behavioral practices, as well as learning in content and academic areas. Their goals reflect a desire for children to speak with confidence, to listen to each other, to respond and validate one another's contributions, to allow others to speak without interruption, to share information about themselves, and to demonstrate curiosity and interest in one another. In contrast to what may be the prevailing view of the power structure in schools, in which the teacher is the dominant voice in the classroom, these teachers place a high value on an egalitarian and democratic approach. Children's voices and ideas are encouraged, and the events of the day are structured around social connections and group conversations.

In addition to a comprehensive set of content goals, the curriculum for this class includes specific objectives for communication and group interaction, and incorporates direct instruction in behaviors such as non-verbal signals, turn-taking, and group participation. For some children, the expectation that they will speak for themselves, that they will look people in the eye, and that they can and should initiate conversation may be new concepts and may pose a cultural or stylistic difference from their home environments. Although the faculty recognize and respect these differences, their expectations for classroom behavior are consistent. While recognizing the possibility that classroom expectations for conversational behavior might differ from the children's home

experiences, the teachers are also aware that the parents have chosen this school for their children, and through this choice, have demonstrated their willingness for their children to participate in a particular model of classroom interaction.

The teachers' beliefs are consistent with the school's philosophy; namely, that conversational and communicative skills are important components in children's learning and in their becoming independent thinkers as well as leaders. There is a strong emphasis throughout the school on self-expression, public speaking, and full participation in class conversations. Kim (2002) characterized these values as particularly American, observing that "verbal communication has been considered extremely important in achieving educational goals…In U.S. classrooms, the individual is expected to be an active participant in class discussion, and speech is essential" (p. 54). Active participation, through both speaking and listening, are important goals in this classroom. The aim is for the children to identify themselves as members of a group, and to recognize that such membership requires participation.

The teachers in my research site recognize and respect the differences in communication styles and cultural backgrounds that the children bring to school. They strive to find a balanced approach in their teaching, which protects children's identities while also encouraging the students to be fully engaged in the class. Often these goals overlap, as the brief morning meeting conversation about Irina's language demonstrates. Mrs. Young provided valuable content knowledge about the names of several modern languages, but she also encouraged the children to share information about themselves and one another in a safe and encouraging conversational context. The classroom meeting, in addition to providing an academic start to the day, also presents daily

opportunities for the children's sense of membership in the group to emerge and develop. Mrs. Young commented,

> It's important to know that a certain child may be uncomfortable looking someone in the eye, giving a greeting, and using a friendly tone. That's a lot. So maybe it's giving a high-five. Maybe it's just waving. Maybe it's saying hello and not doing the shake.

In this classroom, the first component that the teachers emphasized in building a sense of belonging was for everyone to know the names of all the children in the group. Mrs. Ellis said, "If they know who they're sitting next to, then they'll feel more comfortable… part of the community building is getting to know each child individually, so I know how to use that to keep them functioning as a member of the group."

Mrs. Young agreed, noting, "that's the priority…that they feel like they're in a safe environment, that this is circle time for *them*, and that it's for *them*, and about *them*, and they can participate without fear of rejection, or without taking a risk." At the beginning of the school year, the teachers worked closely with the children to make sure that they knew one another's names. They organized games and activities that gave the children opportunities to learn about one another, while at the same time increasing their comfort in their new environment. On the second day of school, Emmett did not want to join the meeting after his mother had said goodbye and left the classroom. "I don't like school because we don't get to see our mom and dad. You only play with them for a little bit," he complained. Mrs. Young responded sympathetically, but also reminded Emmett that he had enjoyed himself at school the day before. In the course of their brief

discussion, Mrs. Young took the opportunity to build community connections by helping Emmett remember the name of one of his soon-to-be friends:

(For an explanation of the transcription conventions used in this paper, see the chart on page 74 and in the Appendix).

What's 'Him's' Name?

September 9

Mrs. Young: But then after school/ What happened yesterday? Remember, you were leaving and you didn't want to leave school. (laughs) Do you remember that? Yesterday when we were putting you in your car? You liked school so much you didn't want to leave. So sometimes it will be hard.]it's fun to be with your mom and dad.

Emmett: [That's because I like Stephen.

Mrs. Young: Yeah, Stephen is fun, isn't he?

Emmett: (pointing) And him, too.

Mrs. Young: What's him/ do you know 'him's' name?

Emmett: Um, I don't//

Mrs. Young: /T/ /T/

Voice: Trip!

Emmett: I know his name because his name is Trip and my mom knows his name because/ because my mom um met his um his mom.

Mrs. Young: So they met before?

Emmett: Uh huh. Um, they were having coffee.

Mrs. Young: Mmm. So it's nice for them to get to know each other. OK, Emmett, thank you for sharing.

In addition to emphasizing the children's names, another daily exercise that the teachers used to build community was the attendance procedure. Each group's meeting area featured a large pocket chart, bordered on its left margin by photographs of the children, and along the top with cards labeling the days of the week. Each day, the students were expected to slip a colored card into the pocket next to their picture; the purpose of this visual display was to show at a glance who was present on a particular day. After the first two weeks of school, the children were quite familiar with this procedure, although several still needed reminders to put their cards into the chart before the meeting began. During the meeting, the teachers referred to the chart for basic curricular information such as practicing the names of the days of the week, identifying letters and repeated patterns (the "d-a-y" portion of each day name), counting, and community building. One morning in the third week of school, two children were missing from Mrs. Ellis' group at the beginning of meeting:

Where's Russell?

September 21

Mrs. Ellis: Now, I have a question for you. Are all our friends here today?

Voices: No. no.

Mrs. Ellis: Lo^ok around the circle. Look at the attendance// Let's see. Are all our friends here today? Who has an/ If you have an idea what that[

Olivia: [Neal isnt' here.

Mrs. Ellis: You can raise your hand.

Michael: Where's Russell?

Mrs. Ellis: Ellie, what do you notice? Are all our friends here today?

Ellie: No, because Neal only has two, and you're supposed to have three if you're here.

Mrs. Ellis: OK. Three slips of paper. OK, and you noticed Neal only has two. Yes, Neal has/ a dentist appointment. And he will be in in a little while. He will be in while we're outside. Or maybe he'll be in while we're coming in to snack. You had a dentist appointment yesterday, didn't you, Wesley?

Wesley: Yeah.

Mrs. Ellis: You left a little bit early/ to go to that. OK. There is someone whose slip of paper is up there, but he's not at our meeting. Do you know who that person might be? If you have an idea, raise your hand.//Michael?

Michael: Where's Russell?

Mrs. Ellis: Where's Russell? That's a great question. Russell is not feeling very well, so he is down at the nurse's office, trying to figure out if it would be OK to be here with us, or whether it would be better to go home. So he's in a good place, but hopefully he'll decide that he's OK and can join us. All right, so, we don't have as many friends as we have had before.

Mrs. Ellis' remarks on this morning served multiple purposes in developing a sense of community among her students—of knowing one another, feeling safe together, and learning with and about one another. This was the first day that anyone had been missing from the meeting, and Mrs. Ellis was able to explain to the children what would happen if someone arrived to school late (Neal would come while they were outside, and would join in whatever activity the children were doing at that time), as well as to discuss

the importance of the nurse's office. This was a place that the children had visited as part of a tour, but none of the children had yet paid an official visit to Mrs. Nelson, the school nurse. Russell's visit there, which Mrs. Ellis described as an opportunity for him and Mrs. Nelson to decide if Russell were well enough to stay at school, presented the nurse's office as a safe, good spot to go.

This attendance discussion includes an example of the teacher providing direct instruction in group conversation, which is one of the focus points of my investigation. After Mrs. Ellis asked the group to notice who was not present, both Olivia and Michael called out without raising their hands. In response to Olivia's statement ("Neal isn't here"), Mrs. Ellis turned to her and said, "You can raise your hand." She then addressed Ellie, who had raised her hand, and asked the same question. Ellie gave a proper response about Neal. Mrs. Ellis expanded on Ellie's answer, discussed doctor and dentist visits with Wesley, then repeated her question about who was missing. This time, she reminded the children to raise their hands. On his second attempt to participate, Michael did raise his hand, and Mrs. Ellis called on him right away. This deliberate and specific approach to teaching group conversation was a consistent feature of the morning meetings in the classroom throughout the year. Similar lessons in turn-taking, shared knowledge, and placing value on one another's presence are analyzed further in Chapter III.

Another element that Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young used in building community through language was the daily greeting. A formal greeting, in the form of a game, a song, or an activity, was incorporated into each day's morning meeting. Explicit direct instruction in voice, body language, and tone were incorporated into the lessons about greetings. Occasionally, the greeting would be tied into a curricular goal, such as

recognizing letters or numbers, building patterns, matching geometric shapes, or naming colors. Mrs. Young's class had learned and practiced many forms of greeting by January. During the morning meeting one day late in the month, she brought a color matching activity as a greeting game. Before the children came into the center of the circle to greet each other in pairs, she reviewed the greeting "rules" with them:

In Any Language

January 30

Mrs. Young: When you come into the middle to greet your partner, what do you need to do with your eyes?

Trip: Look.

Mrs. Young: Look where?

Trip: At them.

Mrs. Young: At your partner. What kind of voice do you need to use to greet them?

Trip: Say hello.

Mrs. Young: Yes, you could say hello. What else could you say?

Amanda: Bonjour.

Mrs. Young: What else could you say?

Diana: Hola.

Mrs. Young: Hola. Nicky.

Nicky: Jambo.

Mrs. Young: Jambo. Amanda?

Amanda: Good morning.

Mrs. Young: Good morning. That's right. These are all great ideas. Does your partner need to say the same thing back to you? No, they can choose their own way to greet. I'll let you know who's going to greet first so that you don't talk at the same time. Can you say yours one more time, Anna?

Anna: Namaste (she bows while saying the word).

Mrs. Young: Say just the word for us, Anna.

Anna: What?

Mrs. Young: Just the word that you were saying, without doing the bowing. What were you saying?

Anna: Namaste.

Mrs. Young: Namaste. And what language is that?

Anna: Indian.

Mrs. Young: Indian. And what do you think it means?

Anna: My mom told me it means hello and good bye.

Mrs. Young: So that's similar to what Ciao is in Italian, right, because that means hello and goodbye as well.

Anna: It means hello, good bye, love.

Mrs. Young: OK. So that's another way you could greet, Namaste. Be sure you're using a medium, clear voice when you greet. And I'll let you know who's going to greet first.

The multi-lingual element of this discussion is notable, but equally important is Mrs. Young's focus on the non-verbal elements of a proper greeting in this classroom: looking someone in the eye, using a clear tone of voice, and the individual's choice and

responsibility of selecting the word or message to deliver to one's partner. By this point in the school year, Mrs. Young did not need to rely on hand-raising as a group management strategy; the children were accustomed to a discussion such as this, where each child would have a turn to speak, and they waited for Mrs. Young to turn her eye gaze to them as an indication that it was their turn to speak. Mrs. Young's specific instructions and detailed description are focused on a wide range of social and linguistic behaviors that contribute to the children's emerging competence in verbal and non-verbal communication. The deliberate way in which this behavior is taught, and the gradual emergence of mastery by the children, is a focus of this research.

Social and Linguistic Development

This research project is grounded in, and expands upon, work in two broad fields of study, child development and sociolinguistics. Where previous studies have focused primarily on children's emerging language skills from a linguistic or developmental point of view (Bruner, 1983, 1990, Wells, 1986, Ninio and Snow, 1996, Cazden, 1972, 2001), as a predictor of literacy skills (Michaels and Cazden, 1986, Dickinson and Snow, 1987, Dickinson, 1991), or from a cultural perspective (Heath, 1983, Kim, 2002), this investigation seeks to examine classroom conversation as a pedagogical phenomenon.

A study of young children's conversations must take into account their emerging abilities in social behavior and expressive language. In my investigation of young children's behavior, it was important to present a profile of the subject group from a developmental perspective. Secondly, because my study focused on classroom behavior, I reviewed previous studies of the culture and structure of classroom talk, which served as important background material. Finally, because it is an investigation of sociolinguistic

behavior, this study refers to adult discourse analysis and employs many terms that are used and defined differently by linguists, educators, and ethnographers; my examination and definitions of terminology are derived from a wide variety of research literature.

The connection between children's social cognition and their competence in discourse is of great significance to my research. Beginning in infancy, children construct mental schemas for understanding themselves and others as individual beings. As they become more able to interact with the objects and people who inhabit their environments, these schemes become more sophisticated. Children learn that they can express their own thoughts and ideas to others, that others have their own thoughts and ideas, and that people's thoughts and ideas can be expressed through gestures, actions, and spoken words. This emerging sense of self and other is a central concept in social development.

Social Cognition: Self and Other. As children learn to navigate their way within larger social contexts, schemas for interaction evolve. In a classroom setting, children discover that they must accommodate the desires of others through turn taking, rule-bound games and structured activities, and negotiations with classmates and teachers. The study of children's emerging sense of self is central to the field of developmental psychology; a particularly rich area of investigation has focused on when and how children come to a knowledge of self and other. Piaget (1969, 2000) observed young children's perceptual behavior, and noted that in the first years of life, they gained the cognitive capacity to generate and maintain a mental scheme for absent objects, and to call these objects into their consciousness. The same process, Piaget argued, occurred as children developed an increasingly sophisticated conception of other people. The ability to understand oneself as a separate being in the world, and to create mental constructions

of other individuals and objects, is a critical step in a child's ability to communicate with other people.

Inherent in Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis' knowledge about their students is that these children are fully aware of themselves as individuals, with their own needs, desires, and knowledge. Part of the teachers' job is to help the children remember that their classmates also have needs and desires, and that a successful community depends on everyone's ability to work together.

A related behavior in children's emerging sense of self and other is *shared attention,* a phenomenon that begins to develop in very early childhood. Among the earliest indications of shared attention are two non-verbal behaviors, shared gaze and the pointing gesture. Bruner (1983), in his discussion of children's language development, described babies' pointing as a pre-linguistic form of requesting action (p. 93). Once children learn to talk, and can indicate a distant object through words instead of gestures, shared attention continues to be a crucial element in conversation, as group participants must attend to the same idea or visual stimulus. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized pointing as both a communicative and social gesture, arguing that "the ability or inability to direct one's attention is an essential determinant of the success or failure of any practical operation…with the help of the indicative function of words, the child begins to master his attention, creating new structural centers in the perceived situation" (p. 35). The pointing gesture's evolution into a social and communicative function was representative of the essential nature of learning as a social process.

In the pre-kindergarten classroom, shared attention is a requirement for a group meeting. There is an expectation that all the children in a group will listen to and look at

the person who is speaking, or that they will focus on an object or event that is brought to their collective attention. In their communication with the children, the teachers employed a variety of cues to direct children's attention; pointing, eye gaze, body position, clapping patterns, songs, and non-verbal signals were all taught and used regularly.

French and Song (1998) conducted extensive observations in Korean kindergartens, with a focus on the role of the teacher in developing children's readiness skills for school. In their discussion of attentiveness, the researchers described an "attention management song," which they presented as "a non-punitive means for the teacher to recall [the children's] attention. It provides children both a reminder that attention is valued and a routine for refocusing their attention" (p. 422). Similarly, Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis relied on readiness songs and chants to remind the children of proper listening and attention-oriented behaviors.

Shared attention is a key element in the group talk in my research setting. The teachers often brought items into the morning meeting for children to observe as a group, or a topic would be introduced and children would be asked to share their knowledge or ideas about that subject. Interruptions, in the form of late-arriving classmates, announcements on the speaker phone, or other such events, would also attract the attention of the entire group, and were discussed as they occurred.

As children learn to use language, their developing competence provides opportunities for them to engage and communicate with others as well as to demonstrate aspects of their cognitive, social, and emotional development. By the time they are four or five years old (the age of the children in my study), most children have achieved

sufficient fluency in their native language to communicate their basic needs and express their thought to others (Piaget, 1955, Bruner, 1983, Ninio and Snow, 1996). However, their mastery of language is still at an immature and incomplete state, and their range of discourse experiences is limited.

The wealth of research into these areas of development suggests that children arriving in a pre-kindergarten class are able to recognize themselves as individuals, and can understand that their classroom is populated by other individuals, each of whom possesses thoughts, desires, cultural norms, and motivations for action (Wellman, 1990). The students' abilities to interpret the intentions and behaviors of others, to explain their own desires and intentions, and to respond to one another in a group setting, are central areas of attention for their teachers. When children are unable to perform these social and linguistic skills, the teachers must anticipate or recognize their naïveté. The teachers' responses to these situations, their ability to interpret the children's intentions, provide instruction or adapt tasks, are a central focus to my research.

Communicative Competence. My investigation was aimed at following the emergence of communicative competence in the pre-kindergarten children's language skills. The terms 'linguistic competence' and 'communicative competence' have assumed significance in the linguistics community, and are relevant to this investigation of classroom conversation. Hymes (1972) argued that educators and researchers must consider communicative competence as encompassing more than a speaker's knowledge of grammar and semantics. Rather, he said, competence should include "whatever else besides knowledge (e.g., motivation, identification, experience) may be involved in using knowledge" (p. xxxv), as well as performance skills such as speaking appropriately.

Hymes also equated communicative competence with sociolinguistic competence, emphasizing competence as "[a child's] ability to participate in its society as not only a speaking, but also a communicating member" (p. 75). Such competence emerges through a process of linguistic development, which, according to Chomsky (1980), begins with "universal grammar…the genetic program, the schematism that permits the range of possible realizations that are the possible human languages" (p. 234). Competence in language use incorporated both form and meaning: the ability of a speaker to produce a statement that conforms to a universal grammar, "now analyzed in terms of a certain structure of rules, principles, and representations in the mind," (p. 91) along with performance: "what someone does [with language]under specific circumstances" (p. 225). Both of these aspects of analysis are relevant to my investigation, as is the acquisition of language skills as a foundation for academic success. Dickinson (1991) connected this competence with literacy, arguing "it is clear that one important aspect of becoming literate is acquiring the discourse forms required by one's society for reading and writing" (p. 256). One means of framing my thesis question is to ask, "In what ways do children's still-emergent skills in grammar, syntax, and conversational interactions affect their ability to make meaningful and appropriate contributions to the group discourse, and further, in what ways can their teachers guide the children's acquisition of these skills?"

In my analysis, I focused on specific conversational features: turn-taking, interruptions and overlapping speech, topic introduction and topic shift, and verbal and non-verbal efforts to find personal connections among members of the group. Participants in a group conversation must be able to demonstrate some form of rule-governed

behavior in order to keep the discussion flowing smoothly. They also must be able to attend to the topic of the conversation. The categories of remarks, exchanges, and discourse moves that I selected for my analysis involve both procedural (turn-taking and interrupting) and meaning-driven (topic selection and personal connection) elements of conversation. Detailed analysis of these elements appears in Chapter III.

These categories also emphasize the prominent features of classroom conversation, and are consistent with the recommendations of other educators and linguistics researchers. Snow and Blum-Kulka (2002) echoed Heath's theory that school-based language exchanges are different from those at home: "At school, children will need to learn the new rules for participating---for example, how to volunteer to be called on, when spontaneous contributions to whole-class discussions are permitted, and when and how one may talk to peers" (p. 327).

Communicative competence has been described as a speaker's "ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters" (Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 249). This definition highlights the importance of context for linguistic behavior. For young children, school represents a new context for using language. In order to participate fully in the life of the classroom, they must learn how to adapt and expand their existing knowledge of language to fit the demands of the new setting. Their ability to navigate this new context depends in part on their ability to discern the social and linguistic norms of the classroom environment.

Mehan (1979) examined the topic of communicative competence in the specific context of classroom discourse. His definition of "classroom competence" encompasses a range of skills related to academic content as well as social performance:

> Classroom competence involves matters of form as well as of content. To be successful in the classroom, students not only must know the content of academic subjects, they must learn the appropriate form in which to cast their academic knowledge. That is, competent membership in the classroom community involves employing interactional skills and abilities in the display of academic knowledge. They must know with whom, when, and where they can speak and act, and they must provide the speech and behavior that are appropriate for a given classroom situation. Students must also be able to relate behavior, both academic and social, to varying classroom situations by interpreting classroom rules. (p. 133)

Mehan's description seems to universalize classrooms and the linguistic expectations held by teachers. His remarks also suggest that the knowledge that students develop about language in a classroom community is gained through observation and experience, not through direct instruction. It is my intention to examine the possibility that such knowledge can be defined and taught deliberately, and that such teaching might result in observable differences in children's behavior.

Bruner (1983) also defined a set of criteria for effective communication by children:

> Can the child request, can he indicate, can he ingratiate or promise or support or show respect by the use of communicative means? And can

> he meet the conditions that the culture places on speakers who would do those things—conditions of preparation, sincerity, essentiality, and affiliation? (p. 18).

Bruner argued that these elements of language are inseparable, and that children learn them interdependently. Much of Bruner's work occurred in home-based settings, where he observed parents and young children interacting on a one-to-one basis; although his results are highly relevant to the present study, there are obvious differences between the verbal exchanges that occur in dyads and those that occur among teachers and students in a group.

Erickson (2004), in his discussion of children's linguistic behaviors, defined competence in the classroom as the challenge to "produce an utterance (e.g. an answer to a question or a volunteered comment) that was not only informationally correct but socially correct as well" (p. 55). This concise definition is particularly apt for my own research in that it emphasizes not only the importance of coherence (relevance of a remark to the topic at hand) but also its social value (the impact of interrupting or speaking out of turn).

In my research setting, both Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young had their own standards for competence in their students' communications, and their reflections about this concept resonate with Erickson. These teachers also acknowledged that their young students are at the beginning stages of mastering these communication skills, and their own expectations of the children's behavior reflect that knowledge. Mrs. Young said, "I think a lot of people will say, 'Oh, they can't take turns; they're in pre-K. That's not realistic.' Yes it is. It's realistic that you can give them strategies. And you can empower

them to take the steps in taking turns." Mrs. Ellis observed, "I've had groups where we can truly sit and have a discussion by the end of the year...when someone breaks in, they'll respond to my...non-verbal raising my hand and reminding them they need to raise their hand." These teachers emphasize the value of the social curriculum in their classrooms, and they devote time each day to providing direct instruction in interactional skills.

Emerging Friendships and Social Development. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young focused much of their attention on the development of friendships among the children in their classrooms. For both teachers, the word "friend" was used as a generic label for any child in the classroom, and the teachers actively encouraged the children to build relationships with each other through play and shared interests. The emergence of true friendships, in which individuals actively sought one another out as playmates, shared experiences, and created fantasies together, was a component of the overall creation of community in the classroom. The children used the word 'friend' freely from the beginning of the year, with varying degrees of sophistication.

William Corsaro (1981), who studied young children's peer relationships, grounded his analysis of children's interactions in their early social connections with their parents. In Corsaro's view, it was these earliest relationships that provided a foundation for children's emerging skills and understanding of social norms and procedures for relating to others. Once children moved beyond their immediate family connections and into a wider realm of peer relationships, "children learn that they can negotiate social bonds on the basis of their personal needs and social contextual demands" (Corsaro, 1981, p. 207). Corsaro felt that social knowledge emerged "in response to the demands

of specific interactive situations" (p. 209). Therefore, he argued, we must not only attend to developmental patterns, but also to the environment and relationships in which children find themselves (p. 209).

One aspect of Corsaro's work that is of particular interest to my research is his discussion of children's language around friendship. In his analysis, Corsaro documented children's use of the word "friend" and the various naïve conceptions of this term from which they seemed to be operating. He found that children frequently used the word "friend" as a means of gaining or denying access to play situations. He also found that children's use of friendship terms seemed less focused on personal qualities of potential friends than on physical proximity and situational conditions. He found that children identified other children as "friends" because they played together, but not because they shared interests or recognized sympathetic characteristics in each other. Corsaro's transcripts showed that children offered and withdrew friendship status frequently; declarations of non-friendship were often based on desires to protect a play event that was already in process and to exclude an interloper, or alternately, to establish one's legitimacy for entering such a play event:

> For these children, friendship often serves specific integrative functions in the nursery school, such as gaining access to, building solidarity, and mutual trust in, and protecting the interactive space of play groups, and is seldom based on the children's recognition of enduring personal characteristics of playmates (Corsaro, 1981, p. 235).

Corsaro's findings raise an important question about the gap between children's *use of,* contrasted with their true *understanding of,* common social-linguistic elements in

the classroom. However, despite the language that children use or the ways in which they invoke the term "friend" in their interactions, it appears that children do in fact form meaningful friendships with each other at young ages, and that these relationships provide a foundation for children to develop sophisticated skills in social competence.

Judy Dunn (2004) also investigated the emergence of young children's friendships. One area of interest in her studies of children's peer-oriented fantasy play lies in its relationship to individuation and other minds. She commented that

> The significance of the development of this capacity for sharing an imaginative world lies partly in what it tells us about the children's capacity to recognize the intentions of another person, sharing their focus of attention, and coordinating their communications about these shared intentions (p. 25).

In the context of the primary school classroom, it seems critical that teachers encourage and support emerging friendships among their young students. As noted above, a recurring example of the teachers' efforts in this area occurred each day around the attendance. The teachers made a point of noticing and speaking about children who were absent, and of greeting returnees warmly after they had been away from school, as this exchange from late November illustrates:

Three Friends Are Not Here

November 29

Mrs. Ellis: Alright. Today, we are so lucky, because our friend Wesley has returned from [*names family vacation spot*] and his time away. So welcome back, we are so happy to see you. //Um, today, um, we still have three friends who are not here. And I believe all of...

Olivia: Stephen!

Mrs. Ellis:...them are still sick. Stephen is one of them, Olivia, who else?

Walter: Michael

Olivia: Neal

Mrs. Ellis: Michael, and Neal. Yeah. Those three. So/ that is what our attendance says.

Mrs. Ellis' deliberate use of the word "friend" to label the children, her attention and warm welcome to Wesley upon returning to class, and her encouragement to the children to name their missing classmates all served to build a sense of community and belonging for the whole group. Mrs. Ellis' intentions aligned with Dunn's (2002) observations that

> In the context of a friendship in which they care about the other child, are concerned for the feelings of the other, and want to maintain the relationship, children attempt to conciliate, negotiate, make compromises more frequently and with more success than in their other relationships (p. 157).

It is certainly a logical conjecture that individuals will make a greater effort to negotiate and conciliate with others for whom they feel affection or concern. Within the bounded structure of the family network, children learn the conventions and expectations of a certain (and small) participant framework; with the exception of children who live in conditions of abuse or neglect, these conventions are practiced with people for whom they feel reciprocal affection and concern. However, as they move out of the familiar surroundings of home and into the larger and less predictable environment of school, children are confronted with the challenge of learning how their known strategies for

interaction must be adapted or refined to meet the conventions of their new group. One of the focal points of my research was to observe situations in which the teachers provided direct instruction in the use of various discourse tools for negotiating social interactions. I was interested to observe how explicitly the teachers addressed certain conversational behaviors, and intrigued by the possibility that their lessons might be reproducible in other settings, especially if these instructional practices might ease the linguistic transition to school for children from a variety of backgrounds.

Vasconcelos and Walsh (2001) conducted a study of community-building in a Portuguese kindergarten class. The practices of the teacher, "Ana," are remarkably similar to those of Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis. Vasconcelos and Walsh argue that "a critical challenge facing early schooling …is to assist children in forming both a sense of community as well as an actual community in the classroom. Community begins in personally meaningful experience" (p. 501).

Culture and Conventions of Behavior

My research focused on a specific component of the children's day, but I considered the morning meeting as just that—a portion of a much larger experience in which the children took part each day. Beyond the morning meeting, the children engaged in social interactions and conversation in pairs, small groups, and large groups with and without direct teacher involvement. They played games of their own design and also played with the toys and learning materials in the classroom and the playground. All of these interactions involved language to some degree, but they also involved other elements of social connection: turn-taking, rule-setting, fairness, role-playing, identity issues, status, relationship building, and awareness of others' intentions and ideas. I

examined the literature related to children's emerging social behavior with the purpose of establishing a context for their emerging conversational skills.

The classroom is not only a new linguistic community, but a new social community as well, one that is defined in part by spoken and unspoken rules of discourse. Bruner (1990) emphasized the critical nature of achieving competence in social interactions:

> Our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation… the child does not enter the life of his or her group as a private and autistic sport of primary processes, but rather as a participant in a larger public process in which public meanings are negotiated. And in this process, meanings are not to his own advantage unless he can get them shared by others (p. 12).

For many experts, children's emerging skills and mastery of discourse structures represent an important aspect of social development. Vygotsky (1978) believed that "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 89). Blum-Kulka and Snow (2002) reiterated this point, arguing that "to develop critical thinking and learn to participate in the social construction of knowledge, children need to experience multiple perspectives, such as those available in multiparty, multigenerational and peer talk" (p. 9). For many young children, the classroom, as one of the first social contexts that they encounter beyond their immediate family, is a significant environment in which these multiparty and peer-oriented conversations occur. The classroom group contains

comparatively more people than a typical family and frequently involves situations where interactions occur simultaneously. In such a setting, children must learn to navigate interactions and linguistic exchanges that are quite different from their experiences at home.

Nicolopoulou (2002) has conducted numerous investigations of children's peer group interactions. Her research has led her to conclude that "peer group interactions can serve as a powerful context for promoting young children's language development, and in particular their narrative development…children, like adults, also create, maintain, and participate in fields of shared activity that provide both resources and motivations for development, including narrative development" (pp. 117-118). Her statements confirm the premise of my research, namely, that communicative competence informs children's social skills in a variety of interactions. The morning meeting is a daily example of a "field of shared activity," in which the children gradually built a set of common stories, experiences, rituals, and a sense of group identity.

Bruner (1983) held a similar perspective on the importance of cultural or community-based behaviors as part of social and linguistic development, and emphasized the importance of learning the specific behaviors and manners of behavior related to various forms of interaction. Bruner related some of these behaviors to cultural conventions, focusing on the process of requesting as an example:

> The conventions of indicating and requesting…are not so much directly linguistic as broadly cultural. When to request, how to prepare the ground, how to address a requestee in order to form a felicitous link—these are what the child learns through interacting (p. 131).

The children in this classroom group recognized their teachers as sources of both authority and nurturing. As a rule, they followed instructions and looked to the teachers for approval and guidance in their daily activities. At the same time, the teachers demonstrated their willingness to listen to and respond to the children's requests or attempts to introduce topics into classroom conversations, illustrating Vygotsky's (1978) observation that "The child's ability to control another person's behavior becomes a necessary part of the child's practical activity" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 29). Nicolopoulou focused her analytical discussion on this same concept, highlighting the importance of learning social and linguistic conventions as a means of engaging meaningfully with others: "As children come to realize the possible purposes and satisfactions that can be pursued in narrative activity…they are driven to learn and appropriate the narrative forms culturally available to them and to turn these to their own ends" (Nicolopoulou, 2002, p. 122). Interrelational skills, especially those related to sociolinguistic competence, are central in the creation of self-identity in such a group.

Within a classroom, as in many social groups, children have the opportunity and the challenge of creating and presenting "identities," as individuals and as members of the group. Different interactional situations may demand that an individual assume a more dominant or a more submissive role, and participants need to learn how to interpret the conditions of a situation .

In my review of research, I read studies of children's peer relationships in classrooms and other social settings. Many of these studies focused on the characteristics of children's fantasy play, which was not my primary interest. However, in the course of their studies, these researchers examined the evolution

of relationships and social competence, and their observations in those areas are relevant to my work. Amy Kyratzis, who has studied children's narratives and social negotiations in the classroom, noted that "one of the most central aspects of identity is one's position or ranking in a relevant social group, be it a peer group, friendship group, or family" (Kyratzis, 1998, p. 429). Through a series of observations of children's narratives during free play in a preschool classroom, Kyratzis documented the ways in which speakers positioned themselves within a group. In one scenario, a group of girls played out an interaction among a group of women friends. Kyratzis' evaluation of the children's drama included the notation that "in terms of social-interactive functions, we see the girls using these narratives to position themselves with respect to one another and to form alliances" (Kyratzis, 1988, p. 440). She also observed collaborative behavior, noting that particularly in the case of such dramatic "pretend" play, the generation of stories became a way of building friendships and clarifying their own identities. "The girls are also constructing possible selves in their story. In their protagonists, valued qualities held by the girls can be seen" (Kyratzis, 1998, p. 441).

Nicolopoulou (2002) presented similar findings and analysis in her investigation of peer-group interactions. In her studies of children's storytelling and the dramatization of these stories, she found that "the girls' stories… portrayed characters embedded in networks of stable and harmonious relationships…In contrast, the boys' stories were characteristically marked by conflict, movement, and disruption" (p. 127).

The exploration of self through interaction with others is, arguably, a hallmark of the human condition. For young children, early interactional experiences often center around pretend play with peers or structured activities led by adults, both of which are features of early childhood classrooms. Through her research, Kyratzis provided clear examples of the ways in which young boys and girls construct their social selves. She noted that for boys, this process "often occurs through the physical enactment of possible social selves, while for girls, self-construction is more often through verbal agreement about possible social selves … through language" (p. 451). The collaborative nature of this exchange is important as part of the child's emerging sense of him or herself not only as an individual, but as a participant in a social group.

Pretend play is only one of many game forms in which children gain social knowledge. Bruner emphasized the importance of repetitive games as a type of experience in which children learn, and adults support language development. For Bruner, the gradual evolution of the game from adult-controlled to child-controlled was a key factor in the child's learning about social interactions. "One sets the game, provides a scaffold to assure that the child's ineptitudes can be rescued, or rectified by appropriate intervention, and then removes the scaffold part by part as the reciprocal structure can stand on its own" (Bruner, 1983, p. 60).

Although Bruner's investigation focused on children under the age of two, this process of scaffolding is a central feature of his theory of curriculum development and a relevant foundation for reinforcement of social skills in a pre-

kindergarten classroom. Dunn (2002), whose research has focused on the interactions of children in peer and sibling relationships, argued that "being able to cooperate, plan, hold back till it is your turn, see the other child's goal—these are skills and achievements that are important for playing all sorts of other kinds of game with a friend" (p. 29). It would follow that these are skills which are not only valuable in game frameworks, but in all other types of paired and group interactions, such as those that occur in daily classroom situations.

Many of the games and routines that Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis incorporated into their morning meetings involved skills such as planning, cooperation, waiting for a turn, or focusing on the remarks of others, and often they were presented in carefully orchestrated steps so that the children could learn gradually how to engage in intricate exchanges. One day in early spring, Mrs. Ellis brought a branch of pussy willow to class for the children to observe. She also taught a new song to the children. With the introduction of both the branch and the song, Mrs. Ellis gave precise and clear instructions, guiding the children to be aware of their own bodies and helping them be aware of the possible consequences of their actions:

Pussy Willows

March 20

Mrs. Ellis: So I have a little song that we can sing about pussy willows. and it's actually a tune you even know, because we sing something else. Yes, I'm going to pass it around and people can feel how soft these are. Cause they're like, they're like little kitties.

Stephen: They're called willows.

Mrs. Ellis: They're called pussy willows.

Voice: Cause they're a pussy cat

Michael: I saw a country mouse yesterday.

Mrs. Ellis: OK, let's all stand up and I'll teach. Well, first I'll sing it for you and then we'll stand up. How's that? (she sings the song, which includes gestures of 'scat!') So, that's what it sounds like. Stand up and let's try it.

Voices: (overlapping)

Mrs. Ellis: Now, the way we do the scat. Ok, but you have to be careful, cause if you do it too wide, what's going to happen? Olivia. No, so we're going to do it carefully. So//when we get to 'down, down, down, down,' what do you think you do?

Ellie: (sits down.)

Mrs. Ellis: Yeah. Ellie knows. OK. (sings 'down, down, down, down'). Now, (to Walter) if you do it that wide, you're going to hit me, So think about that next time. All right, let's start off (begins singing)

Choral: (the children repeat each line as Mrs. Ellis sings)

Voice: I think someone jumped on it.

Mrs. Ellis: OK, good planning, excellent!

Anita: Can we feel it now?

Mrs. Ellis: Yes, actually let's pass it around

Mrs. Ellis: OK. We're going to do three-count turns. One... two... three. Think about what does it feel like. Does it feel soft like a cat, a cat's fur?

Michael: What's this?

Mrs. Ellis: It's a bush. Pussy willow comes on a bush. So those are the branches.

Michael: But how come they're so soft?

Mrs. Ellis: I don't know. That's the flower. No, it's not quite the flower. It's the bud. It blossoms into a flower.

Voices: (many voices overlap)

Mrs. Ellis: They are like the buds. One...two...three .Want to pass it//

Estie: I had three Chineses on my vacation. Chinese are very very very. They have pussy willows.

Mrs. Ellis: They do? Ok. Um, Emily, are you doing what you can to stay in your space and not bother others?

Emily: Walter's still not doing it.

Mrs. Ellis: You always have the choice to not do anything back. All right? We'll try to remind Walter of that same thing too.

Mrs. Ellis' pussy willow lesson incorporated multiple levels of instruction in game-playing, rule-setting, turn-taking, and general classroom behavior. At the beginning of the song, Mrs. Ellis was direct: "first I'll sing it for you and then we'll stand up." This type of modeling is also a form of scaffolding, as Mrs. Ellis provided the instructions and purpose of the activity in small segments. She also anticipated the possibility that the children might hit each other if they were not careful when they gestured with their hands. As they began the game, Olivia and Walter swung their arms wide, unaware that they might intrude on their classmates' space. With both of these children, Mrs. Ellis was explicit in her instructions as to how they should move, and she explained clearly what might happen if they moved their hands in a rough or excessive

manner. When they finished the song, she gave guidelines for the children to manage their turn touching the pussy willow: "We're going to do three-counts," she instructed, meaning that each child could hold the branch for a count of three. As the children passed the blossoms around, Mrs. Ellis remained focused on the children's turn-taking and body control, choosing not to elaborate on Estie's enigmatic comment about "three Chineses." (See my discussion of this remark on page 43)

This lesson is a clear demonstration of direct instruction and establishment of rules for both conversation and group behavior. By this time in the year, the children had participated in similar songs with gestures and body movements, as well as "pass-around" activities in the circle. Although Mrs. Ellis could rely on some of the children in the group to participate appropriately, other children needed further reminders. Bruner and Dunn observed the earlier stages of this process when they studied mothers and older siblings providing scaffolding for young children in the fundamentals of turn-taking and shared attention. When children go to school, primary school teachers must continue this instruction, expanding the children's repertoires of conventions. The methods, and effectiveness, of these instructional approaches, form a focus of my work with pre-kindergartners and their teachers.

Participation Frameworks. Social and linguistic interactions take place in a wide variety of environments, and among people who have different roles and relationships to one another. Goffman (1981) refers to these circumstances as "participation frameworks." His theory of language interaction is that within

such a structure, "All those who happen to be in perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it" (Goffman, 1981, p. 3).

The classroom is a particular discourse frame in which children must learn to navigate a variety of exchanges. One important attribute of classroom talk is that many conversations occur in groups. As Snow and Blum-Kulka (2002) noted, "At school, children will need to learn the new rules for participating—for example, how to volunteer to be called on, when spontaneous contributions to whole-class discussions are permitted, and when and how one may talk to peers" (p. 328). Teachers play a critical role in this conversation format, and the role they choose can impact children's understanding of the power structure in the classroom. If the teacher assumes the role of the authority, she will determine who speaks, for how long, and about what topic. In contrast, teachers like Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young seek to find a more open structure, in which they encourage the children to determine conversation topics.

Mrs. Young regards the children's remarks as attempts to find common ground, establish roles and identities for themselves, and achieve competence in social conversations. "I want kids to be independent learners, and the more I encourage them to have conversation and discussion among themselves, the more I'm letting that happen. They're learning about each other and from each other," she said. Encouragement of this type may strike some readers as a departure from the stereotypical classroom model, where children are expected to keep quiet unless given express permission by the teacher. In the conversation about languages that is presented in the introduction to this paper, Mrs. Young not only allowed the discussion of languages to continue, but also demonstrated her support for the children's comments through her own participation.

Another socially-driven component of discourse that children must master is finding ways of connecting their own knowledge to the ongoing conversation in the classroom. Given the developmental reality that young children do not always have a well-established sense of what knowledge others possess, one of the challenges they face in the context of a large social interaction is determining the level of presupposition to make, as well as how and when to make contributions. The pre-kindergarten children in my research group often made suppositions about shared knowledge that were not well grounded; in other words, they assumed that their classmates or teachers knew what they were referring to, and therefore made no attempts to clarify or define statements. An example of such a remark is Estie's comment during the "Pussy Willow" conversation, when she mentions that she had "three Chineses" during her vacation:

> Mrs. Ellis: They are like the buds. One...two...three .Want to pass it//
>
> Estie: I had three Chineses on my vacation. Chinese are very very very. They have pussy willows.
>
> Mrs. Ellis: They do? Ok. Um, Emily, are you doing what you can to stay in your space and not bother others?

Estie is enrolled in a Chinese language class outside of school; during her vacation that class had met three times. Her partial statement, "Chinese are very very very. They have pussy willows," appears to be an attempt to introduce a piece of her own cultural knowledge about pussy willows in China.

The children's apparently disconnected comments often tested the teachers' abilities to interpret or intuit the children's communicative intent. Edwards and Westgate (1994) made a similar observation in their own classroom research, commenting,

> It is argued that in any classroom, teacher and pupils will treat much of what is said as an index to more extensive background meanings, some of which they bring from 'outside' while others have accumulated in the course of their own interaction. In doing so, they assume that others will be filling-in from the same stock of relevant background knowledge (p. 102).

Whenever possible, the teachers would encourage these spontaneous contributions, because of the great social value they provided to the group. In one instance in Mrs. Ellis' classroom, Wesley started a lively discussion about sleeping bags (page 113). Although Mrs. Ellis joined the conversation after it had already begun, she was able to enter the discussion and work it into her morning meeting as a part of the greeting. When I asked her about her choice to devote so much time in response to a spontaneous remark from one of the children, she explained that one reason she was willing to take on the topic at such length was that it had obviously generated great interest among the children, and it appeared to her from their level of engagement, that all the students would be able to add to the discussion. Later in our interview, her reflections returned to that morning meeting, and she commented about Wesley,

> I let Wesley go because he's a kid for whom—he loves academics, but connecting facially with the group was a skill he was still learning, and so if I could find something that he was excited about, that he realized other kids—but I knew that, one: he wouldn't give up on the topic, and two: it would add this other dimension of building him up socially within the group in a way that doesn't always happen in play.

Mrs. Ellis' sensitivity to Wesley in this instance was a phenomenon that recurred frequently in the classroom. The teachers made great efforts to understand the motivations and intentions behind children's remarks, often providing explicit comments about the ways in which children were making connections with each other and among the ideas and subjects raised in the discussions. Cazden (2001) observed and recorded classroom discourse in a variety of settings, and encountered many examples of children's narratives. She noted that

> Teachers are inherently at some disadvantage when trying to understand young children's stories about their out-of-school experiences. Some stories...are about widely shared experiences with publicly familiar scripts...Other stories, more often the episodic ones, are about idiosyncratic elements of family life...which makes it much harder for the listening teacher to make connections and clarify relationships from extra-text knowledge (p. 16).

Cazden identified this challenge as a "pervasive teaching dilemma" (p. 22), in which teachers struggle to validate a student's meaning while helping the child learn more public and competent forms of discourse. Cazden's observations speak to the cultural challenge teachers face when their own linguistic style, cultural backgrounds, and experiences do not match those of their students, and consequently they find themselves without access to a mental schema that would help them interpret children's narratives. Mrs. Ellis' story about her decision to maintain a topic thread about sleeping bags, and the social benefits of her choice for Wesley, who had introduced the topic, is

just one example of a situation in which the teacher was able to seize upon an "at-home" narrative, and bring it into the classroom in a meaningful way.

Heath's (1983/1996) research into the linguistic differences among the various populations of children in schools in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas emphasized the challenge that Cazden described. After identifying two distinct populations ('Trackton,' an African-American working class community, 'Roadville,' a white working class community), Heath examined the language patterns between parents and young children in their home environments, and compared those patterns to the styles of speech used in early childhood classrooms. Her research also included an analysis of the teachers' own linguistic styles. In her findings, she noted that for the children of these two communities, "the what, how, and why of patterns of choice they can exercise in their uses of language prepare them in very different ways for what lies ahead in school and in work or other institutional settings" (p. 347). For the Roadville children, their home life and socialization were consistent with the expectations of the classroom, and "there is a lulling sense of a familiar continuity of past experiences in the new setting of school" (pp. 347-348). In contrast, the Trackton children grew up with a very different set of interactional experiences with adults and other members of their community:

> The children listen, observe, practice, and finally participate, getting their encouragement often in unpredictable and uneven doses. Trackton parents believe that when their children go to school, they will continue to learn the same way…by watching, listening, and trying. For the children, however, the school is a sudden flood of discontinuities in the

> ways people talk, the values they hold, and the consistency with which the rewards go to some and not to others (p. 348).

Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young have been explicit in their own sensitivity to the potential differences in preparation and background that their children may bring to school. Because this is a private school, the children have all participated in an admissions process that includes interviews, screenings, meetings with parents, and substantial documentation of the children's early years. One component of the school's admissions process is to ensure that each class represents diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, family background, income, residence, and culture. The teachers review all the children's admissions files in the spring and summer before the children enter the class, so they are familiar with the diverse family backgrounds and previous educational experiences of each of their students. Mrs. Ellis said,

> In the first couple of days…I make the assumption that, though many of them have been to school, we may be slightly different. So, some of [the planning] is bridging what their memories of their former school are, with their experience [here].

Mrs. Young noted,

> Depending on what type of school they were at, some kids have a hard time with raising hands, or taking turns, because they come from an environment where that's not expected. Or, they come from a household where everybody does sit at the table, and they take turns, and they listen to each other, they wait for somebody to be done.

The teachers do not see these differences as weaknesses or deficiencies in the children's competence, but as questions to be answered. As is the case with many qualified early childhood educators, both Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis are well-versed in developmental theory. Both of them have several years of classroom experience in addition to graduate degrees in early childhood education. They have observed and studied children in this setting as well as in other schools, and they apply their theoretical and practical knowledge in their observations and interactions with the children. They have both chosen to work at this school because of its values and its focus on communication. In contrast to the teachers portrayed in Heath's study in Roadville and Trackton, Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young are fully aware of their own communication values, but they are also curious about and respectful of the many communication styles that the children bring to the classroom. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young are firm in their belief that communicative skills can be taught, and that the children can participate in the process, with the teachers as facilitators.

Previous Research in Classroom Language

Classroom talk has been a source of interest to educators, psychologists, linguists, and sociologists for decades. Researchers have found rich opportunities for observing, recording, and analyzing the variety of spoken interactions between and among teachers and students. Although there is obvious overlap among the investigations cited here, I have identified three broad categories of investigations and analysis of talk in classrooms, each of which has some bearing on my own study. One group of studies focuses on the interactional structure and the sequence of exchange of speaking roles within the group conversation. A second category of research focuses primarily on sociocultural themes

and issues of power and status within the classroom. The third group of studies focuses on children's competence in monologue and performance-style oral presentations in the classroom. Although all of these studies have provided foundational and theoretical background for my research, I have focused my own analysis, as stated above, on the direct instruction and pedagogy of classroom conversations.

'Structurally' Focused Research. One category of classroom discourse research is concerned primarily with the sequences and types of interactions between and among students and teachers. The investigations in this category emphasize a specific type of discourse, in which turns at talk are clearly demarcated and generally controlled by the teacher. Although this form of discourse is not the focus of my research, the emphasis on turn-taking in these studies of classroom talk is useful in providing a framework for analyzing the sequence of speakers in the morning meeting conversations that I recorded.

Mehan (1979) investigated the ways in which teachers directed exchanges with students. In his analysis, Mehan focused on the organization and sequence of lessons. He noted that "teacher and student behavior is organized into 'interactional sequences,' which perform distinctive functions in specific places in the organization of lessons" (p. 36). Mehan's classroom observations centered on a recurring type of interaction between the teacher and a group of students, consisting of an initiation (I) by the teacher, which could take the form of a statement, query, or directive. This initiation was followed by a response (R) from a student. The student giving the response was typically selected by the teacher in an explicit manner, either through naming, directed eye gaze, or gesture. Finally, the teacher would evaluate (E) the student's response. The evaluation stage might include an assessment of the accuracy or correctness of the response, elaboration or

clarification, or a further initiation with the purpose of seeking additional remarks from the respondent or other students. In his analysis, Mehan defined the boundaries of these "instructional sequences:" "Once an instructional sequence has been initiated, interaction continues until the symmetry between initiation and reply acts is obtained" (p. 52). This symmetry could occur immediately (one initiation act, one reply, and one evaluative act), resulting in a 'three-part teacher-student sequence' (p. 52), or it could involve a series of initiations and strategies 'until the expected reply does appear" (p. 52).

One of the striking features of the questions posed in Mehan's research sites was that the teachers frequently had a specific answer in mind when they initiated the interactions. The implications of this phenomenon are significant as an indicator of power within the classroom. If the teacher's role is not only to serve as the facilitator and conductor of talk (the IRE pattern begins and ends with the teacher's voice), but also as the authority on the accuracy or form of response for information discussed in the classroom, such a dynamic creates a clear hierarchy. It also has an impact on students whose linguistic style differs from that of the teacher, as noted later in this discussion.

In discourse terms, the IRE process is a bounded event; it has a clear format and sequence, with clearly defined roles for the various participants. As such, it is not the type of verbal exchange typically found in natural conversation. Because of the relative order and predictability in role-exchange and the relatively narrow range of possible response types, many researchers have found IRE-type classroom discourse to be a rich source of data for analyzing classroom dynamics.

In my own investigation, this type of highly-structured interaction was rare. The pre-kindergarten teachers had no expectation that their students would wait in silence

until they were called on; nonetheless, as Mrs. Young commented above, they did expect the children to develop and demonstrate an emerging understanding of the importance of waiting for a turn at talk. Also, Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis did not always have a preconceived idea in mind when they raised a topic for discussion; as part of the community-building focus of the class, the teachers' goal was for the children to share meaningful and personal remarks with the rest of the group.

Edwards and Westgate (1994) focused their analysis of classroom discourse in part on the characteristics that distinguish classroom discourse from regular conversation. They argued that the somewhat artificial discourse structures of the classroom are acceptable and even necessary in the context of teaching and learning:

> The point is not that classroom talk 'should' resemble conversation, since most of the time for practical purposes it cannot, but that institutionalized talk (such as talk for instructional purposes) shows a heightened use of procedures which have their 'base' in ordinary conversation and are more clearly understood through comparison with it. (p. 116)

Edwards and Westgate's position is well-taken, especially in the context of the early childhood classroom in which I conducted my research. These children were learning how to participate in multi-voiced conversations, which often followed topic sequences that were not always of their choosing. They needed to learn to wait their turns, to restrain themselves from speaking out impulsively, and to determine whether what they wanted to say was relevant in the context of the conversation.

Although Mehan's work was published almost 30 years ago, the IRE model is still the dominant method of interaction in classrooms, particularly in the upper grades, suggesting that his findings are still valid. The traditional image still holds in many schools: a teacher stands at the front of the room and presents a question to the class. She then calls on one student for a response. After the student responds, the teacher provides an evaluation or a closure to the exchange, and the sequence continues. In an analysis of classroom discourse, Macbeth (2003) placed the IRE structure in a historical context and pointed to developments in classroom discourse analysis that had occurred since the publication of Mehan's *Learning Lessons* (1979) more than two decades earlier. Macbeth defined two categories of studies, the first of which was grounded in the type of discourse analyzed by Mehan and others. Macbeth classified these as investigations of "naturally occurring discourse (NOD)" (p. 246): "The interest in NOD is thus an interest in the social organization of tasks, settings, and identities as they are produced and assembled in interaction. The sequential analysis of discourse points to social order, meaning, and structure…" (Macbeth, 2003, p. 252). Macbeth also noted that these studies were an attempt by researchers to focus on uses of language in ordinary interactions as opposed to linguistic studies of formal language analysis.

Macbeth's second group of classroom language studies fit into the realm of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which he described as an area of social and ethnographic research that focused on the constructive nature of discourse. Macbeth noted the highly theoretical nature of CDA, as well as the deeply layered approach of its practitioners in analyzing their data sets. He addressed the inherent social assumptions

and power structures that go unnoticed by the members of a discourse community (who he referred to as 'the natives'), and commented on the

> ...ways in which power and hegemony are concealed by technologies of consensus, for how they are insinuated into everyday life but unnoticed...The very premise of concealment delivers at once the task and authorization of formal analysis: to assemble the gaze that can reveal what the natives do not see, and its formative place in their ordinary experience" (Macbeth, 2003, p. 249).

It is this level of analysis that provides a means of assessing the inherent imbalance of power between teacher and students, and also among students who bring different linguistic styles into the classroom. These differences are particularly striking when teachers use them as the basis for assessing students' competence in the classroom.

Despite his interest in the hidden social assumptions of power structure within the classroom, Macbeth did not discount the purpose and necessity of the teacher as facilitator of information: "Unavoidably...classroom instruction organizes the room with the assurance that knowledge is already in place, and thus organizes the teaching and learning as a process of revealing it" (Macbeth, 2003, p. 258). Nonetheless, he argued that the teacher's role in the interaction "can be done in an indefinite number of ways, and one of the more delicate organizations has to do with the teacher's third-turn evaluation" (Macbeth, 2003, p. 259). The "third turn," or evaluation component of the IRE sequence, is the portion of the interaction where the teacher arguably has the greatest flexibility in directing the power structure in the classroom. After a student responds, the teacher has the option of maintaining control of the conversation by moving on to a new

topic, or by providing closure to the exchange with the student. She could also share control of the conversation in many ways. One option would be to extend the exchange by engaging the students further by presenting a follow-up question or asking if anyone has an alternate response. Another possibility might be to pursue a tangential idea suggested by a student response. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young frequently chose this last approach in their own discussions with the pre-kindergarten children. Although the teachers planned an agenda and chose general topics of discussion for their meetings each day, they were prepared for new topics to emerge. Their conversations, though purposeful, could not be defined as structured. However, even in the context of a highly structured discourse framework, classroom conversations include countless examples of unexpected responses, interruptions, and comments added as asides. Edwards and Mercer (1987) referred to these remarks as

> …'spontaneous contributions' offered by the pupils [that] were by definition those communications least influenced by teacher control…and the teacher generally remained in control of the ultimate fate of any such contributions—of whether they were acted on, taken up and incorporated into the development of ideas in further classroom discourse, or whether they were discouraged, disapproved, or ignored (p. 131).

In some cases, such "spontaneous contributions" in classroom discourse are no more than brief remarks or observations; in other instances, they are substantial pieces of narrative. Whatever the length and extent of their content, such contributions represent attempts to make connections among events, content areas, or experiences.

Both of the pre-kindergarten teachers in my research site spoke to this issue, emphasizing the importance of the children's ability to co-construct the conversations. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young not only expected these remarks in their pre-kindergarten meetings, they welcomed them. Mrs. Ellis, in describing the agenda of her morning meeting, distinguished between the "business" portion of the meeting (attendance, weather, greeting) and the more open-ended discussion that usually followed those agenda items: "For them, the exciting part of the meeting comes after that. And I don't know if that's just my prejudice...Because I'm looking forward to the conversation."

Mrs. Young gave a specific example of the importance of spontaneous contributions in her classroom discussions:

> There are so many teachable moments through spontaneous conversation...In pre-K and K, you could try to teach life cycle backwards and forwards, but if a kid's not interested in what you're doing, they're never going to learn it...But the day you let that conversation come up about the butterfly they saw in their backyard that stemmed from green grass; you know, you're talking about green grass and why it doesn't stay green in the winter, and they're bringing up butterflies. That's when they're going to learn about life cycle, 'cause you left it open-ended. And you leave time for that spontaneous talk, where they're learning from each other.

The value that Mrs. Young places on children's contributions to the group's growing knowledge base is grounded in her convictions about the development of a community of learners. She places great emphasis on reversing the traditional power

structure in the classroom, preferring whenever possible to allow student-directed learning rather than teacher-directed instruction. She knows that although their comments are important to establishing themselves as active members of the group, the children also need to learn how to participate effectively in group communication. Vasconcelos and Walsh (2001) observed a similar value in Ana's classroom in Lisbon: "For Ana," they commented, "intellectual life emerges from a caring group life. she works to make the curriculum emerge from the daily interactions of group life" (p. 504). Just as the teacher provides direct instruction in areas of curriculum content, she must do the same with regard to conversational rules and conventions. As Cazden (2001) explained, "The adult enacts the entire script herself in the beginning, but the child gradually appropriates more and more of what had been the adult role. The adult so structures the game that the child can be a successful participant from the beginning" (p. 62).

The concept of turn-taking is the principal connection between the "structural" studies of classroom discourse in the literature and my own. What students learn about the verbal and non-verbal signals for gaining the "floor" in a multiparty conversation are critical skills for competent and successful participation in classroom interactions. Sociolinguist Barbara Johnstone (2002) explained the importance of turn-taking and the various moves that speakers can choose in order to get a turn at talk in a conversation:

> Getting the conversational floor takes less work when a second speaker waits until the first speaker has indicated that he or she is finished talking, via phrase-final intonation or grammar, eye contact or body movement, or some explicit means for allocating the next turn to someone else (asking a question, for example). Another way to say this is that there

> is a 'preference' in conversation for well-defined boundaries between turns. If a new speaker wants to interrupt a turn, he or she has to talk louder, say something like 'excuse me,' or acknowledge in some other way that this action is 'dispreferred.' Another way in which turns are relevant to how conversations are structured is that certain types of turns may call for particular corresponding types of turns to follow them: questions call for answers, complaints for responses, a greeting for a return greeting. When conversationalists fail to respond with the expected turn type, extra work is necessary to 'repair' the problem: if a question turn is not followed by an answer turn, the question may be asked again, for example (p. 72).

Erickson (2004) discussed the importance of understanding the implicit conversational rules in classroom talk. In one observation, he watched a first grader, Angie, attempting to respond to a teacher's direct question during a group conversation. Erickson's analysis of Angie's difficulty illustrates the multiple aspects of communicative competence that young children must achieve in order to be successful participants in classroom discourse, particularly around getting and keeping a turn at talk. Erickson described behaviors that make a child's turn vulnerable: hesitation, shrugging, low volume or voice quality, and pauses (p. 59). He also discussed timing and topical relevance as key factors in getting the teacher's attention and gaining the ability to contribute a remark (p. 66). The teacher's role in this interaction began when she designated Angie as the respondent to her question. When Angie did not provide a correct response (defined by Erickson as one that was "not only informationally correct

but socially correct as well" (p. 55)), the teacher continued to demonstrate to the rest of the group through eye gaze and orientation of her body, that Angie still had the floor. (p. 62).

Erickson focused much of his discussion on the turn-taking sequence in the discussion. His observations and distinctions of verbal and non-verbal behaviors of both the children and the teacher are relevant to my own analysis. My data set includes several examples of children attempting to gain a turn at talk, or of the teachers encouraging the more reticent students to contribute to the group conversation.

Performance-Based Discourse Studies. The performance nature of communicative competence in the classroom has been noted and indirectly addressed in the discussion above. In my research into the literature regarding classroom discourse, one recurring type of linguistic performance is the "Sharing Time" or "Show and Tell" narrative style of talk. Although the children in my investigation did not regularly engage in monologue-style storytelling in the morning meeting, previous studies of this type of language use have been influential in my analysis because of their emphasis on linguistic style.

Courtney Cazden, in her influential work *Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning* (1988/2001) conducted an investigation into "Sharing Time" discourse in early childhood classrooms. Among her observations was the premise that "the basic purpose of school is achieved through communication…Spoken language is an important part of the identities of all the participants" (p. 2). Competent participation in school-based discourse, as any other form of discourse, is a learned process. Cazden argued that

> …speech events, including classroom discourse, can only be accomplished by the collaborative work of two or more persons. In this sense, *school* is always a performance that must be constituted through the participation of a group of actors…the communicative competence of students, especially in the early school years, develops gradually (p. 40).

Cazden's point underscores the importance of the teacher's ability to understand a child's attempt to achieve linguistic coherence in her remarks. As the facilitator of discourse in the room, the teacher has the responsibility of guiding, explaining, and providing scaffolding for children to learn and practice the skills of social interaction.

Michaels and Cazden (1986) conducted a series of studies of "Sharing Time" in classrooms in Berkeley, California, and Boston, Massachusetts. They analyzed a variety of interaction styles, intonation patterns, and linguistic backgrounds in the classrooms, with a focus on ways these factors impacted the ability of teacher and student to collaborate with one another. In the discussion of their findings, Michaels and Cazden reported similar observations to those documented by Heath (1983/1996): "discourse patterns related to ethnic background affect the quality of teacher/child collaboration in ways that, cumulatively, deny certain children access to key learning opportunities" (Michaels & Cazden, 1986, p. 132). The authors distinguished two styles of narrative in their data. The first type, which they named "topic-centered," was "tightly organized around a single topic with a high degree of cohesion, and lexically explicit referential, temporal, and spatial relationships. There was a marked beginning, middle, and end, with no shifts in time or place" (p. 136). This discourse style was primarily used by the white children in the classrooms, and was perceived positively by the teachers.

In contrast, the black children in the classroom tended to employ what the researchers called a '"topic-associating" style of narrative, "consisting of a series of implicitly associated personal anecdotes, often involving shifts in time, location, and key characters, with no explicit statement of an overall theme or point" (Michaels & Cazden, 1986, pp 136-137). This narrative style was often viewed negatively by the teachers, who found the children's stories difficult to follow and lacking in cohesiveness.

> To the extent that children get practice clarifying, expanding, and focusing their discourse to meet a teacher's implicit literate notions about how information should be organized and lexicalized, collaborative exchanges…may serve to bridge the gap between children's home-based oral discourse competence and the more literate discourse strategies valued in school and required in written communication" (p. 138).

In my small research group (22 subjects), the representation of any single ethnic background was often limited to one or two children. For example, there is only one African-American child in the class. To classify that child's narrative style by racial tendencies would be inappropriate and invalid. Nonetheless, the children did demonstrate many types of speaking styles, which I observed and noted as the conversations ensued.

The "Sharing Time" research studies are relevant to my own research in their emphasis on the critical role of the teacher in validating children's attempts to communicate effectively in the classroom. These studies also connect with the previously cited research on children's peer relationships; Sharing Time as a performance-oriented form of speech provides children with an opportunity to present information themselves which may serve as a point of connection with classmates. Given the reality that children

bring a wide variety of narrative styles to their school environments, it is essential that teachers be prepared to respond carefully to each student's remarks.

II: Design of Study

I concentrated my data collection on the "Morning Meeting" component of the school day because of its regularity and predictability in the pre-kindergarten schedule, and also because it is a central element of the teachers' focus on building community. In determining the parameters for my research, I conducted the investigation as a microethnography, according to Berg's (2004) definition:

> Microethnography focuses on particular *incisions* at particular points in the larger setting, group, or institution. Typically, these specific points are selected because they in some manner represent salient elements in the lives of participants, and in turn, the life of the larger group or institution (p. 150).

Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2005) provided an even more specific label for the type of research I conducted. They described classroom language research in the context of microethnography and in the tradition of an ethnography of communication (p. xv). "Language not only is the object of study in research on classroom language and literacy events but it is also the means through which the research occurs" (p. xvi), they noted. These descriptions of research methodology matched precisely the manner in which I intended to work: by focusing on a brief but recurring element in the classroom day, I hoped to gather data that would inform my understanding of children's language use in a more general sense. The morning meeting is a bounded event in the day, and it involves a distinct form of talk: There is a clear beginning and end to the morning meeting, and its structure contains a specific sequence of activities and types of talk. I collected 47 recordings over the course of the year, for a complete data set that represented more than one recording per week.

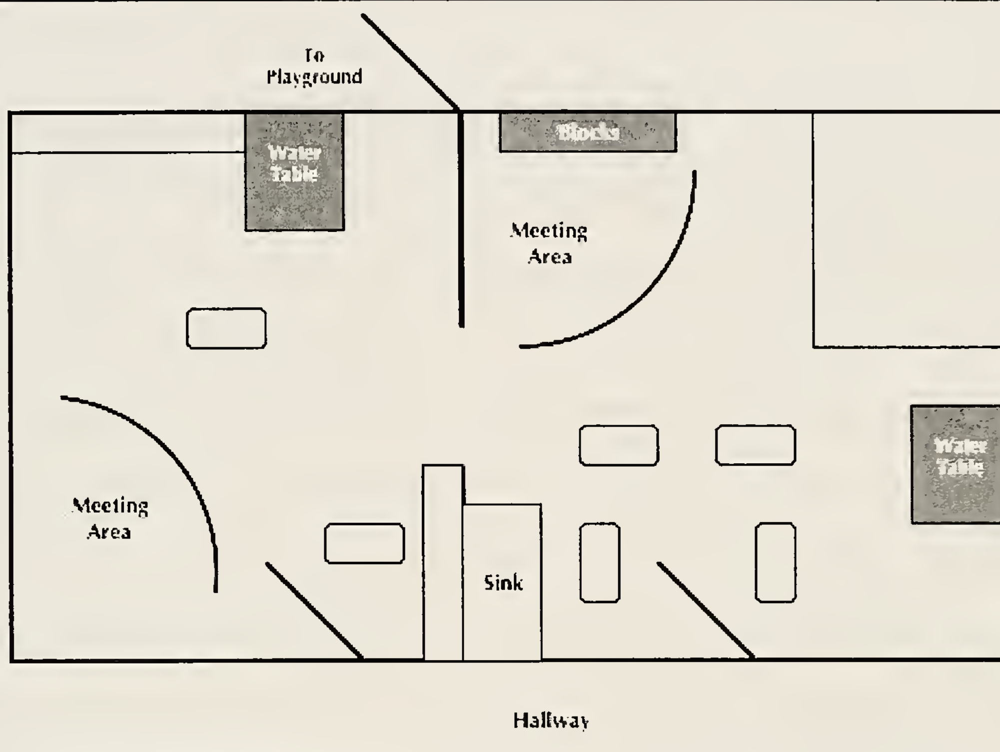
Description of Research Setting

I conducted this study in a private elementary school in the Boston suburbs, serving a population of 267 children beginning in pre-kindergarten and ending at grade 8. Students at the school come from approximately 30 cities and towns in the greater Boston area. The school's population is ethnically, socially, economically, and racially diverse. I focused my research in the pre-K classroom, which serves children between the ages of 4 and 5.

The pre-kindergarten class consists of 22 children, 11 boys and 11 girls. Their large classroom features a partial wall that separates the room into two spaces, each of which features a meeting area (see Figure 1 on next page). The entire classroom is used by all the children during most of their social time; however, they are divided into half-groups for academic instruction. Each morning, children enter the classroom for "tabletop time," some with adult caregivers, between 7:50 and 8:15 a.m. They find many choices and materials for activities on the classroom tables.

Parents and caregivers may remain in the room until the teachers ring the classroom chimes at 8:30 a.m. At that point, children clean up their tables and wait to be excused to their mats in the classroom meeting areas. These areas are defined by a special carpeted region on the floor. The curved carpet stripes help the children keep their mats in the correct spots.

Figure 1: Classroom Diagram



The morning meeting is the first structured activity of the day. It lasts between 15 and 30 minutes, depending on the teacher's goals and other factors, such as specialist schedules and the weather. (The weather is a factor because on most days, the children go outside directly after morning meeting. If the weather is poor, the teachers accommodate the lost outside time by extending tabletop time, begin the morning meeting later, and occasionally extending the morning meeting). Each teacher has a meeting area for her group. Each morning, therefore, there are two simultaneous meetings comprised of one teacher, 11 students, and often a graduate student teacher. It is not unusual for a visitor to be present. As the director of the teacher training program, I am often in attendance to observe the student teacher, but just as often, I or someone else may join the class to

observe individual children or the whole group. During the year that I conducted this research, I was such a frequent presence in the classroom that the children thought of me as one of their regular teachers.

Characteristics of Participant Group

There are 22 children in the class, as noted above, 11 boys and 11 girls. Fourteen of the children are Caucasian. One child is adopted from China, one is African-American, one is adopted from Central America, one is biracial Asian-Caucasian, one is from Spain, one is from India. Four children speak languages other than English (Farsi, Hindi, Spanish, and French) at home. Several children participate in out-of-school language and culture classes in Chinese, Spanish, and French. Two children are from single-parent families. Five are only children. Seven are oldest siblings. Eight are youngest siblings. Two are middle siblings. The range of ethnicities, family styles, and languages in this class is representative of the overall school population. The class is divided into two groups, each of which has a name that was selected by the children. One group is the Dalmations; the other is the Dragonflies.

Data Gathering Process

On the mornings that I recorded the children's meetings, I went into the classroom a few minutes before the end of "tabletop time" to greet the children and adults in the room and to find a seat in the morning meeting area. I alternated between the two teachers' meeting areas so that over the course of the year I collected approximately the same number of recordings from each group. For the majority of recordings, I was present in the room for the entire morning meeting. In addition to the audio recordings

that I collected, I also took notes about the children's and teachers' actions and statements. Most of these notes were brief reminders to myself about which speaker made certain statements. I described non-verbal exchanges, as well as events or visual stimuli that were discussed among the children, side conversations or distractions, and contextual observations such as the weather, new items in the room, or situations that had happened previous to the meeting which might impact the children's remarks or behavior. I also recorded observations about where the teachers' attention was directed during the discussions. Midway through the year, I began including a diagram of the circle to identify of where each person was seated in the gathering. On a very few occasions, I was called away from the classroom for other business. In those situations, I left the recording device with one of the teachers in the room and retrieved it later in the day.

As a faculty member at the research site, I had extended access to the classroom. My familiarity with the setting provided a rich context for my investigation, and also made my presence in the classroom a regular part of the children's day. On the first day of school, I demonstrated my recording device for the children and answered their questions about it. The children were fully aware that they were being recorded. Occasionally, a child would become distracted by the device if it happened to be near his or her spot on the floor, but I did not observe any changes in the children's speech behavior that would indicate that the recorder altered or affected their language or their participation in the group conversation.

Recording and Transcription Process

I recorded the children's meetings in a digital format, using an Apple iPod™ device with an attached microphone. After collecting each recording, I downloaded the file into my computer's iTunes™ application. This process allowed me to catalog and organize the sound files, and to extract selections easily, using QuickTime™ digital media software.

The technical aspects of transcription involved entextualizing the spoken words as closely as possible. I entered the text into the computer using a digital closed-captioning application called MAGPIE™, which was developed by the WGBH National Center for Accessible Media. This application allowed me to attach the audio file I had downloaded directly to the text transcript. When I had finished transcribing, I could play the file through MAGPIE. I also exported each transcript into Microsoft Word™ for ease and flexibility in formatting and extracting selected sections.

I collected a total of 47 recordings over the course of the year, although I did not intend to use all of them in my analysis. Eliot Mishler, in his writing (1991) about transcription, and in a presentation to Caroline Heller's research and writing seminar, observed that researchers have a tendency to gather data sets that are too large for their investigations, and that a sensible approach is to work with a selected subset of the data for preliminary analysis. Since I was interested in development in the children's discourse behavior over time, I chose to transcribe and analyze a small set of 12 recordings that would represent different portions of the year: four from the fall, another set of four from the middle of the school year, and a final small set from the spring for a

total of twelve recordings. I defined the ‘beginning’ of the year as the period from the first day of school until the end of October. This choice was informed partly by the teachers’ practice; they spend the first six to eight weeks of the year establishing routines and introducing classroom practices. My boundaries for the ‘middle’ of the year began on the day school resumed after Thanksgiving break and continued through the end of March, a period of approximately four months, punctuated by December break and February vacation. For the “end” of the year, I chose samples recorded from the end of April vacation until the last day of school. Again, this determination was made in part because of the teachers’ practice; during the final eight weeks of school, the teachers and students made frequent references to the number of days left in the year and they reviewed and refined material that they had been learning all year. My choices were also determined by a desire to represent both teachers’ classes equally, so I selected my final data set by balancing the number of recordings from each group. These 12 transcripts would form the basis of the analysis, with excerpts from additional recordings included to add depth and texture to the discussion.

Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Transcription

Researchers working with child language and classroom discourse data have noted a number of issues in representing spoken language in a written and analyzable form. The challenges I needed to resolve in light of the goals and emphasis of my study included establishing a means of capturing and describing a variety of forms of communication, creating a format that did not prioritize any participant, representing overlapping speech, and deciding on the level of detail to be represented. For Edwards

and Westgate (1994), there was a philosophical and theoretical basis for choosing between "the immediate coding of observed behavior as it occurs, and the creation of an audio- or audio-visual record that can be replayed after the event" (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p. 60). At the most basic level of data analysis, then, the first decision I made was the choice to create permanent recordings of the children's meetings.

Once the decision to make recordings had been established, there was no doubt that I needed to create text transcripts of the audio recordings. As Cameron (2001) stated, "Without a transcript—a written/graphic representation—talk is impossible to analyze systematically" (p. 31). She further noted that "transcribing is a way to bring into focus the characteristics of spoken discourse, which are surprisingly obscure to most people" (p. 33). "Transcripts are our constructions and making them is one of our central research practices," said Mishler (1991, p. 277). My transcripts needed to include the spoken language of the teachers and children, but I also needed to document non-verbal communication elements such as eye gaze or gestures, as well as information about the location of children in the room, interruptions or distractions from outside the morning meeting area, and other relevant data.

I needed to make decisions related to several aspects of the research, and I consulted several sources about transcription theory and methodology. Bloome, et al. (2005) commented on the importance of defining what, precisely, about language I intended to investigate: "Researchers must decide what it is they are studying when they claim to study classroom language…The boundaries they impose…what they connect their bit of research to, what frames of reference they use, are all part of a definition of language" (p. 3). Cameron (2001) noted that "when we speak we use pausing, and,

especially, intonation (pitch and stress) to 'chunk' our talk into units...generally what the boundaries signal is the structure the speaker wishes to impose on the information s/he is giving" (p. 35). These comments related to one of the first elements I needed to address and how I wanted to code and label the segments of language I would investigate in the formatting of my transcripts: Would I attempt to encode the children's speech in fine detail, employing the diacritical marks of discourse analysts, indicating changes in inflection and marking pauses and other elements of speech, or would I simply type the words that were spoken, relying on conventional punctuation marks to signify full stops and pauses? How would I represent such aspects of the discourse as overlapping speech, interruptions, or turn sequences?

Mishler raised these questions and others, noting, "these procedural and methodological decisions reflect implicit theoretical assumptions..." (Mishler, 1991, p. 261). The assumptions to which Mishler referred, and the work of discourse analysts in general, typically apply to analysis of speech among competent adults. The data that I have collected is, quite explicitly, *not* the conversation of competent adults. Therefore, many of the behaviors that are notable in adult conversation were either not present or were only present in immature forms in these morning meetings. As I assembled the transcripts of the children's meetings, it was critical that I focused on the developmental level of the children. Their knowledge of when and how to take turns or when and how to introduce new topics is still emerging; with this reality in mind, it was extremely important that I include references to the children's verbal contributions and also their gestures or non-verbal signals so that I could document their progress in gaining the skills of competent conversation. In my analysis of events and interactions, I was also able to

review the transcripts with the teachers and ask for their assessment of certain exchanges; in addition, after many morning meetings, I had follow-up conversations with the teachers about events or comments that had occurred during the lessons. These contributions were valuable in interpreting possible intentions or referential statements that the children made.

One of the major issues I needed to address in the transcription process was the occurrence of overlapping speech. Cameron (2001) pointed out that "a transcript needs to show this going on, and using standard writing conventions like commas and full stops may obscure it by making conversation look like a succession of distinct, self-contained clauses, when it really does not sound like that" (p. 35). This type of speech behavior is directly related to turn-taking and the recognition of which participant in a conversation has the "floor." Overlapping speech is a recurring issue in analysis of adult speech, and in the subtle observations and behaviors required of adults in the process of conversation. Learning to interpret the cues of timing, topic, and status for turn-taking within a group conversation can be seen as one of the central elements in communicative competence, and interpreting the nuances of overlapping speech is an interest for linguists, including Johnstone (2002):

> Speakers may (or may not) start their turns when the previous speaker's turn *could be* ending (at the end of a phrase, for example), but they do not always wait until the previous speaker has *in fact* stopped talking. In other words, in most conversations there are frequent occasions when more than one person is talking at once. Such 'overlaps' are not always perceived as interruptions; often they are not perceived at all,

> because they are expected and not disruptive. For some speakers and in some situations, overlapping speech can be seen as cooperative and can help build rapport between speakers. (p. 73)

I intended to analyze the ability of children to recognize the effects of their interjections on the rest of the group. Cazden (2001) commented, "It becomes important to try to understand when overlapping speech is an interruption and when it expresses peer solidarity and support" (p. 86). There are, in addition to these distinctions, many other reasons for overlapping speech, especially among children who have not yet learned to master their impulses and who are still learning how to participate in a large-group conversation. I also needed to distinguish overlapping speech from "latched speech" (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p. 66), in which one speaker's turn follows immediately after another's with no pause between turns. Because I was interested in the dynamics that occurred when children's speech overlapped or followed directly on the remarks of another, I was certain that I needed a coding scheme for this element of discourse.

There are a number of means by which a researcher can purposely or inadvertently present one speaker as the dominant voice. Ochs (1979) noted that in adult-child interactions, transcripts often tend to represent the adult as the dominant or higher-ranking participant in the conversation. For example, "whichever speaker is assigned to the leftmost column has a better than average possibility of being [perceived by the reader as] an initiator of a sequence of talk" (p. 50) and also, "the first move in an interactional sequence becomes a point of reference for the remainder of the episode at hand" (p. 50). Ochs examined the options for physical layout of a transcript, discussing

the various cultural biases inherent in a top-to-bottom format for linear transcripts, or in a left-to-right format for columnar transcripts.

As I began the transcription process for my own data set, I was pleased to note the number of occasions where a child, and not the teacher, had created the point of reference in the conversation. In many situations when a new topic was introduced, it was a child who brought the topic to the floor, thereby creating a new "point of reference." Although Ochs' discussion of power structure in transcription provided a necessary caution, the conversations in my data did not, in my analysis, appear to be dominated by the adults, and I chose to format my transcripts in a linear format.

A related issue for transcription formatting concerns the amount of information to include in the documentation. Given the relatively large volume of data that I collected, there were many possible methods for transcribing and organizing these recordings. As I continued to gather resources and locate models for transcription protocols, I soon realized that if I applied all of the methods recommended by the researchers, my transcripts would be cumbersome to produce and to read. Ochs (1979) advised, "selectivity, then, is to be encouraged. But selectivity should not be random and implicit. Rather, the transcriber should be conscious of the filtering process" (p. 44). Gee (1999) echoed this argument, stating, "ultimately it is the purpose of the analyst that determine how narrow or broad the transcript must be" (p. 88). Making sure to include entire sequences of talk to provide context, I focused my analysis on the types of speech acts and discourse moves I was most interested in investigating, and relied on those choices to determine my transcription protocol.

My primary interests in this study are the children's conversational behaviors and emerging competencies in turn-taking, topic management, and overlapping speech. For the most part, I chose to rely on conventional spelling and punctuation to entextualize the speakers' words. Although the data present many opportunities to analyze the children's speech patterns, intonations, articulation, and elocution, I chose to focus primarily on the meaning in the children's utterances and on the sequence of the conversations. However, for a small number of recurring speech elements, I applied the conventions in Table 1.

Table 1: Transcription Markers

Marker	Meaning
[	Right-facing brackets identify places where a speaker's turn is being interrupted or where overlapping speech occurs.
]	Left-facing brackets indicate the interruptor/overlapper's speech.
=	An equals-sign indicates latched speech; situations when there is no pause between speakers.
/	A single slash indicates a brief pause.
//	More than one slash indicates a longer pause.
(…)	An ellipsis inside parentheses indicates a segment of indistinguishable speech.
Fa:vorite	A colon in the middle of a word indicates that the speaker extends or elongates the pronunciation of a word or syllable.
We^ather	A caret inserted in a word indicates that the speaker's pitch or tone rises to place stress on a syllable or word.
[*name of town*]	A bracketed comment indicates a remark that was stricken in order to protect the speaker's identity.
(laughs)	Text in italics indicates non-verbal or non-linguistic communication acts.

Ethical Considerations

Although this research project met all the criteria for exemption from human subject research protocols, I felt it was very important to inform the school administration, faculty, and most critically, the families of the children about the study.

I have been extremely fortunate in the support and encouragement my research has enjoyed throughout my school community. As I prepared to conduct the study, the head of school wrote a letter to the parents and caregivers of the pre-kindergarten classroom (see Appendix), commenting on the ways in which this type of research would contribute to the expertise of our faculty. I also met with the two pre-kindergarten teachers and discussed the project; they were enthusiastic and shared my curiosity about the children's language. I sent a consent form and letter home (see Appendix) to all the families in the classroom; 100% of the families gave permission for their children's participation in the study. In addition, I received a professional development grant from my school's technology department, since I was planning to collect my data using a digital device. This last component of the project entailed my giving a presentation about the research to my faculty colleagues at the end of the year, an exercise that helped me focus my analytical procedures.

To protect the subjects' identities, every child and teacher in the study was given a pseudonym. These names were used in all transcription and in all discussion of the data. Although the teachers' actual names are used in my citations and acknowledgements, I have made every effort to prevent a reader from determining which teacher is the leader of which group. On the few occasions when I participated in the conversation, my remarks are indicated with my initials, LFG, in the transcripts. In situations where the

data is shared through an audio presentation, the children's real names are unavoidably included, but any text accompanying the presentation uses the pseudonyms. In addition, I removed any specific references to names of family members, or details such as birthdays or towns of residence.

Selection of Discourse Behaviors

My investigation centers on the children's increasing competence when participating in group conversation. I wanted to gauge the relevance of children's remarks to the topic at hand or to the ongoing collective knowledge of the group, as well as their ability to apply linguistic and social skills of group conversation. In my analysis, therefore, I considered children's competence from two perspectives: structure and meaning.

The first focus in my analysis centered on behaviors related to community and membership in a group, and the ways these were taught as part of the classroom conversation. As I examined the transcripts, I identified the teachers' direction of the conversations to establish connections among group members, to recognize and acknowledge children in the group, and to manage turn-taking, interruptions, and spontaneous remarks. These three teaching goals aligned with three categories of discourse behaviors: solidarity moves, ratification, and turn-taking.

The second perspective (meaning) is a component of topic management. Because their sociolinguistic skills are still emerging, young children tend to lack a sophisticated ability to filter or prioritize the many topics that arise in the course of typical conversation. Ninio and Snow (1996), in their analysis of pragmatic development, noted that children's conversational skills are relatively immature in the areas of "maintaining

topic relevance or observing rules of timing and obligations to respond" (p. 146). Their attention may be drawn to a passing remark or reference, or they may misunderstand an unfamiliar word or concept. Therefore, it is not unusual in a conversation with young children to find the topic shifting quickly.

Given this tendency in young children's linguistic behavior, listeners often are not immediately able to determine the connection or purpose for a child's statement in the course of a conversation. In my data set, I identified numerous occasions where children's remarks referred to concepts that had been briefly mentioned and that were not part of the main topic stream. Although these remarks were not entirely random, they had the effect of re-directing the topic flow of a conversation. I found that the linguistic concept of *cohesion* served as a unifying theme for much of my analysis of topic flow. Gee (1999) provided a clear and concise definition of this concept:

> Speakers and writers have to do more than connect clauses within sentences. They must also connect sentences across whole texts. The grammatical devices we use to create such connections are called *cohesive devices*. They signal to the hearer the connections between sentences of a text and are part of what makes a text sound like it 'hangs together.' (p. 159)

In competent conversation, cohesive devices take the form of transitional statements, such as 'speaking of…' or 'that reminds me of…' and similar phrases. Typically, 4-and 5-year old children lack the skill of using these devices. Ninio and Snow (1996) found that "explicit marking of cross-utterance relations … is extremely rare in the speech of 6-year-olds" and that even 12-year olds had not reached maturity in this

aspect of conversation (p.155). As a result, children's attempts at cohesive linking are often abrupt. As I reviewed the transcripts, I noted the occurrence of what I refer to as 'naïve cohesive attempts;' statements that referred to concepts that were not directly related to the topic at hand. I was interested in tracking the teachers' responses to these naïve cohesive attempts; that is, whether they resulted in a topic shift in the conversation or were ignored or only briefly acknowledged by the teacher.

Solidarity: The "Me-Too" Gesture. In the context of this investigation, solidarity relates to the social dynamics of conversation and the idea that individuals establish common knowledge and build relationships and connections with each other through language: "Language use is really a form of joint action. A joint action is one that is carried out by an ensemble of people acting in coordination with each other" (Clark, 1996, p. 3). One recurring solidarity element that I tracked was the use of a non-verbal signal to indicate agreement or shared knowledge and experiences. This gesture, known throughout the school as the "me too" signal, is a hand motion that was taught on the first day of school and reinforced all year. Other solidarity moves include comments the children or teachers made to express empathy, to relate a similar experience to one described by another member of the group, or to build on an idea suggested by someone else.

The teachers in the study continually emphasized the importance of the "me-too" gesture as a means of building community; the message conveyed by the "me too" is one of agreement or shared knowledge. This non-verbal form of communication provides an opportunity for many participants to share in the discourse without interrupting the

speaker. At the beginning of the year, the signal was taught in both groups, then reinforced and encouraged throughout the rest of the year.

Mrs. Young is passionate about the importance of the "me-too" gesture. It is one of the first communication elements she teaches her students at the beginning of each year. "It sets the tone that 'I can share and not be interrupted,' or 'I feel safe to share, because I know that I can make a connection with other people, ' she said, adding,

> When you have a child getting used to an environment, and they're up there, and putting themselves out there, and sharing something, to have a friend shouting 'Me too! Me too!' can have a good effect, or it can have a negative effect, where the kid shuts down because he got interrupted and it's stolen his thunder and he doesn't want to do it. And when you take the time to teach that 'me-too,' it gives that child the empowerment to say 'hey, I want to make a connection here,' but it also empowers the child that's speaking to be able to keep going. So I would say that's really important to me.

Mrs. Ellis' group also learned the "me-too" gesture at the beginning of the school year. "It's important if you're going to listen to each other," she said. In Mrs. Ellis' group, direct instruction of non-verbal signals is presented gradually: "I usually wait for opportunities that naturally arise in the group, and use those as ways to teach."

Ratification. Ratification moves are those speech acts or nonverbal communication acts that demonstrate acceptance and authorization for others to participate in a discourse event. Goffman (1981) placed these dynamics in what he refers to as a participation framework, which he defined differently from Bloome, et al. (2005):

"All those who happen to be in perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it" (p. 3). Some of these individuals are ratified participants, and others (such as eavesdroppers or those who inadvertently overhear a conversation) are non-ratified participants. In the course of my observations in the pre-kindergarten, it became clear that the children did not always recognize their own role in the participation framework.

In the morning meeting and in other group time on the rug, the teachers' goal was for the children to be quiet, engaged participants. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young described and demonstrated what being "ready" for meeting looked like: the children would sit on their mats with their legs crossed, their eyes on the teacher or the speaker, and their voices turned off unless it was their turn to speak.

On many occasions, children's attention would shift away from the group conversation if they were not either speaking or being directly addressed. One of the more difficult roles for these young children to understand was that of Goffman's "ratified listener;" the group member who is present and attentive but who does not speak. The children's impulsive nature and their enthusiasm for the topics addressed in morning meeting made it extremely difficult for them to suppress their thoughts or to wait for their turn to speak.

The teachers employed a variety of strategies to gain the entire group's attention and re-direct the children whose focus had wandered. Ratification, therefore, became an increasingly important element for analysis.

Turn-Taking and Topic Shifting. The final aspect of conversation in this analysis, turn-taking, is the process by which various speakers make moves, either verbally or non-

verbally, to take for themselves or grant to others the opportunity to contribute to the discourse. For the children in this classroom, the work of monitoring themselves and controlling their impulses was compounded by the limitations of their still-emerging linguistic competence. One challenge they faced was determining when and how to claim a turn to speak in a group conversation. This determination depends on a number of factors, many of which are specific to a particular discourse community, or in ethnographic terms, a "participation structure" (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 28).

In such a context, turn-taking rules are "shared expectations among participants regarding the patterns of turn-taking protocols for a particular type of situation or event" (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 28). In some situations in the morning meeting, the teachers systematically granted turns at speech around the circle, providing the clear message that each child's turn would come in sequence. Sometimes this procedure was described explicitly, and the teachers would name the children in order before proceeding with the turns. As the children became more accustomed to this practice, the teachers occasionally relied on eye gaze alone as a signaling gesture. In other situations, the teachers instructed the children to raise their hands in order to claim a turn. Despite these efforts and the amount of practice and repeated instruction provided, turn-taking protocols were not always so well-defined, and children needed to use cues from the teacher, including eye gaze or gestures, as well as an understanding of the topic at hand, in order to make appropriate attempts for a turn.

Interruptions were frequent in the morning meetings. Such behavior is common in any naturally occurring discourse events among adults as well as children, but certain types of interruptions may demonstrate naïve or incompetent participation is

interruption; as discussed above, some interruptions can be classified as solidarity moves while others are either inadvertent communication errors or insensitive, impulsive, ego-centric utterances made without regard for the other members of the group. It is these latter types that the teachers addressed with the children.

Within the category of turn-taking and interruptions is overlapping speech, which can be either an interruption or a sign of solidarity. I encountered numerous examples of overlapping speech in the classroom, particularly when an exciting topic presented itself and several children wanted to respond at the same time. Cazden (2001) observed this behavior, and recognized that its impact on the group was dependent on the situation: "To monitor speaking rights in this less procedural and more substantive sense, we have to look beyond the sequence of speakers to the sequence of ideas" (p. 87), she advised. When children's voices joined to share ideas, their behavior had a positive tone within the group. However, there were other moments when multiple voices competed, rather than sounding choral. Cazden (2001) commented, "It becomes important to try to understand when overlapping speech is an interruption and when it expresses peer solidarity and support" (p. 86).

One of the teacher's responsibilities in such circumstances is to facilitate the conversation and monitor interruptions to make sure that the more dominant voices do not overwhelm the less confident members of the circle. Both teachers commented on this component of their work, describing the children who had the potential to dominate the conversation, and the ones who needed encouragement and support in order to have their voices heard in the group. For both Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young, this level of awareness and active intervention is a necessary element in building a true community.

According to their teaching philosophy, each child in the class had both the right and the obligation not only to have a voice, but to hear the voices of the others. Interruptions of some children were taken more seriously than interruptions of others, as the transcripts throughout this document demonstrate. The children who interrupted frequently, or whose remarks were not related to the topic at hand, were typically addressed with a firmer tone than the children who rarely contributed, or whose comments served to enhance the conversation. This practice is a critical element of conversation with young children. Ninio and Snow observed that "adults tend to protect children's turns, but in peer-interaction situations children must learn to hold the floor long enough to finish their own turns" (p. 149); Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young's emphasis on turn-taking represents an important part of scaffolding and community building as the children learned to negotiate their turns in group conversations.

Interruptions and turn-taking can be interpreted as elements of the power structure within a classroom, and the children with more dominant voices or more sophisticated communicative skills can assert themselves either positively or negatively. Some of the more boisterous children in this class would not be described as aggressive or domineering, yet their frequent and quick responses often prevented others from participating. Other children's interruptions had a more negative impact, particularly in situations where they vehemently disagreed with another child or attempted to take over a classmate's turn to provide an answer first. In Erickson's (2004) observation of Angie and her attempts to gain the teacher's attention, he described the behavior of Angie's classmates, who were also vying for a turn to speak. He labeled one group the "turn sharks;" these were the children who would "watch for damage in other speakers'

turns…taking the turn away from a speaker who had faltered or committed some error in appropriateness" (p. 55). In Erickson's analysis, the turn sharks' behavior demonstrated their understanding (albeit in an overly assertive manner) of the rules of conversational turn-taking and turn-management. In such cases, Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis acted more vigilantly, stopping the interruptor and re-directing the turn sequence to allow the initial speaker to finish a turn. For some of the more habitually spontaneous speakers, this was a lesson that needed to be repeated often.

In this classroom, the teachers were aware of and sensitive to the children's varying levels of confidence, eagerness, or willingness to speak, and they worked patiently with their students to achieve their goals of community and linguistic competence. In other, less attentive classrooms, children who do not assert themselves verbally may be at risk of being perceived negatively by their teachers. Kim (2002) commented that different cultures value talk to differing degrees, and that "the amount of talk and the degree of quietness endorsed by a culture may have an overpowering impact on the communication motivation of most people in that culture" (p. 34). Given this variation, it is critical for teachers to be aware of the cultural tendencies toward language that their students bring to the classroom, especially since Kim found that "teachers tend to have lower expectations of communication-apprehensive students, which lead to lower achievement" (p. 35). The teacher's need to recognize these differences is important as a component of building a sense of community and making each student feel validated as a member of the group. Of particular relevance is the recognition that children from different cultures or those from non-mainstream linguistic traditions may have been

provided with models or values about assertiveness that make them less likely to initiate conversation or offer unsolicited comments.

Kim (2002) commented on the phenomenon that "in the United States, assertive behaviors are perceived as more competent and attractive than unassertive behaviors" (p. 46). She went on to note that "assertive interpersonal skills are a basic necessity for effective functioning in many aspects of life in the United States. The nonassertive pattern common among ethnic minorities has been judged by some to be psychologically dysfunctional and has become a target for intervention" (2002, p. 52). Kim's multicultural perspective on language use is significant with respect to the expectations and assumptions that teachers have for competent linguistic behavior, and bears upon the children's future success in American society.

Another challenge that the children presented to their teachers in the course of turn-taking was the issue of topic flow. Often, children's responses or spontaneous remarks had the potential of shifting the discussion away from the topic at hand. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young faced frequent decisions about whether or not to accept and incorporate topics raised by the children in each meeting I recorded. In my coding of the transcripts, I chose to label these exchanges "uptakes," a term introduced in the work of Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long (2003). These researchers described uptake as "occurring when one conversant, for example, a teacher, asks someone else, for example, a student, about something the other person said previously" (p. 145). My adaptation of Nystrand, et al.'s definition focuses on the remarks of students as well as the teachers, and is connected closely with cohesiveness. Uptake events in my analysis are defined as occurring when one member of the group asks a question or makes a comment that a)

follows on something stated or referred to by the teacher or another student, and b) when that remark has the result of changing the topic being addressed by the group for at least one turn exchange. One example of such an uptake event occurred in the conversation on March 20 (transcribed on page 113), when Emily introduced the notion of the first day of spring, effectively changing the topic from a discussion of sleeping bags to a conversation about seasons.

III: Results

The recordings that I collected provided many examples of the children's gradual development of communicative competence in the three areas of discourse that I had identified for analysis. The teachers' attention to, and direct instruction in, these discourse behaviors, were evident throughout the year.

Solidarity

As noted above, the "me too" gesture was one of the first and arguably most strongly emphasized components in the children's repertoire of communication skills. On the first day of school, Mrs. Young found an opportunity to provide direct instruction in this non-verbal indicator:

Flat Tires

(September 8: First Day of School)

Nyla: My mom//we got in the car but then the wheel was flat.

Mrs. Young: I know, that's what your mom told me that happened this morning.

Nicky: My mom had a flat tire once.

Trip: My mom did too.

Mrs. Young: Oh! My goodness/ and I'm so glad that Nicky and Trip said that to Nyla, because now I can teach you another silent symbol. I just want to teach you one quick thing. Another way/ Nyla was talking, but you want to say, 'I did that too, 'or 'that happened to me, too/' If you want to say that, you can say that without even using your words, so you don't interrupt a friend. Can everybody take their thumb, put it up, put all your other fingers down, and then bring your pinky up. So all fingers are down, except for your pinky and your thumb. Everybody try that?

Trip: I have something to share!

Mrs. Young: Then you need to raise your hand, but right now I'm just giving this symbol, and I know that Emmett has something to share too, but he is practicing first, so can you practice too?

Nate: I know what that is; it's the signal to/

Trip: I can't do it!

Mrs. Young: You're doing it already, you were doing it. There you go, So, if you want to say [

Trip: [Is that like this? [Yup]

Mrs. Young: Oh/ put your thumb out and put this finger down. There you go, you did it. Now, when you have your hands like this, (more interruptions) that's right, like this, Trip. And we'll learn that after. But this one, so Nicky, you want to tell Nyla that happened to you, too, right? So you could do this to Nyla, so everybody move your arm like this, and that lets that person know, without having to use your voice or your words, you can infer from that, 'hey, I did that too!' So if you've ever had a flat tire in your car, put your hand up like this, and give Nyla a 'me, too." And now Nyla knows that that's happened to Trip, and it's happened to Diana, and it's happened to Nicky, and it's happened to me. OK, and we'll practice that a lot.

In this exchange, Mrs. Young's remarks served two instructional purposes. Her primary goal was related to establishing community, partly by encouraging the children to identify common interests and experiences within the group. Therefore, she took up Nyla's initial remark about the flat tire, and responded enthusiastically when several other children called out about their own experiences with flat tires. She explained in

great detail the importance of not having to "use your voice or your words," to avoid interrupting a friend.

Shared experiences like these, Mrs. Young knew, are a means of helping the children find common ground and building connections. However, in this first meeting, she also needed to teach them the specific hand and finger positions in addition to explaining the purpose of the gesture. Over the course of the first two months of my data collection, the "me-too" was reinforced and encouraged by the teachers in both groups, with the expectation that the children would begin to use the gesture on their own without being instructed to do so by the teachers. By the end of October, the children were beginning to demonstrate greater familiarity with the gesture:

Snow

October 24

Emily: Snow is my fa:vorite kind of we^ather!

Mrs. Ellis: *(laughs)*

Choral: Me too! Me too!

Mrs. Ellis: You know what? We don't need to shout; we have a signal.

Neal: You know what? My favorite season is fall, because that's when I have my favorite sport.

Mrs. Ellis' reminder in this exchange was very brief. As she spoke, she demonstrated the signal. Several children picked up on her cue immediately and copied it. Exchanges of this type occurred through the winter and spring, with children excitedly responding to their classmates' comments, and the teachers reminding them about the signal. By March, all the children knew and produced the gesture with the briefest of

reminders, and it was evident that they knew it by name without the teacher demonstrating the move:

Black-Capped Chickadees

March 20

Mrs. Ellis: We need to find a bird where the call is the same as the name. Emily, what are you thinking of?

Emily: A black-capped chickadee. It goes 'chicka dee dee dee dee, chick a dee dee dee dee.

Voices: (Talking over Emily)

Mrs. Ellis: You can give her a 'me too' if that's also what you were thinking of.

Ellie: I was/ I just couldn't think of it.

Mrs. Ellis: Just give her the 'me too.' (She demonstrates, and many children give the gesture). All right. So today, we're going to do 'Jay, Jay' as we greet each other. So we're going to start out with 'Jay, Jay, Walter." (Demonstrates holding the bird and passing it to Walter, who is next to her). And you can pass that to Emily.

Mrs. Ellis' assumption that the children would know what to do when she said, "You can give her a 'me too,' " is an indication of how thoroughly the gesture had become integrated into the children's communication patterns within the group. A number of children immediately gave the gesture, looking at Emily to be sure that she saw them sharing their agreement with her response.

By the last week of school, the children were initiating the signal and using it appropriately in their meetings:

Sleeping Beauty

June 7

Mrs. Ellis: (leads the group in a favorite song) All right. Do you remember that one? Let's sing it again, now that you remember. OK. How's it start?

Choral: (the whole group sings the song).

Mrs. Ellis: All right. (Starts a new song about Sleeping Beauty).

Emily: I know that one too! It's Sleeping Beauty.]

Olivia: [(does the signal). Me too.

Ellie: That's kind of like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, because she pricks her finger and Snow White eats a poison apple, but they fall asleep.

Stephen: I love it when she falls asleep.

Mrs. Ellis: (continues the song). Ready, on your horses!

In this brief exchange, the children's comments and gestures supported the ongoing business of the meeting. Olivia's "me too" gesture was recognized, and she did not interrupt Emily's remark; instead, she was able to demonstrate her connection to the conversation in silent solidarity as Emily, Ellie, and Stephen each shared a comment that was sanctioned by the teacher's gaze.

Solidarity and community building took many forms in the classroom. The teachers organized group activities and shared experiences to give the children multiple ways of connecting with each other. Both teachers used chants, clapping patterns, and games to practice group participation. Over the course of the year, certain songs and routines became so familiar that the children could lead them, and the teachers encouraged them to do so. However, not all the children wanted to be led, and their

behavior sometimes indicated a desire for independence, even at the cost of group harmony. At the beginning of May, Mrs. Ellis' group struggled to stay in unison on a greeting song. Mrs. Ellis decided to use the situation as a teachable moment:

Finish All Together

May 10

Mrs. Ellis: All right. What's the point of that song?

Ellie: To finish all together.

Mrs. Ellis: To finish all together/

Ellie: It's not the point to make it a race. Because some people are doing it really faster, so they can get finished first.

Mrs. Ellis: OK, you're right, it's not a race. It's a song that we share together. // So, we should start and finish together, right? And the other point is, where do your hands end up?

Choral: In your lap.

Mrs. Ellis: In your lap! So then you're ready for morning meeting. All right, because your hands are on your own body, and they're quietly in your lap. All right. Let's try that again, and this time, we're going to start/ and finish all together. And then we'll be ready for morning meeting. And I have an activity, a game, that I'd like to play. So let's do a good job on this, so this will be the last time we need to practice. Walter?

Walter: Did you notice I have a Band-Aid?

Mrs. Ellis: I did notice that while you were using the modeling clay. But I didn't have a chance to talk about it. That would be a great thing to talk about during snack. Press that "Save" button. There we go. All right. OK.

Michael: Can I start?

Mrs. Ellis: Michael, are you asking if you can start it? All right, why don't you start it?

Michael: One, two, three/

Choral: (the group sings the song)]

Olivia: [(shouts) Emily, you're not supposed to be doing it that way!

Mrs. Ellis: All right. Now let's/ Who can remind me the two things that we talked about that song being about? Olivia, what's one of them?

Olivia: Um. Emily was doing it super fast.

Mrs. Ellis: Which means that/ what was she forgetting?

Olivia: To wait for/ to do it all together.]

Mrs. Ellis: [all together, because it's not//

Olivia: A race.

Mrs. Ellis: A race. The point of it is to do it all together. And the second point of doing it is, where do your hands end up?

Choral: In your lap.

Mrs. Ellis: And that's one of the things you need to do to get ready for morning meeting. OK, let's try it one more time.

Anita: Can I start?

Mrs. Ellis: Yes you can, Anita.

Anita: One, two,

Mrs. Ellis: Wait, maybe give the first direction for where they should put their hands, and that might help people. All right, everyone feel like they're ready to do it all together? Excellent. Wait for Anita.

Anita: One, two, three

Choral: (they sing the song again).

Ellie: But Emily did it too fast and she//

Mrs. Ellis: OK. We've tried it three times. And this looks like something that we could practice, and then eventually, the whole group would be able to do it together. And that would be a good thing. All right, we've already sent down the attendance slip and I was s:o happy to write on it// Emily, this is not a time to settle this, and Ellie, we're going to drop this. OK? So, what did I write on the attendance slip?

This meeting, occurring so close to the end of the year as it did, demonstrates the level of expectation that Mrs. Ellis had for her students in their group behavior. The teachers often used songs to start the meetings; this one in particular, as the children all knew, ended with their hands in their laps, a signal that they were settled and ready for the meeting. The practice of singing a song together was a strategy for building solidarity within the group, and Emily's effort to sing at her own speed was recognized as oppositional by the children and the teacher. Mrs. Ellis' decision to repeat the song three times is an indication of how much she wanted to emphasize the goal of unity in the group.

Just as Mrs. Ellis was preparing the group to make a second attempt at the song, Walter raised his hand and called her attention to the Band-Aid on his finger. This move is an example of a naïve cohesive attempt, as described above. Mrs. Ellis had exaggerated

the hand gesture at the end of the song to emphasize her point about children's hands ending up in their laps when they finished singing. Her comments and her gestures reminded Walter of his finger injury; he began looking carefully at his finger while the teacher was talking, then raised his hand. In this situation, Mrs. Ellis did not allow the conversation about Band-Aids to go beyond a single turn sequence, and she immediately returned to the goal of singing the song.

Embedded in the teachers' goals for community building was a value on responsibility to the group. The children were taught and reminded frequently to take care of the classroom, to keep themselves safe, and to take care of their friends. As they approached the end of the year, Mrs. Ellis introduced a formal structure for these responsibilities. She expressed her concern that the children had not been listening to each other and following the classroom rules, so she decided to assign "buddies" who would help remind each other of the expectations:

Buddies

May 10

Mrs. Ellis: Now one thing we need to figure out is, let's say your buddy isn't doing/ isn't following the directions. What are some of the ways that we could remind them of what the directions are? Remember, you're bu:ddies. So what tone of voice do you want to use with a buddy? Russell?

Russell: We don't/ and whenever you're mad, don't even think about being mean.

Mrs. Ellis: You would not ever want to do anything that would hurt them. Remember that you're buddies, so what Russell reminded us of, is that we want to

use a pleasant voice. All right. Olivia, what's your idea about how you might remind your buddy?

Olivia: If somebody is having trouble, do not use your body. Or bite them. Cause they might bite you.

Mrs. Ellis: So you don't want to bite them, 'cause they might bite you back? But would you remind somebody to do/ does your mother remind you of what to do by biting you? No! So we wouldn't do that either.

Olivia: Cause once Russell said he would bite me.

Mrs. Ellis: Oh! That's great. I'm so glad you brought up/ you also don't want to threaten: 'If you don't do this, then I'm going to do that.' That is a threat. When you find yourself saying, for instance, 'if you don't get your backpack out of your cubby, I'm going to tell the teacher.' You are threatening the other person. What might be a way to get that person to get the backpack out of their cubby and bring it to the rug? Anita?

Anita: Say, 'please can you bring it to the rug?'

Mrs. Ellis: You can say 'please bring it to the rug.' What if they've forgotten? Estie?

Estie: Um, you can say, um, 'bring your backpack on the rug.'

Mrs. Ellis: OK, you can remind them of what the direction is. OK. And Ellie?

Ellie: Could you please bring the backpack to the rug.

Mrs. Ellis: Yeah. You could. Or, sometimes/ I'm going to give a suggestion because I want us to do this activity and work with our buddies. Sometimes what works is if you say, "Let's get your backpack.' And then the idea is/ you and your buddy would go and get the backpack together. And that's a lot of fun, is to do things together. All right.

Neal: Because working together makes a really big job not so small at all.

Mrs. Ellis: Not so big at all. Right? Yeah, it makes it feel smaller, doesn't it? That's a great point, Neal, is that working together makes jobs feel smaller. All right. Um, Emily, Ellie, and Olivia, and then let's do the activity so that we can have a chance to work with our buddies.

Emily: OK, I have one that might be nice to say to your partner if your partner forgot an instruction, we could say, um, 'the instructions were to bring your backpack to the rug, so let's get your backpack.'

Mrs. Ellis: Ah! That says it all, doesn't it? It gives the reminder, but it also says that you're willing to help them. That's great. OK. Could you put your shoes on, please? Ellie?

Ellie: It's kind of cool how me and Estie are buddies for a reason 'cause we both have the same shoes!

Mrs. Ellis: You know what? I didn't even think of that, but you talked about that yesterday, didn't you, that you both have the same shoes.

Estie: And we are also friends.

Mrs. Ellis: That's right. I tried to find people that were friends. Now, you (to Olivia) had something you wanted to say. So why don't you hop on your mat and/

Olivia: I forgot.

Mrs. Ellis: OK, you waited too long. OK, we're going to, with our buddies, play a game. And some of you have already started playing this a bit. The first thing you're going to do is count the number of digi blocks you have.

This discussion is a remarkable example of direct instruction in group conversation. Mrs. Ellis was detailed and explicit in her discussion with the children, but

she did not lecture them; rather, she expected the children to provide the details of each element of the plan. She addressed tone of voice first, gathering responses from the children and then re-phrasing their answers: “We want to use a pleasant tone of voice.” She then re-directed Olivia’s comments about biting, turning to the notion of threatening. She defined the term, gave an example, and asked for an alternative strategy. Ellie’s excitement about being paired with Estie added to the discussion. Her observation that she and Estie had the same shoes could be classified as a naïve cohesive attempt, since it was not directly related to the discussion about reminding each other about class rules. In this case, Mrs. Ellis eagerly incorporated the topic into her discussion, and framed Ellie’s statement in a way that allowed the class to reflect on importance of friendship and connection within the group.

Ratification

The children’s gradual recognition that they had a responsibility to the group occurred over weeks and months, to the point that by the end of the year, most students were able to attend to the business of morning meeting for the duration of the class. There are numerous examples in the data set where the teacher addressed one or more children to tell them explicitly what their was job in the group discussion. For these children, the clarification of what was expected of them when they were not speaking or being directly addressed was a significant step in gaining communicative competence.

The morning meeting procedure in this pre-kindergarten class always included the same components, although these might take different forms from day to day. There was always a greeting to begin, followed by attendance, the reading of the daily schedule and the reading of the morning message. The formal meeting ended with a group activity. The

children had learned the structure of the meeting by the end of October, but some elements of the class terminology had not become completely internalized. In particular, the names given to various components of the day occasionally generated confusion or a reaction from the children.

The following exchange, which took place in late October, illustrates the early stage of an evolution in terminology that occurred gradually. Reading the daily schedule was a highlight of the morning meeting, and it was a coveted job. The schedule consisted of a set of laminated picture cards that the teachers had drawn and labeled to represent each portion of the day. These cards were hung in a horizontal row across a strip of cork board at the front of the meeting space. The 'schedule reader' came to the front of the space and used a pointer to indicate each card, calling out the name of the activity. Over time, the process became ritualized, so that by the end of the year all of the children used identical lexicon and even similar intonation as they named each activity. In the fall, however, some of the children had not memorized all the activity names, and relied on memories from previous experiences in day care or preschool for descriptors of daily events, such as "outside time" or "recess" or "circle time." The teachers did not have a strong preference for one term over the other, but the children gradually adopted a single set of labels for their schedule, and they became adamant about the correct use of these terms:

That's Not Recess!

October 24

Mrs. Ellis: Alright! Excellent. Now Wesley, you are our schedule reader. So/ Thank you, Emily.

LFG: Walter/ Walter please keep your hands on your own body.

Mrs. Ellis: Oooh, hold on Wesley. We all ready? Put your finger on your nose if you're ready to hear the schedule. //Hold o^n! I don't see fingers on noses. Are you ready? To listen to the schedule? Thumbs up, thank you.

Wesley: [Reads schedule] Table top activities, morning meeting, But I thought it was closing meeting! [Mrs. Ellis: Oh, no!] Recess, snack time, choice time

Walter: That's not recess!

Mrs. Ellis: What did I say about talking while the person is giving/ it's really hard to read the schedule if people are calling out to you.

Wesley: closing meeting, then/ I mean, reading, then closing meeting and dismissal.

Mrs. Ellis: All right. Thank you, Wesley, very much. Now, one question: Is recess and outside the same thing? [yeah] Yeah. Recess and outside. It's just like, bye-bye, dismissal, going home and going to lunch we all decided was all the same thing. It's up to the schedule reader to decide which of those words they want to use. And if you make/if you have other words that you would like to use, when you read the schedule, you can use those words. All right? But Wesley is absolutely right in calling it outside. All right, just as Walter is absolutely right in calling it recess when he was reading it.

Mrs. Ellis responded immediately, though briefly, when Walter interrupted Wesley's reading of the schedule. Her comment is an example of explicit and direct instruction in conversational rules; she pointed out Walter's behavior ("talking while the person is giving…") and explained why this behavior was not helpful. Once Wesley had finished reading the schedule, she returned to the issue, this time confronting the meaning

rather than the effect of Walter's interjection: "Is recess and outside the same thing?" she asked. In her explanation, she was able to acknowledge the accuracy of Walter's remark, as well as that of Wesley's remark. Both boys' contributions received credit, and their membership and knowledge within the group were confirmed.

Not all the children were as assertive as Walter in making their presence known in the group, and the teachers made efforts to encourage the more reticent students to participate. Mrs. Ellis provided a demonstration of the importance of this awareness in her encouragement of Olivia, who, compared to her classmates, was relatively inexperienced in group conversation, even into the middle of the year. When it came to her turn in the sleeping bag conversation in March, Olivia struggled to provide a competent response:

The Tent

March 20

Mrs. Ellis: OK, Olivia.

Olivia: Um// My mom got a tent. A tent for camping. And um///

Mrs. Ellis: (aside to another child) We're listening to Olivia.

Mrs. Ellis: What about the tent and camping, Olivia?

Olivia: (silence)

Mrs. Ellis: Do you think your mom's going to plan some camping trips for you?

Olivia: (nods)

Mrs. Ellis: OK. That will be fun.

Mrs. Ellis gently prompted Olivia twice in order to elicit a response. During Olivia's turn, Mrs. Ellis refused another child's attempt to take the floor, much as in the scenario of Angie and the 'turn sharks' in her first grade classroom described by Erickson (2004). This brief exchange with Mrs. Ellis provided Olivia an opportunity to share something about herself, which she might have not gained without the guidance of the teacher. Mrs. Ellis emphasized the importance of knowing each child in her class, and responding individually to their needs: "That's part of the community building, is getting to know each child individually, so I know how to use that to keep them functioning as a member of the group." Both teachers demonstrated this knowledge often, tempering their remarks to adapt to the needs of a specific child. In Mrs. Ellis' group, Olivia and Walter needed frequent reminders about keeping their bodies still; she was more explicit with them than with other children, such as Ellie, who could be re-directed with a brief reminder after she had interrupted Emily in the discussion about black-capped chickadees.

A frequent occurrence at the beginning of the year was the tendency for some children, when not being directly addressed by the teacher, to turn their bodies or their gaze away from the speaker and find some other focus for their attention. In these situations, the teachers emphasized the value of shared attention in a group conversation.

A second aspect of ratification in this analysis relates to the children's sense of membership within the group. The teachers wanted to be sure that all children were acknowledged as valuable members of the group, and as participants in the discussion. With these goals in mind, the teachers frequently made a point of verbally recognizing children who were not frequent contributors. In their interviews, each teacher reflected on

an individual child for whom this recognition was particularly important. Mrs. Ellis watched over Neal and Olivia; in Mrs. Young's group, Isha was one of the quietest members. Mrs. Young described a turning point in Isha's emergence as a more involved member of the class:

> She had done the morning artist sheet, and she drew her picture…usually she wouldn't say much about her picture. But on that day, it turned into—she said 'it's a mountain with a pool at the bottom.' And it transpired into—Trip jumped in, and Wade, and Nyla, and they all had something to say about the picture. And [Isha] was ecstatic. She was not a talker in that group. But this was a wonderful way for her to feel part of the conversation, where other times she didn't…and it continued for a week. We wrote a story, all around this one picture…it had so many literacy components, but also components of just how to be social. And she was just beaming, because she doesn't usually participate. One day turned into a weeklong activity. It was important not just for Isha, but for this group, to be part of a collaboration.

In a similar reflection, Mrs. Ellis described her experience with Neal:

> He was not a group kind of guy. And so it was really important that I take anything he offered me and put it front and center, because it was a way for him to contribute and for kids to get to know this kind of quiet kid, and what he knew, and what he could do.

Other children in the group demonstrated similar reticence or lack of experience in joining spontaneously in the conversation. Both teachers made efforts to include as

many of the children's voices as possible in their discussions. The conversation about sleeping bags that emerged in Mrs. Ellis' morning meeting was one such instance. The segment below, which represents the final moments of that conversation, provides a brief, yet significant example of how the children were recognized, even if they were not called on to speak.

Sleeping Bags: Moving On

March 20

Mrs. Ellis: (To Olivia): Do you think your mom's going to plan some camping trips for you?

Olivia: (Nods)

Mrs. Ellis: OK. That will be fun.

Mrs. Ellis: OK. Stephen, and then Ellie, and then we're going to go on. So Stephen.

Stephen: Yesterday I saw (...) Yesterday I saw two red breasted robins, and, AND I have a sleeping/ and I have a tent, and, and/ cause I love sleeping/ in outside.

Mrs. Ellis: Oh you do? That's kind of fun isn't it? Ellie?

Ellie: Um//// Um/// Did you know that/ my bro:ther's birthday is in the coldest season, cause it's in January.

Teachers: Ah, Oh. It is in the cold season.

Mrs. Ellis: All right, now, we need to do our greeting. (To Anita): I said that Stephen and Ellie were going to be the last and then we're going to go on. Ok, so, um, I'm sure there will be something else, Anita, that I can call on you on. All right. We're going to greet. And today, we're going to greet using...

At this point in the morning meeting, Mrs. Ellis' group had been discussing sleeping bags and camping for several minutes. Mrs. Ellis had led the conversation in turns around the circle, allowing each child to share a comment or description about the topic. As she finished this cycle, several children raised their hands to add new comments. Mrs. Ellis wanted to continue with the morning meeting agenda, so she chose only two students to share their ideas, some of which were naïve cohesive attempts: Stephen embedded his observation of robins into his report about his family's camping gear, and Ellie announced that her brother's birthday was in the coldest season. Both of these remarks most likely stemmed from the previous conversation about the arrival of spring and the various weather conditions in the different seasons, and they were acknowledged briefly. After those two students made their comments, Anita raised her hand to add another remark. Mrs. Ellis reminded Anita and the rest of the group that a limit had been set on new comments. However, she reassured Anita that there would be an opportunity for her to participate in the conversation later. This brief remark served the purpose of ratifying Anita's presence in the group, despite the fact that she was not selected to share a comment at that moment.

The teachers regularly provided opportunities for children to introduce topics into the conversation, especially with regard to the students whose voices were less dominant in the group. Mrs. Young's description of how Isha's picture story gave her a chance to lead an ongoing discussion is one such example. In Mrs. Ellis' group, Olivia rarely offered a new topic and Mrs. Ellis created openings in the conversation and encouraged her to do so. In early June, Olivia came to school wearing new shoes, which she proudly showed to her classmates. The shoes featured small lights that lit up when the heel struck

the floor. As the meeting began, Olivia sat on her mat and began stamping her feet to make the lights flash. In an effort to re-direct Olivia, Mrs. Ellis offered her a chance to speak. The ensuing conversation resulted in a brief lesson about bragging and opinions:

New Shoes

June 1

Mrs. Ellis: And so, um, yes, you have new shoes on, don't you, Olivia? Let me finish this explanation and then you can show me how the shoes work. Um, anyway, Field Day is this afternoon for grades 1-7, and so, if you're staying for extended day, we're hoping that we might be able to go out and watch a bit of field day.

LFG: Oh, that will be exciting.

Mrs. Ellis: And so yes, that will be very exciting. Stephen, hang on one second, because I said the next person was going to be Olivia, who has new shoes. And would you like to share your new shoes with us?

Olivia: (lifts a foot)

Mrs. Ellis: You were stomping them, so I didn't know if this would be a good time to hit the floor with them. Why don't you stand up and let us see how they boink.

Olivia: Why?

Mrs. Ellis: 'Cause we'd like to see them.

Olivia: And then the (names other group)?

Mrs. Ellis: No. Just our group.

LFG: They're pretty cool, Olivia.

Mrs. Ellis: They are. (gestures for her to jump). One, two, three.

Anita: Do it again, jump. It's like you're flying!

Estie: The higher you go, They light up.

Walter: I want to see how they light up.

Mrs. Ellis: Ok, Emily. Would you like to show your shoes, and then I'm going to call on Stephen. It looks like you have spring shoes on too, or they look like summer shoes. Do you want to stand up?

Emily: (*aside*) That's one of my hair rubber bands.

Mrs. Ellis: Could you tell us about your shoes?

(*Emily stands up and begins to remove her sandals*).

Russell: What the heck are you doing?

Emily: This is how they go. They have Velcro, and this is how I get them off.

Ellie: And I have// (*she holds her foot out into the middle of the circle*).

Mrs. Ellis: Yeah, we all can put our shoes out. Like that.

Wesley: I don't even have to do Velcro, or tie them.

Mrs. Ellis (*to Michael*): What about you, do you have shoes like mine?

Stephen: Hey, Wesley!

Ellie (*to Olivia*): Can I see how they work?

Michael: I want to see!

Olivia: My shoes are the coolest in the whole entire world.

(Lots of voices talking over each other)

Emily: That's not a very nice thing to say!

Mrs. Ellis: What makes it feel unkind to you, Emily?

Emily: Because/ Because I have some good shoes, and it's not OK to say that in public.

Mrs. Ellis: Oh, well you can just say, or you could maybe just say that that's her opinion, but you happen to like your shoes. All right, I think we need to do a greeting.

Mrs. Ellis' choice to call attention to Olivia's shoes in a positive way, rather than by directly reprimanding her for stamping her feet during the meeting, was typical of the teachers' approach to their students throughout the year. Mrs. Ellis was clearly aware of the curiosity Olivia's shoes would generate, and she allowed extra time in the conversation for several other children to share their own shoes. Olivia's announcement that her shoes were the coolest in the world drew indignation from her classmates, who all responded at once, defending their own shoes as being also "cool." Emily's reaction, in particular, reflected her own social value against bragging or gloating, which had been on ongoing theme among the children. Mrs. Ellis' approach had been to address this issue as a lesson in expressing opinions, and continually emphasized that when people expressed their preferences, these statements should be interpreted as personal views, not as confrontations. The impact of this decision was that Olivia was ratified as a valuable member of the community, and she was given a chance to be the focus of interest for the teacher and her classmates.

Turn-Taking and Topic Management

The transcripts in the analyses of solidarity and ratification include a few examples of naïve cohesive attempts, but I have chosen to focus on these remarks in the examination of turn-taking because of their potential impact on the sequence and flow of the group discussions. The children's attention and focus in the meeting, and their spontaneous remarks, were often influenced by their own experiences, knowledge, and

interests. Their attempts to bring prior knowledge into the discussion fit Gee's (1999) description of linguistic cohesion, despite their often indirect relevance to the topic at hand. In many circumstances, the teachers eagerly incorporated students' spontaneous contributions into the discussion. In other cases, the teachers struggled to keep the conversation on track, despite the children's urges to explore a different topic. In mid-October, Mrs. Ellis began a morning meeting with a song about acorns, which were plentiful on the ground around school. After singing the song, she asked the children what they did when they found acorns on the ground. Her intent was to take a response from each child around the circle, but Neal and Stephen became focused on a different topic:

Acorns

October 12

Mrs. Ellis: All right! Let's get our acorns. Let's get our acorns all ready.

Anita: I know what to do!

Mrs. Ellis: You do? You're really on today, Anita, OK. How does this one start out

Neal: I know it.

Stephen: I have a collection.

Mrs. Ellis: You do?

Neal: I'm an acorn.

Mrs. Ellis: (leads the singing. *This is a new song, so she leads by singing one line and having the children follow*).

Mrs. Ellis: How many of you when you're walking along on the street/ notice acorns? And step on them?

Choral: me/ me/ me

Mrs. Ellis: You notice acorns on the ground? I'll bet you do, Stephen. There are probably a lot of oaks around. (to the group): What do you do when you see an acorn?

Stephen: Step on them.

Mrs. Ellis: You like to step on them?

Emily: No! I have/ I don't even know when I step on them!

Mrs. Ellis: (...) cause you have something good to say. Wesley?

Wesley: When I see/ acorns on the ground/ I pick them up.

Mrs. Ellis: OK, you can collect them.

Ellie: (sings the song alone)

Mrs. Ellis: What do you do?

Several voices: (several children are now singing the song)

Mrs. Ellis: Sounds like we want to do that song again. We're going to// Neal/ think about what you do when you see acorns on the ground? All right? OK, let's sing it all one more time, and then I'd like to call on Emily, and Anita, and Neal.

Voices: and me/ and me/

Mrs. Ellis: OK! It sounds like people still have reports. OK.

Choral: (they sing the song again).

Mrs. Ellis: Good j^ob. Emily, what do you do when you see acorns

Emily: I like to hear the cru^nchy sound with them, but I also like to have an acorn collection, and I don't want to step on t^oo many of them.

Mrs. Ellis: Oh. Hmm. Neal, what do you do?

Neal: Well, I um, collected a lot of cool stuff on the beach up in Maine/ because I have a / because up in Maine/ I have some st- rock stairs/ and they go all the way down to the beach, and there's all sorts of pretty rocks//

Mrs. Ellis: uh huh// So when you heard that Stephen was/ that Wesley was talking about collecting the acorns, it made you think about other kinds of collections that you have.

Neal: Yeah, Cause I have a whole bag of stuff/ There's a whole bag of nature that I have from Maine.

Mrs. Ellis: Do you have any acorns from Maine?

Neal: (shakes his head no).

Stephen: Me too.

Mrs. Ellis: No. No acorns? I wonder about

Stephen: (shouting) I've been to Maine before, and I've went to the beaches.

Mrs. Ellis: And there are no acorns?

Stephen: And I've played baseball at the beach.

Mrs. Ellis: OK. I'm going to call on Anita next, because she has her hand up. Ok, Anita.

Anita: I/ I pick up acorns and I tell to my mom and dad, I found a acorn when they are not looking.

Mrs. Ellis.: Ohhh. So Ellie,

Ellie: I tell my parents when I'm gathering acorns. And I pick them up.

Mrs. Ellis: You pick them up. Ok. Stephen?

Stephen: I went to the beach at Maine and I caught a crab.

Mrs. Ellis: Oh! My goodness. So you were listening to Neal talk about Maine and that made you think about a story about crabs in Maine.

Stephen: Yeah

Mrs. Ellis: You know, it's kind of[

Stephen:]That made me remember that I caught a crab in Maine.

Mrs. Ellis: Oh. OK. Russell, what do you want to say about acorns?

Russell: At Maine, I caught a lobster, and I was catching it.

Mrs. Ellis: OK. Now what do you do when you see acorns?

Russell: I throw them and I see if they land on/ I see if they get to the other side.

Mrs. Ellis: OK! So here's a new idea. Some of you step on them, some of you collect them, and some like to throw them.

For the first portion of this conversation, each child gave a relevant response about acorns. When it came to Neal's turn, he chose to take up a sub-topic that had been introduced and incorporated into Stephen's and Emily's responses, and he described his vacation house and his rock collection. Mrs. Ellis was able to identify his cohesive attempt, and she took the time to clarify for Neal and the group how it was that he came to share this particular remark at this point in the conversation. She then attempted to re-direct Neal so that he could give a response about acorns, but she was unsuccessful; Neal did not have any acorns and Stephen excitedly added his own statement about Maine, which was prompted by Neal's comments. Mrs. Ellis did not acknowledge Stephen's first two attempts. He then raised his hand and she called on him, and he persisted in his report about Maine. Mrs. Ellis took up the topic at that point, again tracing the cohesive

path for Stephen and the group. After Russell also added his own memories of Maine, Mrs. Ellis was finally able to re-direct the conversation to the topic of acorns.

As in this example, the children's naïve cohesive attempts could often be traced to an idea, or even a single word, that had been mentioned even in the briefest manner. The transcript below is an excerpt from the sleeping bag conversation that has been discussed previously. As Mrs. Ellis made her way around the circle, she came to Emily, who described her own sleeping bag, then added a new topic into the conversation. Mrs. Ellis chose to take up a discussion about spring, which led to a naïve cohesive attempt from Walter:

The First Day of Spring

March 20

Emily: And also after I got dressed, I was doing a welcome spring ballet.

Mrs. Ellis: Oh. / Why were you doing a welcome spring ballet?

Emily: Because it's the first day of spring.

Mrs. Ellis: Yes, this afternoon/ is the first/ is when spring will officially begin, but tomorrow we'll do a happy spring day because it will be the first/ full day of spring.

Michael: Will it be warm by/ in the afternoon?

Mrs. Ellis: Isn't that interesting? You would hope that/ spring is sort of a warm season, but spring starts out kind of on the cool side, and then ends up on the warm side, in June. So, ah. And then summer starts. [

Walter:]my/ my

Emily: Like, like March starts like a lion, and ends like a lamb!

Mrs. Ellis: We hope that is true! (laughs) So yes, Walter?

Walter: My brother's birthday is in June.

Mrs. Ellis: It is.

Voice: And mine is too.

Emily's remark about the first day of spring, combined with Mrs. Ellis' response, Michael's question, and Mrs. Ellis' reply, constitute an uptake event. This exchange, although brief, also served the purpose of adding to the students' understanding of the seasons.

A second, briefer uptake event occurred as a result of Mrs. Ellis' mention of the word 'June,' in her explanation of spring. This brief reference most likely prompted Walter to share the information about his brother's birthday. Although the topic at hand, the arrival of spring, was not directly related to birthdays, his remark demonstrates an emerging cohesive awareness, as he was able to relate his own knowledge to a tangential concept in the topic stream of the discussion. Mrs. Ellis acknowledged Walter's contribution, but did not take up the discussion beyond a brief acknowledgement, although she had enthusiastically responded to both Emily's and Michael's comments about spring.

One of the tensions the teachers in my research site faced in their desire to support the children's communication and community building was finding a balance between the ratification goals described above and the need to maintain a sense of order and focus in the conversations. The following example demonstrates this tension, and provides an example of the kind of direct instruction in conversational competence that the teachers practiced throughout the year.

Grandma

November 29

Estie: Grandma's not coming to my house.

Mrs. Ellis: Your grandma's not coming to your house for Christmas?

Estie: No.

Walter: I wish my grandmother would come.

Mrs. Ellis: Walter, what are we talking about right now? Who was talking?

Walter: You.

Mrs. Ellis: No, I wasn't talking. One of your friends was talking. Do you know which one of your friends?

Walter: Wesley.

Mrs. Ellis: No. Close to Wesley.

Walter: Anita.

Mrs. Ellis: No. It was Estie. And she was telling us about something that she's/she's sad about. About Christmas. When her grandmother won't be there. All right. So.//So let's read this story *When Winter Comes*. Wesley?

Wesley: I'm going to see my grandma at her house with my cousins/ for Christmas.

Mrs. Ellis: We'll have a chance to talk more about Christmas plans later. Right now, look, there are those fall leaves mixed in with the snowflakes, right there on the title page.

Mrs. Ellis had been reading a book about winter to the group when Estie shared her news about her grandmother. The subject matter of the book had generated a great deal of interest; school had just re-opened after Thanksgiving break and the weather was

very cold. The children were excited about the upcoming winter holidays. Estie's remark about her grandmother drew a response from Mrs. Ellis, but it also prompted Walter to call out his feelings about his own grandmother. At this point in the school year, Mrs. Ellis was familiar with the children's personalities and participation patterns; Walter was one who tended to call out and interrupt frequently. Therefore, she was firm and explicit in her response to him. She reflected on this exchange later, when asked about how she addresses children's communication errors:

> I tend to get more explicit as a child doesn't get it. For instance, if I was being that direct about 'that's interrupting, and you're not taking care of your friends,' it's probably because they've done it repeatedly and they need my reminders that they have to raise their hand.

Mrs. Ellis' reaction to Walter made it clear that it was Estie's turn to speak, and that what Estie had to say was important to the group. Her response also served a ratification purpose by emphasizing to Estie that her comments were valued despite the interruption from Walter. This exchange serves as one of many to show that the children did not learn the rules of conversational competence from any single piece of instruction. When Wesley shared his own comments about his grandmother, Mrs. Ellis stopped the discussion, this time issuing a more global statement about the topic. The subject of Christmas was one that had the potential of generating responses from all the children, and Mrs. Ellis did not want to start that conversation at the time. Instead, she re-directed the children's attention to the book she was reading.

Turn taking and interrupting were areas of difficulty for many of the children throughout the year, and the teachers frequently addressed children whose interruptions

clearly violated the tone of classroom community and solidarity. On the first day back at school after February vacation, Mrs. Young's group was energetic and full of news. For two weeks in February, including the children's winter break, both teachers had traveled to Reggio Emilia, Italy, for a professional development workshop. When they returned, they were eager to re-connect with the children and to reinforce the community-building work that the class had accomplished before vacation. Mrs. Young included the word 'Ciao' as the greeting word on her morning message, and she was eager to get started with the meeting:

Ciao

February 28

Mrs. Young: Are we having assembly today? [NO] Are we having library [NO]. That would be silly. Let's take a look at our message. Let's take a look at our message. Nicky and Trip, are you ready? // This is a special word that I wrote in our greeting, because it's something that people say where I just was.

Nate: Jambo.

Trip: Ciao.

Mrs. Young: Ciao. And Ciao, who?

Louisa: (*names their group*)!

Voices: (*several children shouting the group name loudly*).

Mrs. Young: (*makes a quiet gesture*). You know what? I'm going to stop. // You're talking out, and you're talking right over other friends. Trip?

Trip: (*says name of group*).

Mrs. Young: That's right. And I have two questions for you, Trip. Where do people say Ciao?

Trip: Um...

Mrs. Young: Italy. And that's where Mrs. Ellis and I just got back from. And this is the other question. When I first introduced this word to you. What do some families do when they use this word?

Wade: Kiss.

Mrs. Young: That's right. They go 'Ciao!' (*demonstrates a hug and kiss*). OK. Who can do the day of the week? Anna?

Although the children's responses were enthusiastic and correct, their voices had risen far above conversational level and the shouts could be heard in the hallway. Mrs. Young gave a quiet signal and paused with a disappointed look on her face before saying, "You know what? I'm going to stop." As the children settled themselves, Trip raised his hand and looked eagerly at Mrs. Young. His behavior was rewarded not only because the teacher called on him to answer her question, but because she extended her attention and addressed a second question to him as well.

Mrs. Young's expectations for her group were consistent throughout the year; nonetheless, she adjusted her responses to suit the situation. The children's exuberance on that day in February was due to many factors: they had been away from school for a full week and were 'out of practice' regarding the rules for class meeting, they were excited to see each other, and their teacher had returned after a relatively long absence. Mrs. Young was firm with them because she wanted to make sure that the children quickly reestablished their proper behavior and because, as she said, she had a lot of material to

cover that morning. On other occasions, the children's eagerness to call out answers received a more gentle response, as it did on the last day of school. The group was assembled for their final meeting, and Mrs. Young's supervisor, Mrs. Olivetti, leaned into the room to tell her which child would be first to march in the end-of-year assembly, which was arranged by alphabetical order:

I'm Second!

June 8

Mrs. Young: Wow, first letter of the alphabet. So why do you think because she has the first letter of the alphabet is she going first?

Nyla: Because the A is the first one.

Mrs. Young: Yeah. Because her name has the first letter, she's going to be the first one to go up and shake hands.

Nyla: What about for B?

Mrs. Young: You know what? There are no B's.

LFG: For a last name.

Mrs. Young: That's right.

Trip: My name starts with a C.

Mrs. Young: That's right, Trip, your name starts with a C, and that's why you're second.

Trip: I'm second!

Nicky: I'm also second!

Voices: *(several children call out their initials)*

Mrs. Young: Can you not shout out, because I have two friends here (*indicates children with their hands raised*). Nate, that's right, you're right, but I have two friends here that are patiently raising their hands. Amanda?

Mrs. Young's reminder was lighthearted as she asked the children to wait their turns during this exchange. The children's interruptions and overlapping remarks were happy and not loud or strident as they had been on the day in February, when Mrs. Young took a much firmer tone to calm her students. Even the briefest interruption was likely to generate a reaction, as indicated by Mrs. Olivetti's businesslike announcement. This was the children's first experience with the last day of school, and the morning had been out of the ordinary since they had arrived. Parents and teachers hugged and shared final moments, gifts were presented to the teachers, administrators had been in and out of the room, and the children could barely contain their excitement about the assembly that would be happening in less than two hours.

On the last day of school, the children began their meeting with a discussion of their names. As I reviewed the transcripts for this analysis, this topic struck me as particularly apt, because talking about their names was how they had found their mats to begin their first meeting together:

This Is My Name!

September 8

Louisa: Mine has my name on it.

Anna: Mine has *my* name on it

Mrs. Young: That's right.

Nate: Can I go sit on the one that has my name on it?

Mrs. Young: That's right, Nate. And thank you. You guys are being so patient while I set this up. So thank you.

Trip: In my old school, it was in the middle.

Mrs. Young: It was? // You can come right over and find your mat. Your mat will have your name on it. If you're not sure, you can always ask a teacher.

Voices Overlapping: Whe:re's mine" Here's mine. I can't find mine.

Emmett: Mine has a //

Mrs. Young: What does it have?

Emmett: E-M-M-E-T-T.

Mrs. Young: So let's see. Does this one have a E-M-M-E-T-T?

Uh-huh.

Wade: I don't know where my name is.

Mrs. Young: Wade, is this your mat?[

Wade: [No

Mrs. Young: Is this your mat?

Wade: My name is W-A-D-E.

Mrs. Young: I think you see it. Do you//

Wade: This is my name!

Mrs. Young: That's right. That's where you'll sit.

Mrs. Young: Is this I-S-H-A?

Amanda: I got one over here.

Mrs. Young: Oh wow! You found it.

Nine months later, these children have become friends. They know one other's names and where they sit in the circle. And on this last day of pre-kindergarten, they will go to the gym and have their names called out to the entire school as the next kindergarten class.

IV: Discussion and Implications of This Research

Wells (1986), in writing about young children's classroom discourse, argued that teachers need to model appropriate conversational behaviors and accommodate children's naïve attempts: "Meaning making in conversation should be a collaborative activity. But where there is a considerable disparity between the participants in their mental models and their linguistic resources, the more mature participant has to make adjustments to in order to make collaboration possible" (p. 89). Here, as noted above, is the role of the teacher as a critical member of the discourse. The teacher must not only interpret meaning, but instruct children in the proper means of engaging in discourse.

The research that I have described here, both from the literature and my own investigation, speaks to the complexity and sophistication of language in early childhood classrooms. What may, on the surface, appear to be a delightful conversation about the weather, a camping trip, or a flat tire, is in fact an opportunity for children and teachers to build knowledge together and in the process, to gain practice in the social skill of discourse. The data suggest several possibilities for further research and for the development of teaching practices.

Possibilities for Further Research

This research suggests a basis for a longitudinal study. The children in this classroom experienced a full year of instruction related to communication skills. On the last day of school, they had not achieved mastery in all of those skills, but they had made progress. They interrupted less frequently than they did at the beginning of the year, in part because they had gained a non-verbal skill in the form of the "me-too" gesture. They

had established a set of rituals for the structure of Morning Meeting time, and for their own behavior during the meeting. Their ability to recognize a turn sequence had also improved over the course of the year. Most of this new knowledge was the result of explicit and repeated instruction from their teachers. A further study of the group in the form of additional recordings of the class in Kindergarten and into their elementary school years could provide data about the long-term effects of this intensive instruction on the children's emerging communicative competence.

Such a future study could involve quantifying certain elements of conversation, such as the number of interruptions, or the number of attempted topic shifts, and comparing the frequency of these events between the original data set and the behavior of the children in later grades. Methodological and theoretical questions to consider for such a study would include a determination of which developments should be measured, and the establishment of a sequence of benchmarks to track children's progress toward full competence.

In my analysis, I chose not to address issues of gender in the communicative behavior of the children. I focused instead on the instructional practices of the teachers in response to the children as a group of classmates, not as boys and girls with possibly different styles. However, a further investigation of the data to compare the number and type of responses, spontaneous remarks, and interruptions by boys and girls could present interesting findings. Such an examination would involve a study of more than the subset of recordings that I used in this dissertation, and the data set is certainly rich in potential for additional work in this area. The transcripts demonstrate a wide range of

conversational styles, which might be connected to gender. One area of further investigation would be to compare the types of spontaneous remarks made by the boys and girls. Do the girls, as Nicolopoulou (2002) found, tend to focus more on relational topics, and the boys more on action and movement? Are there certain categories of topics that appeal more to one gender than another, as demonstrated by their responsiveness or the frequency of their remarks? Which types of topics are extended further in the discussion, and by children of which gender?

The research into roles and status in social groups suggests another area for further study. In the transcripts and analyses of the recordings, as well as in my own and the teachers' observations, certain children stood out as dominant figures in the group. As the teachers became more familiar with the children, they tailored their interactions with the children in response to their established behavior patterns. In other words, a child who was a frequent interrupter would receive a more stern response than a child who did not often speak out. At the same time, the teachers were aware of the children who did not volunteer regularly, and they made a point of encouraging those children's participation. One question that arises here relates to the impact of temperament on a child's status in the class. Do the dominant speakers gain control of the conversation? Do the quieter children exert less of an influence on the group? A possible area for further analysis might be a more quantitative examination of the recordings, tracking specific numbers of comments for each child, and then matching them against teacher responses. This area of research would also be ideal for a case study analysis, perhaps focusing on a dominant speaker and a reticent speaker in each group, and following those children's

conversational performance throughout the year, not just in the Morning Meeting, but in other aspects of the school day.

Another potential follow-up study would be to analyze the child-generated topic shifts in the group conversations. In my research, I examined many of the children's attempts to introduce new topics or to change the topic flow in the discussions, focusing primarily on the naïve cohesive attempts. However, there were many other situations when a child introduced a new topic so successfully that it took on the primary status in the conversation. Were these remarks evidence of a high level of competence on the part of the speaker, an indication of knowing just how to introduce an idea that was so relevant or compelling that it (and the speaker who introduced the topic) could take control of the conversation? How could such factors be measured or tracked?

Implications for Curriculum and Instruction

The teachers' emphasis on community, and their focus on group membership and solidarity in the morning meeting, was evident in all the recordings. The children's enthusiasm about attendance and their eagerness to connect their own experiences with those of their classmates were encouraged by the teachers in many instances. "Where's Russell?" "Where's Louisa?" "Where's Mrs. Young?" the children would ask. They always seemed aware of who was missing. One strategy that the teachers used to check attendance (and to reinforce math skills) was to count the people in the group. Mrs. Young referred to the number of people present as the "magic number" of the day; after the children had memorized 11 as the total number in their group, they cheered if the magic number came out to 11 on any given morning. This spontaneous behavior,

encouraged by the teachers, was just one indication of the children's sense of themselves as a group, and of the importance of each individual in the group.

One of the most successful elements in the teachers' attempt to build solidarity in group conversations was the "me too" gesture. The children seized upon this hand sign and used it effectively from the beginning of the year. Although at first, they exaggerated the gesture and accompanied their hand movements with loud calls of "me too," they gradually adjusted their behavior and used the signal as a completely non-verbal message.

In their facilitation of group conversations, Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young were direct and explicit. They defined and described behaviors such as interrupting or threatening in great detail and with clear explanations of the impact of those behaviors on the rest of the group. Whether it was Mrs. Young presenting the purpose and specific finger positions of the "me too" on the first day of school or Mrs. Ellis explaining what a threat is and why it's not OK, or either of the teachers emphasizing the importance of waiting for a turn to speak, these teachers provided direct instruction in the rules of conversation. Their consistent efforts to provide these explanations were evidence of their belief that communication skills are a central component of early childhood curriculum.

For Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ellis, content was not always a primary intention in the morning meeting. Although the morning message included a literacy, mathematics, or occasionally a science lesson, this content was usually seen as one of many components in a complete meeting. During the rest of the school day, the teachers continued to emphasize communication skills, but these skills were then incorporated into instruction and activities in the content areas. The teachers' belief is that the children would not be

able to focus on the content of their lessons if they did not have the foundation of communication skills. Their convictions about the central nature of linguistic competence echoes that of French and Song (1998), who argued that "learning in school depends heavily, sometimes almost exclusively, on learning from language…Thus, the development of skills that can support and enable learning from language comprises one of the most fundamental components of school readiness" (p. 413).

The emphasis on teaching communication skills raises questions about whether and how this type of instruction might be replicated in other settings. The research cited here about cultural variation in children's linguistic backgrounds, confirmed by the diversity in conversational styles in my subject group, speaks to the need for teachers to understand and respond to children's language behaviors. The implications here extend beyond the superficial knowledge that some cultures value deferential behavior in children, or that other cultures value assertiveness, or the developmental theorists' concepts of children's perceptual abilities. Children come together at school from different cultural and social backgrounds, or with attentional issues, or they may arrive with substantially more or less vocabulary knowledge than their peers, or different means of expressing themselves, or different abilities to wait for an adult's attention. All of these factors, and many more, impact the development of a community of learners.

Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Young frequently spent time addressing individual students, and they had the opportunity to learn each child's unique communication needs. Each teacher was responsible for 11 children; this number is approximately half of a typical classroom size. Their familiarity with the students and their ability to spend considerable individual time with these children cannot be discounted. For teachers working with

larger groups of children, what instructional strategies about conversation might be reasonably incorporated into the early childhood curriculum? These questions will help drive further investigations and the development of curriculum initiatives.

As a final comment, Mrs. Ellis, in describing her overarching goals for morning meeting, spoke about the children and their sense of themselves in the classroom:

> There's really so much going on [in the meeting] and I guess I just want them to be happy at the end. Happy to be coming to meeting, happy to be together and feeling that they have connections with each other. And that I'm not doing all the talking.

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Appendix

PERMISSION FOR PARTICIPATION IN PRE-KINDERGARTEN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION STUDY

A research study about spoken language is being conducted in the pre-kindergarten classroom. Details about the investigation are provided on the letter attached to this form.

Please check one of the following:

_____I **give my permission** for my child's comments to be included in this research study.

_____I **do not give my permission** for my child's comments to be included in this research study.

The nature and purpose of this research has been satisfactorily explained to me. I understand that the investigator will answer my questions that arise during the course of the research. I understand that, in signing this consent form, I give permission for the study results to be presented in written and oral form. I also understand that identifying information about my child, such as his or her likeness, name, birthdate, or residence, will be removed before any data is presented, and that my child will be given a pseudonym in all presentations based on this research.

Parent's Signature _______________________________

Child's Name _______________________________

Date _______________________________

December 15, 2005

Dear Pre-Kindergarten Parents,

The director of our teacher training program, Lauren Goldberg, is currently involved in research for her doctoral degree from Lesley University. Her interest in the development of social language has found a focus in children's conversational sharing during morning meeting. As you can imagine, our pre-kindergarteners offer some remarkable examples of how young children make linguistic connections between their personal experiences and the topics raised in the classroom.

I have followed Lauren's interest in the development of social language in children for the last few years and have encouraged her research. She has just begun the final phase of her studies, which involves observing and recording morning meetings to gather examples of social language in a classroom setting.

Engaged and active teachers are continually asking questions about the impact of their behavior on the learning of their students. What kinds of teacher prompts encourage child participation in discussion? What feedback helps to maintain ongoing discourse on a topic? Lauren's research will help our associate teachers and our veteran teachers ponder more deeply the effect of their responses on the language exchanges of their students.

I encourage you to read Lauren's description of her research and to complete the release form included in this mailing. No child in the classroom will be identified in the final research project. There is no intervention on Lauren's part. She is only recording the ongoing discussion during morning meeting.

We are pleased to support this research project. It is yet another indication of the depth of care given to the learning process here at [*Name of School*].

Sincerely,

Lenesa Leana

Table 1: Transcription Markers

Table 1: Transcription Markers

Marker	Meaning
[	Right-facing brackets identify places where a speaker's turn is being interrupted or where overlapping speech occurs.
]	Left-facing brackets indicate the interruptor/overlapper's speech.
=	An equals-sign indicates latched speech; situations when there is no pause between speakers.
/	A single slash indicates a brief pause.
//	More than one slash indicates a longer pause.
(…)	An ellipsis inside parentheses indicates a segment of indistinguishable speech.
Fa:vorite	A colon in the middle of a word indicates that the speaker extends or elongates the pronunciation of a word or syllable.
We^ather	A caret inserted in a word indicates that the speaker's pitch or tone rises to place stress on a syllable or word.
[*name of town*]	A bracketed comment indicates a remark that was stricken in order to protect the speaker's identity.
(laughs)	Text in italics indicates non-verbal or non-linguistic communication acts.

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Do Not Take From This Room

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