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ABSTRACT

This study examined one teacher's learning and implementing instructional conversations (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988). She received assistance through opportunities to: 1) observe effective examples of instructional conversations; 2) practice skills and get immediate feedback through conversation; 3) read and discuss articles about instructional conversations and questioning techniques; and 4) read and comment on transcripts of lessons and follow-up conversations. Participant-observation, unstructured conversations, and interviews comprised the data, which included transcripts of audio-taped lessons, follow-up conversations, and interviews. There was a gradual shift in the teacher's practices from recitation to instructional conversation. Action, reflection, and collaborative talk became the process of change in her practice and thinking. Additionally, data revealed that students gave longer responses, initiated conversation, and participated in responsive conversation in which they contributed to, challenged, and extended each others' statements. Implications for teachers' professional development are discussed.

Teachers make decisions every minute about the instruction and support that happens in their classrooms (Cunningham and Allington, 1994; Yinger, 1979). To provide instruction and support, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) believe teachers need to learn the professional skill of assisting performance and teaching the child in his or her zone of proximal development, the area of cognitive development where the child cannot do a particular task alone, but may succeed with support to accomplish the task. A particular kind of activity, instructional conversation (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988), can be used to promote these learning opportunities for students. Instructional conversations are

challenging conversations between a teacher and a group of students about ideas relevant to the students (Goldenberg, 1993). Knowledge and higher thinking skills are gained as students interact with each other (Wells, 1994). This article describes a three month study in which one teacher's learning and implementation of instructional conversation was assisted through opportunities to read about, observe, and discuss effective instructional conversation. Practicing the techniques with feedback through conversation and reading transcripts of lessons and follow-up conversations also assisted this learning. The focus of this article is on the teacher's growth in conducting instructional conversations and the impact of action, reflection, and collaborative talk.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditional reading instruction stressed a set of skills to be mastered. For comprehension assessment, students were asked questions and wrote answers in workbooks with the main concern for students' right or wrong answers. These questions asked were primarily literal with the belief that the ability to read and answer questions was evidence of reading comprehension. Recitation, the prevalent form of questioning in classrooms, was also mainly concerned with assessment. The teacher Initiated questions, the student Responded, and the teacher Evaluated the response (IRE), (Cazden, 1988) with teachers doing most of the talking. Students were observed doing little more than responding with some recall information and rarely did they start a conversation. Very little of the teachers' statements were made in reaction to a students' statements (Durkin, 1978-1979; Palinscar, 1986; Pearson, 1986).

Today, many educators believe that learning to read is not a simple transfer of knowledge from the text to student, but a process in which students' construct meaning by interacting with a text. This process has recast the students as meaning maker (Goldenberg, 1993; Leal, 1992; Michaels, 1984; Palinscar, 1986; Pearson, Roehler, Dole and Duffy, 1992; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1990; 1994). The student is expected to actively construct his or her knowledge and understanding, making connections from mental schemata and developing new concepts, rather than receiving knowledge from the teacher (Goldenberg, 1993). The understanding of a text depends on the reader's background, memories, and associations brought up by reading. The reader uses prior knowledge, prediction techniques, and text structure to comprehend text (Anderson, 1994).

Current views are also based on social constructivism theory's emphasis on learning as a social process (Davidson, 1986; Raphael and McMahon, 1994). Higher cognitive and linguistic skills first appear in social context between people. A child's growth actually occurs in their zone of proximal development, the area of cognitive development where the child cannot do a particular task alone, but may succeed and indeed learn with support to accomplish the task (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the cognitive process necessary for learning develop when the child interacts and cooperates with people in their environment through participation in meaningful joint activities in which performance is assisted and guided by more competent members (Eeds and Wells, 1989; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1990).

Conversation is a key factor in this learning process as it provides experiences for students to verbally share their interpretations, listen to other perspectives, and alter or develop new knowledge from the interaction (Golden, 1986; Palinscar, 1986; Wells, 1994). When the conversation is about a text and comments and explanations are offered that relate the text to personal experiences, students see what is involved in engaging with text. With the teacher's guidance and the use of text and talk, students collaborate with each other, achieve understanding, and communicate that understanding to others (Wells, 1990, p. 16). Talk provides such a rich source of information about how students negotiate meaning that the teacher can use that information to provide support (Leal, 1992).

Instructional conversations, as one form of classroom talk, help students use their knowledge and experiences to explore important ideas as they develop a deeper understanding of issues. When instructional conversations take place in the student's zone of proximal development, students' understandings and interpretations are developed through collaboration between the student and teacher and between student and student (Goldenberg, 1993; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; 1989). Talking, asking questions, and sharing ideas and knowledge affect students' cognitive processes and assist them in using language to explain their interpretations. Answering questions and using language in this way become practice in formulating and expressing complex thoughts which in turn affect students' construction of knowledge (Au, 1979). Language becomes the primary vehicle for learning, as a tool for both communicating and helping students deepen their understanding (Goldenberg, 1993; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; 1989).

There are four characteristics of instructional conversations: 1) highly informal, mutual, voluntary contributions by teacher and student,

with instant feedback, lack of penalty for wrong answers and undue domination by any one person, particularly the teacher; 2) sequences in which students first discuss Experiences or knowledge they have that is related to the story in some way, students read short parts of the Text and discuss questions the teacher asks that draw Relationships (ETR) for students between the content of the story and their personal experiences and knowledge; 3) conversations that rely heavily on questioning, extending from recall of specific detail through higher order critical thinking; and 4) instruction that is responsive to students' comments. So instead of having a traditional recitation, students actually talk with one another to challenge and expand each other's statements (Au, 1979; Goldenberg, 1991; 1993; Saunders, Goldenberg, and Hamann, 1992; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988).

Key to the success of instructional conversation is the interaction with the teacher and the teacher's willingness to let the child's past experiences be an integral part of the reading lesson (Au, 1979; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988). Teachers "weave" the students' prior knowledge, experiences and comments with the ideas and concepts of the lesson, thereby expanding the students' understanding and knowledge (Goldenberg, 1993). Teachers, as skillful questioners, lead children not to the correct answer, but to talk about their answers. Teachers formulate questions and comments on the basis of students' responses (Au, 1979; Gallimore, Dalton, and Tharp, 1986; Gallimore and Tharp, 1990). Teachers present challenging ideas, ask students to clarify comments, instruct, or keep quiet at the appropriate time. Students try out their understanding in their own words, and teachers hear evidence of students' thinking, understanding, and interpretive strategies. Teachers can guide immediately or wait and design the next lesson (Dillon, 1981; Golden, 1986; Wells and Wells, 1984). Most important is the student participation, both individually and collectively, as well as the teacher's facilitation of the discussions (Goldenberg, 1991; Goldenberg, 1993; Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1991, Thomas-MacKinnon, 1992).

Instructional conversations are professionally and intellectually demanding, and do not come easily or naturally to teachers (Goldenberg, 1993), so it is important to examine what happens to teachers and students as they grapple with instructional conversation as a method of instruction. The questions this study asks are: How can instructional conversation become routine in classrooms? What effect will action, reflection and collaborative talk have on teachers' thinking and practices? What will happen when students are given opportunities to engage in instructional conversation?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigated one teacher's process in learning to conduct instructional conversations. The method of gathering data was participation in the setting, direct observation, and unstructured conversations and interviews.

Subjects

This study involved one elementary teacher, Susan (pseudonym), her students, and myself, Becky, a resource person for the public schools and doctoral student at a university. I used conversation first in my classroom with 4th and 5th graders and for the last three years in my role as a staff developer and teacher support person where I go into classrooms to model literature conversations. This was Susan's first year back as a self-contained classroom teacher after two years as a resource teacher. She felt she needed more materials and ideas for her students. She had taught a total of 25 years in three different states with second, third and fourth graders, gifted, regular, and at-risk students. She regularly attended conferences and involved herself in projects at the local university.

Susan had initially requested that I conduct community building lessons and class meetings with her students while she observed them. After several months of these lessons, I talked to Susan about participating in this study. I felt comfortable with Susan and her students. Susan knew of my interest in conversations about stories because of some staff development I conducted. Susan saw a need with her class of transition students to work on reading, their weakest area. All of her eighteen students were being retained for a fifth year in a four-year primary program and did not know each other. She wanted to "force herself" (her words) to look at different literature books and teacher guides and a literature/economic unit she had. She also wanted to watch someone else teach so she would have time to observe her students more closely. Susan agreed with my design of the study, except for keeping a journal. She had tried that before and didn't keep up with it.

Materials

I used trade books specifically selected because of the relevant and engaging issues they presented. Susan used a literature/economic unit with introductory activities, text questions and follow-up activities that had an economic theme. We shared the books and guides we used with

each other. Susan and I read and discussed several articles during the study.

Procedures
    I started in late December with an interview of Susan and an initial observation of a literature lesson led by Susan. Questions for the interview were: Why did you feel comfortable having someone come into your classroom to model lessons? Why did you agree to do this study? Tell about your teaching background and philosophy of teaching. As a follow-up to the last question, I asked: What made you change schools, subjects, and the grade levels you've taught?
    Starting in January and on a weekly basis for three months, Susan and I alternately conducted lessons (in the transcripts referred to respectively as teacher and modeling lessons). Both read aloud a story to all students so that everyone could participate in the conversation about the story. I followed the instructional conversation model described in this literature review. Susan started with the traditional IRE lesson format. Immediately following each lesson, we met to discuss the lessons. The follow-up conversations were unstructured with the goal to have Susan and I share in a conversation about the class conversations around the stories. All lessons, follow-up conversations, and interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by me. All the transcripts were given to Susan to read and make comments or changes. After a few lessons, I asked Susan to read an article on instructional conversation. A conversation was held that focused on that document. On her own, Susan began to tally which of her students participated during my lessons and some of the specific things I said. During my next modeling lesson, I requested that Susan record who talked, students' responses to initial and probing questions, and what students did with wait time. After requesting more information and techniques, I gave Susan an article on questioning techniques. At the end of the three months, I conducted a culminating interview to discuss the three research questions: How can instructional conversations become routine in classrooms? What effect will action, reflection, and collaborative talk have on teachers' thinking and practices? What will happen when students are given opportunities to engage in instructional conversations?

Analysis
    The data for this study included tape-recorded conversations of Susan my literature lessons, our follow-up conversations after each lesson, and an initial and culminating teacher interview. I began data analysis as

I read through each lesson and follow-up conversation that I had just transcribed. After reading each literature lesson, I wrote what I noticed, e.g., the format of the lesson, how the teacher read the book, the teacher's questions and the students' responses. After each follow-up conversation, I wrote the things Susan talked about, e.g., her students' thinking and comments and her plans, ideas, and questions. I also wrote my questions about the data, e.g., what is different in the teacher and modeling lessons and should I count the students' responses? I also wrote about what I might do differently during the next modeling lesson or follow-up conversation. The recurring topics during the teachers' conversations were Susan watching her students and the modeling, and Susan's analysis and reflection of her ideas, actions, and plans.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To begin the study, I observed one of Susan's literature lessons. The lesson included vocabulary review and discussion of the story in the teacher initiation, student's response and teacher evaluation sequence, (IRE), (Cazden, 1988). The teacher read a story aloud and stopped after each page to ask recitation-like questions. Susan had the attention of all her students during the lesson. Some students participated and some not at all. Susan called on some students not participating and got answers from them.

My first lesson modeled for Susan was on January 16. I read the book, *Uncle Jed's Barbershop*, and started the conversation with an open-ended question to hear what the students were thinking about the story:

> T2   *What do you think?*
> S8   *I liked it, it was good.*
> S2   *It reminded me of Dr. King. He had a dream for the future, blacks and whites together going to the same schools together.*
> S5   *They both died.*

The conversation moved to the topic of segregation.

> S2   *What was that called?*
> T2   *Segregation. Are we still segregated?*
> Ss   *No.*
> T2   *Are there places you go now where there are only black and white people?*

One student says yes quietly and talks directly to Susan about his neighborhood having no white people. A different student looks at Becky and says yes there are white people in the neighborhood because he lives in the same neighborhood. The first boy repeats his statement and adds that there is a barbershop in his neighborhood where there are only black people. The second boy nods his head in agreement.

In the follow-up conversation, Susan noticed what I did different and what her students said. Susan asked, "You didn't start with a conversation about what happened in the story?" I explained, "I didn't come with my agenda, I wanted to see where the students took the conversation. I've found they go to some pretty good places." Susan continued to talk about how her students identified with the seriousness of the story and that they really paid attention. "I really liked the boy who defended himself and didn't give in as he talked about his neighborhood."

Susan's first teacher lesson was the next week. Students heard *Helga's Dowry: A Troll Love Story*. Susan started this lesson with vocabulary and concept development, e.g., services, goods, bartering and dowry. She stopped at every page to ask questions. Student's responses were mainly short phrases. Susan responded to all her students by elaborating and giving more information. During our follow-up conversation she was concerned about what she did and if it matched what I needed for the study. I explained the study had two parts, instructional conversations during literature lessons, and our collaborative conversation about the discussions. Susan talked a lot about her students' lack of vocabulary and writing skills. She mentioned my comment last week about going with what the students said. "I wasn't getting anywhere with the question about candy so I dropped it and went with the question, what did you like about the book? I liked that, but original questions are important to come back to at a later time."

I modeled a second lesson a week later. While I taught, Susan decided to watch and keep a tally of students who were listening and participating. At the follow-up conversation, she noticed all the students were listening to the story and many were discussing, including some who usually do not. Also on her list were things I said during the lesson, like "tell me more." She noticed the visual passage I used as an introduction to the book. "It let students think before hearing the story... I like to watch you do the work and have all the plans and materials. It gives me time to watch for other things in the lesson and from the students." This is an excerpt from that lesson after the students heard a story from *The Stories Julian Tells*. As I indicated to Susan during our

last follow-up conversation, I wanted to give students the opportunity to respond and build on what each other are saying without the teacher talking after every student. I wanted to lead the students through the conversation, but let them put their ideas in their own words.

T2 *What do you think?*

S3 *I liked the part where the boys are under the bed.*

S6 *I liked the boys sticking their fingers in the pudding and then their whole hand.*

S5 *I liked the part when the father was mad.*

S6 *I liked the part where the boys are under the bed. The boys were pressing against the wall.*

T2 *What's that mean?*

S6 *They were moving back against the wall not wanting to be found by father, they were scared.*

S10 *The boys said they went outside and when they came back the pudding was gone.*

T2 *What do you think about that?*

S10 *They lied.*

T2 *Why?*

S8 *Didn't want to get into trouble.*

S10 *They shouldn't have lied, they needed to tell the truth and not lie to their father.*

S3 *It's wrong to lie.*

The following week, Susan read *The Goat in the Rug*. Susan read the story one page at a time, showing the pictures, and asking questions. She stressed vocabulary, sequencing, and noting details. During this conversation, students were beginning to share information and initiate questions.

T1 *How many can see window rock? How did it get that way?*

S2 *Weather.*

S6 *Wind.*

S4 *Ice.*

S1 *Snow.*

T1 *This is a desert, what weather is in the desert? Will we have ice?*

Ss *No.*

T1 *No, it's too warm, you have wind and rain.*

She read on.

> S2   *This is an Indian story.*
> T1   *Yes, it's a Navajo story.*

She finished the book where the goat said she couldn't wait to have her hair cut again.

> S11   *I knew it, I knew she'd do it again.*
> T1   *This is a true story of a weaver and her goat.*
> S7   *It's true?*
> T1   *Yes, at a Navajo nation at Little Rock, Arizona.*
> S7   *The goat really sat next to her?*
> T1   *Yes, the goat stayed with her just like a dog.*

During the next week, Susan read and discussed the article on in-structional conversation. We talked about the difference between in-structional conversations and what Susan does and the teacher's role as the facilitator. Susan started our conversation with a statement and a question; "I'm asking too many questions and getting too quick answers instead of deep thinking answers. Am I giving students the opportunity to get longer answers? I thought of these questions after reading the arti-cle on instructional conversations and I'm also connecting that with what I read in the transcripts. {Susan read from the article}:

> *Many traditional forms of teaching; recitation, direct in-struction, assume that the teacher's role is to help students learn what the teacher already knows. The teacher identifies learning goals for students, then systematically designs and employs lessons to reach them. This type of instruction es-sentially consisted of having students acquire the goals through the teacher's skillful use of, for example, modeling, step-by-step instructions, practice, and checking for under-standing. The teacher generally looks for particular answers and expects little or no discussion (Voght and Schaub, 1992).*

"I see myself that way. I feel that way, that's me. Now the facili-tator, the next paragraph, {Susan continued to read}:

> *The teacher plays the less directive, but no less deliber-*
> *ate role of the facilitator. An instructional conversation*
> *teacher does not provide step-by-step instruction designed to*
> *produce right answers or correct performance. Rather, the*
> *teacher encourages expression of students' own ideas, builds*
> *on the information students provide and generally guides stu-*
> *dents (Voght and Schaub, 1992).*

That's what you do and I'm sure it took time."

Susan also discussed that many of her students talk during conversations and she liked her students taking turns without raising their hands. "This year I have my own class, I can do more, so I am ready now to do this and you're giving me actual lessons and modeling to do it with. I understand more about instructional conversations from the article; it gave me two comparisons. But does it make a difference? Is it since students know we're going to talk about something, they'll listen more, so they can talk too? Could we use literature and conversation to get better writing?"

I also wondered about how to make instructional conversations routine? What are the differences in what Susan and I do? What is it specifically that teachers do during conversations? What do the students do that is different? I decided, during my third modeling lesson, to ask Susan to record who talked, the students' responses to initial and probing questions, and what students did with wait time. The following excerpt was from my next modeling lesson and a conversation about thunderstorms before reading *Storm in the Night*:

T2	*What do you like about thunderstorms?*
S1	*Rain.*
T2	*Why?*
S1	*(no reply)*
S2	*I don't like the rain, it messed up the crops.*
T2	*How?*
S3	*Too much rain.*
S4	*Too hot.*
T2	*I thought you meant, I have wood chips around my rose bushes and when it rains they all wash away and I have to go and push them back around the roses.*

S7   *They make the clouds dark and me and my sister can pretend we're playing a scary game.*

S6   *I like it when I can walk around in the dark and hit stuff.*

S8   *I like everything about thunderstorms.*

S2   *I like the rain (hesitates) weathering.*

T2   *Tell me about weathering.*

S2   *The changes (hesitates) like cracks and holes.*

T2   *Even this year without a lot of snow there's pot-holes in the roads.*

S1   *I like rain because we can put a bucket out and get the rain and drink the water.*

T2   *Do you drink the rain water?*

Ss   *No.*

S3   *Rain hitting the cars and when it dries it's dirty.*

S8   *The car is dirty and the rain is clean, it goes down on the car and cleans the car.*

S7   *I hate the rain, it gets my dog cold so he shivers and I think he'll have to go to the hospital.*

S5   *But my dog gets scared and they hide.*

S2   *I have two dogs, one of them stays out in the rain, and the little one, when it thunders he dives under the sink.*

S4   *I hate the rain because it cancels my basketball games.*

S5   *I like the rain because when I sleep I like hearing it hit the windows.*

In our follow-up conversation, Susan noticed that everyone talked, there were personal connections, and lots of thinking and content covered. From the question about wait time, Susan thought some of her students were thinking, getting ideas from each other, and forming opinions. She especially noticed that they were listening to each other and adding on to what each other said.

"You're getting answers from even the busy ones. It seems to me you were getting more, more personal stories, sharing, more about each other, and students talking to each other. That's a first. It seems like you had a goal to get to that part, that there would actually be discussion. So there's a lot of talking and sharing among themselves. I'm seeing

more come out of it, just the fact to give them a chance to talk." Susan still wondered, however, "Is it the questions or is it because they have more knowledge because they have more prior knowledge, and what can they learn by it afterwards?"

Susan began her third lesson in a very different manner by telling her students what she wanted them to do.

"You know that we've come together for a literature circle and in our literature circle we try to be able to talk better about what we read. When we talk, I'm trying to work to get more than just an answer that says yes, no, or I don't think so. I'm looking for what happened last week where we were thinking. Robert said something and then he disagreed with someone and someone else said, I think this, too. [We want] to get a conversation going and that's what we're trying for today."

This excerpt is from teacher lesson #3 after the students heard *Something Special for Me.*

T1   *Rosa had a problem. Tell me what it was.*

S9   *She went to the store and wanted to buy those things and couldn't wait.*

T1   *She wanted them really bad. She knew exactly what she'd do with them.*

S10 *She thought that she had seen all kinds of things, but it wasn't worth it to spend that big jar of money.*

T1   *That big jar of money was sitting there, but they had saved a long time. I agree.*

S9   *She went to the dress shop and put on a dress and said wait.*

T1   *Can you see yourself trying to make that decision? Janice, what was the next thing she started to buy?*

S11 *Accordion.*

T1   *Not yet.*

S7   *She didn't want to spend all of her money on something she can't keep forever.*

T1   *Okay.*

S7   *She wanted to keep it forever and [do] a lot of things with it and she could get an accordion so she gets to keep it wherever she takes it. She could do what she wants. She likes it causes it had wonderful music. She could do things and keep it and she won't have to waste it [money] for stupid things.*

T1   *Why is it so stupid?*

S7   *Because with clothes, all you gotta do, you gotta wear other clothes and you couldn't wear it all the time and you spend a lot of money on clothes and you grow out of them and they get old and you have to wash them everyday and you can't wear them every day.*

T1   *What do you think of the idea that the accordion lasts longer?*

S2   *Clothes are okay.*

S3   *The accordion can break.*

T1   *The accordion can break, but not if you're careful with it. Let's go back to what Eddie said to agree or disagree and why.*

S10   *I agree.*

T1   *Why?*

S10   *Because clothes can get ripped and dirty.*

S9   *I disagree.*

T1   *Why? (Wait time) Why is an accordion a bad idea? (Wait time) I'll come back. Think for a minute, there's one more thing she looked at.*

S3   *They went to the tent place where they had tents and stuff.*

T1   *They actually said what it would be like to be camping. That's a pretty neat idea, you can use camping equipment over and over.*

S3   *I would have got it.*

T1   *You would? Why?*

S3   *I could sleep in that bed.*

Susan achieved the goal she stated at the beginning of the lesson and modeled exactly what she said she wanted, responsive conversation. She read the entire story first and then started the discussion with an open-ended question instead of literal questions. She accepted her students' ideas and commented on and agreed with them. She used "not

yet" and "okay" as prompts for her students to continue thinking. She asked "why?" in an effort to get students to elaborate. She posed questions, rephrased and elaborated. She followed the students' exchange instead of her lesson guide. Many topics connected to the story were discussed. The conversation was longer, and more students participated and gave longer responses.

In another excerpt from lesson #3, Susan allowed opportunities for students to question each other and defend their ideas. We see that students have begun to respond to each other and not just to the teacher.

> S8 *Eddie said you can't use clothes over, but your little brother could wear them.*
> T1 *So you say clothes can be recycled and clothes are important, too, but*
> S7 *(interrupted) Another thing is she wanted to get what she wanted and she liked it.*
> S8 *How can you tell what she liked?*
> S7 *Because (hesitated, and Susan said to go on) I can have all the stuff to go camping and the accordion you don't need nothing, no batteries or nothing. It might take me a long time to drive to the camp and maybe not have all kinds of stuff and may have to stay in the backyard.*

In the follow-up conversation, Susan said she was most surprised by a student who rarely participated, but today became very involved. When asked why she did this lesson differently, Susan replied,

> *"Last week we talked about letting the students know what we were doing, so I started that way today. I thought I'd do the story as a whole because I've always done it in parts. I thought we'd hold off till the end for a change, just a different approach. I was just interested, I guess now I'm trying to get as much conversation as I can because it's kind of like I want to see what they think because they have so many good thoughts I want to hear them... If I could teach myself to be quiet."*

Susan took time to watch her students as they listened to each other and became more involved. As well, she analyzed her behaviors of being quiet and hearing what her students are saying.

Two weeks later, Susan read *Sea Breeze Hotel.*

> *T1   Now, I'm going to Kenny's story.*
>
> *S4   It was nighttime and I was outside and it was rain-ing and the wind was blowing and it tore a hole through it [a kite] and it fell down.*
>
> *T1   Someone ask him a question.*
>
> *S15   Why would you go outside in the rain? Could you go outside some other time when it was not rain-ing?*
>
> *S4   I didn't know it was going to rain, it was nighttime and then*
>
> *S15   (interrupting) You said it was raining when you went outside.*
>
> *S4   I said (hesitates)*
>
> *T1   She's confused, that would have been a good word, I'm confused, tell me more.*
>
> *S4   It wasn't raining when I went outside.*
>
> *S15   It started pouring little drops or something.*
>
> *T1   That clears that up.*
>
> *S4   Then it tore a hole in my kite.*
>
> *T1   What tore a hole in your kite?*
>
> *S4   The wind.*
>
> *T1   And the rain when it got real wet.*

After another student told a short story about her kite, a student came back to Kenny's story.

> *S14   Kenny, in your story was there any thunder?*
>
> *S4   No.*
>
> *T1   Why are you asking?*
>
> *S14   If it was thundering it could hit the car.*
>
> *T1   Thunder? I have a question. Does thunder hit anything?*
>
> *Ss   (a lot of yes and no)*
>
> *S11   If it hit the tree and knocked the tree down.*
>
> *T1   Thunder? Rob, help me out, I'm confused.*
>
> *S15   They're not going to knock the tree down because they are very high.*
>
> *T1   Anyone disagree?*
>
> *S8   I disagree because thunder is only a loud noise.*

> S3   It could be so loud the echo could hit the tree.
>
> S1   I agree, thunder is so loud it shook the ground.
>
> S15 Sometimes it causes a earthquake.
>
> T1   Thunder causes an earthquake?
>
> S5   What you're looking for is lightning, cause lightning knocks down trees.
>
> S13 If lightning hit a kite it could fall to the tree and then be electrocuted.
>
> T1   How do you know that?
>
> S13 When I was in Miss Cole's class we were talking about weather and our teacher told us a story about weather and then she said there was this story about this man flying a kite and it started to thunder and it ripped the kite.
>
> T1   Not the thunder, the lightning. And he was holding something metal and this man's name was
>
> S15 Benjamin Franklin.
>
> T1   And he discovered electricity on that day when he was flying a kite.

We see in the above example, Susan respected her students' ideas and stories and allowed time for them to talk. She modeled the skill of asking "why?" questions and explaining what you mean or don't understand. As shown in other studies (Almasi, McKeown, and Beck, 1996; McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, and Clyde, 1996), Susan's modeling allowed students to see the thought processes of understanding text and communicating that to others. Susan guided the conversation, but allowed time for students to construct meaning. She asked a student for help, used questions to get students to elaborate, invited other students to contribute and modeled the idea that we can agree or disagree with each other in a conversation. Roehler, Hallenbeck, McLellan and Svoboda (1996), suggest that the teacher's modeling provides students with more opportunities to learn and helps them to learn how to talk to each other and to the teacher. During the follow-up conversation, Susan talked about trying to hold back and have the students ask questions and her use of deliberate silence to give them time to reflect.

During the three months of modeling and practicing instructional conversations, Susan began to use conversations to observe her students and listen to their stories. She encouraged them to question and share ideas. During these conversations, Susan's students actively constructed meaning in collaboration with others. Instructional conversations

allowed her students to put their thoughts into words, explain their ideas and hear what others are thinking. Eeds and Wells (1989) and Saunders, Goldenberg and Hamann (1992) document similar experiences of teacher and student behaviors.

In the culminating interview, Susan said that reading and discussing a book every week was very important in making instructional conversations routine. By doing this every week, she saw what students did and said while engaged in conversation. "Eddie has higher thinking skills and now that we take time for conversation he is not the first student to talk, but the third or fourth one because he has used the time to put his thoughts together. Eddie's an example of a child who needed the time." Susan talked about instructional conversation as a way for students to learn to work together, find things to write about, and learn more. "We can use instructional conversation in math. If it's always the teacher using the math terminology the students will never get it, they need to use it also and explain things to each other." She talked about the benefits for her students. "It's about kids listening and helping each other understand. They hear each other's perspectives, not just their own." Other researchers agree that instructional conversations promote learning and students increase their abilities to interact and work together (Roehler, Hallenbeck, McLellan and Svoboda, 1996; Tharp and Gallimore, 1988).

Goldenberg and Gallimore's (1991) research described what is needed for teachers to learn to conduct effective instructional conversations: 1) opportunities for teachers to meet routinely with a skilled person; 2) teachers' needs and concerns determine how that time was spent; 3) specific goals and specific times frame the time together; 4) teachers work to understand pedagogy as well as the skill of instructional conversation; 5) time provided for planning instructional conversations; and 6) opportunities for teachers to analyze transcripts or videotapes of their lessons (p. 70). As well, Pace (1992) examined teachers' shift from traditional to whole language instruction and found teachers need time to think about and feel comfortable with the implications of changing their practice. Without support many teachers may start to make changes, but in times of frustration go back to more comfortable ways. This study confirms that working together, talking right after the lessons, and reading the transcripts helped this teacher change. Susan comments to me during the culminating interview:

> *"When you are teaching you can't listen. You're rolling*
> *with them and trying to keep up with them. There's no time to*
> *evaluate yourself until you sit down like this; the evaluation at*

the end is better. You, never said how I was doing, but the transcripts told me what was said and what happened. You knew what you were doing with instructional conversation, but I knew it took time to do this and that was very comforting. I didn't have to know how to do it, so that opened doors for me to ask for help and to wait and give time for students to think."

This study also supports what Tharp and Gallimore (1988) indicate is a major barrier to changing teaching practice, the absence of opportunities for assisting teachers in their classrooms as they work with students. Teachers, like their students, have zones of proximal development. Schools need to create opportunities for teachers to receive assistance. Richardson (1990) recommends we first acknowledge and build upon teachers' experiences, promote reflection of experiences, and then introduce new ideas and practices through dialogue that combines discussion of new practices with the teachers' current views of effective practices. Au's (1990) study of change in one teacher's view of interactive comprehension instruction included discussing instructional problems, which helped the teacher's thinking and implementation of solutions. Susan would agree,

"You learn over the years to try something so you can become a better teacher, and you learn more from sharing with people than just doing it. I watched (Becky) and tried to head to the same place, but then I also wanted to do something different. I felt like we were on the same level, but she also pushed me into some things. I like my old ways and I know they work, but this works better."

Ultimately, effective instruction is about the teacher making decisions about what is best for kids (McIntyre, 1996). "The individual classroom teacher is a key player in reform. Knowing more about how teachers change is important if schools are to respond to changing needs in a changing world" (Pace, 1992, p. 475). Given the opportunity to observe, practice and get feedback through collaborative talk, this teacher made a shift from recitation to conversation and her students initiated conversation, and challenged and contributed to each other's statements.

The conclusions of this study in terms of the teacher and students behaviors are limited because of the short-term exploratory nature of the study and the impact of other factors on the teacher and her students.

However, the results suggest the importance of teachers' professional development as a continual everyday process of engagement, reflection, discussion, and collaborative efforts to learn. One of the implications for further research is a longer study to understand more about the processes that support teachers' professional development in the practices of critical analysis and reflection and explicit modeling and scaffolding in students' zones of proximal development. Teachers, as learners, need to experience successful practice, to discuss, to think about, and to try out strategies with support through modeling, coaching, and collective problem solving (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995). Research is also needed to determine teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the kinds of staff development that support changing in their practices as well as what supports collaboration and the sharing of knowledge.

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