

TALK OPPORTUNITIES AROUND TEXT AND THE RESPONSES THEY ELICIT
FROM MIDDLE LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

By

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Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the role that talk about text assumes for English language learners in their middle level reading classrooms. In particular, this study looked at the opportunities that English language learners have to talk about text in middle level reading classrooms and their responses to these opportunities. In addition, it looked at how English language learners explain and regard the talk opportunities they receive and their participation in them. Scholars propose that talk in general, and talk about text specifically, fosters comprehension, higher level thinking, and academic language proficiency. A relatively large body of scholarship has examined the role that talk about text assumes for English language learners at the elementary level. However, very few studies have done this at the middle level. This study seeks to augment that sparse body of research. It contributes to middle level research, research around English language learners, and research regarding the role of talk in reading classrooms.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Joshua, our village, and the Saulgill family.

I love you all.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Schools across the nation face two indisputable facts: (a) classroom composition is changing dramatically as the English language and Latino learner population grows at unprecedented rates and (b) a significant and persistent gap exists between the literacy achievement of these children and their English only (EO) speaking peers (Goldenberg, 2008; Short & Echevarria, 2005; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Waxman & Tellez, 2002). This gap is particularly evident in grades 4-12 (Au, 2006; Cummins, 2003; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Vacca & Vacca, 2005). The educational community – teachers, administrators, researchers, and policymakers – gives serious and sustained attention to this difference, but as Jimenez (2004) notes, “we are far from final answers” (p. 6). The literacy achievement gap is rooted in multiple, complex, dynamic, and interrelated factors that operate both inside and outside the world of school. The bad news is that many of these factors fall beyond the school’s realm of influence. The good news, as Jimenez explains, is that “much of the low achievement of language-minority students may be pedagogically induced or exacerbated and therefore amenable to change” (p. 9). Clearly, what we do inside the world of school matters tremendously to learners. According to Gersten and Jimenez (1994), English language learners (ELLs) benefit from classroom literacy practices that lead to high involvement, foster higher-order cognitive processes, and enable them to engage in extended discourse. The opportunity to engage must be authentic. Meaningful talk around text constitutes one such practice.

In this qualitative study, I explore the opportunities that English language learners have to engage in talk around text in their middle level reading classrooms. I analyze the

students' responses to these opportunities and look for indications of high involvement, higher order thinking, and extended discourse. Three questions guided this inquiry: (a) What kinds of talk opportunities around text do middle level English language learners receive in a reading classroom setting?, (b) How do English language learners respond to these various opportunities?, and (c) How do English language learners explain and regard the talk opportunities they receive and their participation in them? In the subsequent sections, I further develop these ideas. I share facts and figures to specify the growth of our ELL and Latino population, present indicators of their academic struggle, delineate cognitive and linguistic demands, and posit the central role that talk plays in the teaching and learning process.

Central Points

Population Growth

At present, approximately 56 percent of teachers in the nation have at least one English language learner (ELL) in their classroom (Waxman & Tellez, 2002) and this number is growing rapidly. In 2003-2004, approximately 5.5 million English language learners enrolled in U.S. schools as compared to 2 million in 1990 (Goldenberg, 2008; Short & Echevarria, 2005). Goldenberg reports that in the past twenty years, the number of ELLs in U.S. schools increased from 1 in 20 to 1 in 9. That figure is predicted to be 1 in 4 in another twenty years. The number of English language learners in Washington State schools has almost doubled since 1994. According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2009), overall student enrollment increased by approximately 86,000 from 1994 to 2006. Nearly 37,000, or 43 percent, of these new students were English language learners.

Nearly 80 percent of English language learners in U.S. schools are native Spanish speakers (Goldenberg, 2008; Kohler & Lazarín, 2007). From 1990-2000, the Latino population in the United States increased by 57.9 percent, accounting for 38 percent of the nation's overall population growth during the decade. During this same time period, the Latino population in Washington State grew from 4.4 to 7.5 percent. Latino students account for almost 15 percent of all learners in Washington State schools. In fact, after White learners, they represent the largest ethnic group in the State. This growth is particularly evident in central and eastern Washington. In October 2007, Latino students comprised 76 to 86 percent of the total student population in a number of central and eastern Washington school districts such as Grandview, Granger, Quincy, Royal City, and Othello. Latino students accounted for 69 percent of all students in Pasco, 34 percent of students in Kennewick, and 31 percent of students in Walla Walla (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI], 2009).

Academic Struggle

Academic success for ELL and Latino learners has not paralleled this explosive population growth. The academic struggle becomes particularly evident as students enter the upper elementary and middle school years. Between grades four and six, English language learners in general experience a sudden drop in reading achievement. This phenomenon is often referred to as the grade four slump (Cummins, 2003; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Vacca & Vacca, 2005). English language learners do not typically recover from this slump. Consequently, the achievement gap between them and their English only (EO) peers continues to widen throughout the middle and high school years. Thomas and Collier (1997) indicate that as ELLs move into cognitively demanding work

of increasing complexity, their rate of progress often does not match that of native-English speakers. Their performance, as measured by standardized tests, declines. According to Thomas and Collier, English Language Learners fall behind the typical achievement levels of native English speakers by 1 to 4 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) each year, resulting in a cumulative achievement gap of 15 to 26 NCEs by the end of their school years.

This achievement divide appears consistently in other academic measures as well. Au (2006) pinpoints a four-year achievement gap between Latino and White students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). She explains that Latino students' high school NAEP reading scores match those of White students' eighth grade NAEP reading scores. Furthermore, NAEP (2009) data reveal that only 30 percent of eighth grade ELLs scored at or above the Basic proficiency level in reading in 2007. Within this 30 percent, only 5 percent of ELLs scored at or above the Proficiency level. These figures are dismally low, especially when compared to the scores of native English speakers. Seventy-six percent of native English speakers scored at the Basic level or above and 33 percent of those students tested at or above the Proficiency level.

These data are important, especially in light of what the NAEP reading levels entail. A Basic level score requires literal comprehension of grade-appropriate texts while a Proficient level score requires students to “read grade-appropriate texts and draw conclusions, make inferences, and make connections to their own experiences” (Allington, 2002, p. 8). Students must also “react critically to what they read or to question their interpretations of text in the face of opposing arguments” (Alvermann,

Dillon, & O'Brien, 1984, p. 6). These later skills, demonstrated at the NAEP Proficient level, are associated with higher levels of cognition and academic success.

Like ELLs across the nation, English language learners in Washington State score alarmingly low on high-stakes reading assessments. Many English language learners across the State of Washington, particularly those at the middle level, do not meet the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) reading standard. Low scores are especially evident in districts with large numbers of Latino students, many of whom are English language learners. For example, 47 percent of seventh-graders in the Pasco School District, 53 percent of seventh-graders in the Quincy School District, and 62 percent of seventh-graders in the Granger School District did not meet the reading standard in 2005-2006. During the 2006-2007 academic year, 47.2 percent of all Latino seventh-graders did not meet the WASL reading standard. This represents the highest failure rate of any ethnic group in Washington State. The failure rate for English language learners as a group was even higher. A full 79.4 percent of ELLs in seventh grade did not meet the WASL reading standard. Even when compared with other groups of students who historically struggle to "make the grade", this number is high. For example, 41.3 percent of seventh-graders receiving Title I assistance and 66.3 percent of seventh-graders in Special Education did not meet the WASL reading standard (OSPI, 2009).

While these figures are also distressingly high, they reveal that no other group struggles to succeed in Washington State schools as desperately as English language learners. Again, these data are important considering the higher level thinking skills required by the reading WASL. To pass the reading WASL, students must: demonstrate

understanding of theme and literary elements, summarize with evidence, make inferences and predictions, interpret critical vocabulary, compare and contrast between and within texts, determine cause and effect, analyze, evaluate, generalize, draw conclusions, and apply information to other texts or situations (OSPI, 2009).

Clearly, standardized achievement tests are but one gauge, and a controversial one at that, of academic success and failure. However, high-stakes tests are measures that cannot be ignored. Failure to make the grade, on high-stakes assessments like the WASL, impacts students' lives dramatically. First, scores on high-stakes exams determine who will, and who will not, graduate. At present, students in Washington State must pass the reading WASL, or an approved alternative, to graduate from high school. Furthermore, these scores are often used in conjunction with other measures to determine placement in lower track courses or higher college-preparatory tracks and to determine grade advancement or retention. Overrepresentation in lower track courses, disproportionately high retention rates, and attrition are additional measures that indicate and engender academic struggle. I discuss each in turn.

Pérez and de la Rosa Salazar (1997) report that Latino students are “disproportionately enrolled in educational ‘tracks’ that prepare students for neither college nor stable employment....Even among Hispanics who stay in school until their senior year, 75% are enrolled in nonacademic tracks that do not offer the courses, especially in math and science, required to enter college” (p. 60). In addition to curricular differences, pedagogy in lower-track courses or programs differs from that of higher tracks. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) note that students in lower track classes have fewer opportunities, and, consequently, less engagement in all aspects

of effective language arts instruction such as dialogic instruction, comprehension building activities, extended curricular conversations, and high academic demands. Another common dimension of tracking is the placement of Latino and English language learners in low reading groups in which instruction differs significantly from that found in higher groups. According to Garcia (1991), instruction in low groups tends to focus on literal interpretation of the text to determine answers. After years in such groups, students are programmed to rely on explicit interpretation and are unaccustomed to the skills necessary to do well on tests of reading achievement. Garcia states that if low-group instruction teaches students “to focus on a literal interpretation of the text, then reading tests which devalue this skill are penalizing children for what they have learned” (p. 389). Reading instruction should engender the skills necessary to advanced literacy.

When this does not happen, students are sometimes retained. Latino students are more likely to be retained than their non-Latino peers, especially as they enter the middle and secondary school years. According to Pérez and de la Rosa Salazar (1997), up to half of all Latino students between the ages of 15 and 17 are enrolled below grade level. Pérez and de la Rosa Salazar explain that being held back is the greatest predictor of later dropping out of school. Eleven percent of Latino students who dropped out of high school in 2004 had been retained at some point (Kohler & Lazarín, 2007). Clearly, low scores on high-stakes assessments, inappropriate retention, and faulty placement in lower curriculum tracks or groups can result in lifelong consequences for Latino and English language learners. Nowhere is this more evident than in their incredibly high drop-out rates.

Schools across the nation report high attrition rates for Latino and English language learners (Bielenberg & Wong Fillmore, 2004/2005; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984). Dropout rates for Latino students reach 85 percent in some regions of the country (Godina, 1994; Pérez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997; Scribner, 1999). OSPI (2009) data reveal that 42.5 percent of Latino students and 44.5 percent of ELLs in the Washington State Class of 2006 did not graduate on time. Because schools must serve students until they graduate or turn 21 years old, some of these students might still graduate. OSPI estimates that an additional 7.8 percent of Latino students and 10.7 percent of ELLs will graduate late. If these estimates prove true, 65.3 percent of Latino students and 66.2 percent of English learners will graduate with the Class of 2006. These numbers are still too low to meet the graduation rate goal of 68 percent as established by No Child Left Behind (OSPI, 2009). More importantly, the graduation rate, real and estimated, remains far too low for the thousands of Latino and English language learners in Washington State who will never receive a high school diploma. The cost of dropping out is high. According to Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008), “the average high-school dropout will earn \$19,169 per year compared to \$51,554 for the average college graduate (and \$78,095 for the average individual with an advanced degree)” (p. 367). Latinos, due in large part to low educational attainment and high drop-out rates, have disproportionately high rates of poverty and employment in low-wage, unstable work (Pérez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997).

These data (e.g., low scores on high-stakes exams, overrepresentation in lower track courses, and above average retention and attrition rates) by no means exhaust the ways to gauge academic success and failure. However, they indicate, in powerful and

fundamental ways, that something is amiss in the education of ELL and Latino students, even in districts clearly striving to meet their educational needs. Simply put, too many of these children do not make it in our public schools. This matters to caring and concerned teachers, administrators, researchers, policymakers, and parents. Most of all, it matters to the students whose lives are forever impacted by the education they do, or do not, receive during their youth. In my opinion, there is no more pressing issue in our profession than the education of English language and Latino learners.

What do we want for our nation's Latino and English language learners? In a sense, the answer to this question is simple: the same thing we want for *all* learners. We want them to: (a) be engaged in a learning process that is joyful, challenging, supported, relevant, meaningful, collaborative, shared, mindful, critical, authentic, transformative, and on-going; (b) graduate from high school with the content, literacy, language, and social skills foundational to expanded possibilities and opportunities; and (c) be proficient and fluent in the literacy practices suited to, and shaped by, our 21st century realities, opportunities, and demands. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) share a vision of education that requires robust academic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge. As they explain,

Solving the big problems of the day, whether deep poverty, infectious disease, environmental degradation, global warming, or terrorism, will require the active engagement of well-educated, cognitively flexible, and culturally sophisticated individuals able to work in groups. Schools, then, will need to nurture young minds to be able to synthesize knowledge derived from various academic disciplines, wrestle with social and ethical dilemmas, and work across cultural

boundaries with individuals of different races, religions, and cultures. In order to foster higher-order cognitive skills, competencies, and interpersonal sensibilities, schools will have to accomplish more than ever before. If schooling is to be relevant and in synchronicity with the problems and opportunities of the day, it will need to prepare youngsters to deal with the increasing complexity and diversity that characterize their lives. (p. 2)

Cognitive and Linguistic Demands

Embedded within these broader goals are the literacy skills needed to pass high-stakes reading achievement tests, like the WASL. Acquiring these skills is anything but easy. As students move into middle school, academic and linguistic demands increase. They are expected to use language in particular ways, ways that often differ from their elementary experience. According to Bielenberg and Wong Fillmore (2004/2005), “Text materials and the language of instruction evolve to a markedly different form so they can communicate more advanced and complex subject matter. The language becomes more precise in reference and more complex in structure” (pp. 45-46). In other words, advancement in grade-level is matched by advanced demands in English language and literacy. English language learners must develop advanced reading skills in order to access complex concepts. They must also develop the advanced skills needed to understand and use these concepts and their labels in spoken and written communication. When this does not happen, many culturally and linguistically diverse students are marginalized academically. They do not adequately develop the academic English skills foundational to literacy, subject matter mastery, and superior test performance (Bielenberg & Wong Fillmore, 2004/2005; Delpit, 1988). More importantly, they do not

develop the language proficiency necessary “to become full participants in the dialogue and texts that provide access, power, and opportunity in today’s world” (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002, p. 3).

For English language learners, acquiring these skills is especially challenging. They must master content knowledge as defined for all students while at the same time developing advanced cognitive and linguistic proficiency in their second language. They are learning academic content *and* the language through which it is delivered concurrently. Gibbons (1991) underscores this point. She explains that not only must ELLs learn this new language, “but they must learn *in* it as well” (p. 3). This challenge uniquely distinguishes ELLs from their monolingual English speaking peers and makes their academic task much more difficult.

To succeed in school, English language and Latino learners must be proficient in the advanced literacy and academic language that typifies classrooms across the nation (Bielenberg & Wong Fillmore, 2004/2005; Cummins, 2003; Scarcella, 2002; Valdés, 2001; Zwiers, 2004/2005). Many teachers erroneously equate academic language proficiency with fluency in everyday English. Historically, this has resulted in a lack of language support and over-referral to special education when ELLs do not perform as expected academically. Cummins (2003) explains that everyday and academic language develop concurrently and in correlation with one another. However, they also “behave differently from one another – with respect to when they reach a developmental plateau, to the kinds of experiences and instruction that promote each dimension, to the communicative contexts in which they are likely to be exhibited, and to the components of language on which they rely” (p. 4). In the following paragraphs, I distinguish

between these dimensions of language proficiency and describe academic language in depth.

In his early work, Cummins (1994) referred to everyday language as *basic interpersonal communication skills* (BICS). More recently, Cummins (2003) refers to this dimension of proficiency as social language or conversational fluency. Children use social language to build relationships, play, interact in the cafeteria, and converse about day to day occurrences. Greetings and leave-takings, simple requests for information, descriptions, and expression of feelings offer additional examples of this dimension of language proficiency (Cummins, 2003; Scarcella, 2002; Williams, 2001). High-frequency words and simple grammatical constructions characterize social language. It is context-embedded, or rich with language cues that lie beyond the actual spoken words. These paralinguistic cues, such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, and intonation, make social language more accessible and less reliant on precision use of vocabulary (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). Most native English speakers have developed social language proficiency by the time they enter school at age five. English language learners typically acquire social proficiency within one to two years of exposure to their new language. As noted earlier, many educators wrongly assume that competent users of social language are also able to function in academic environments which require very different language skills. On the contrary, becoming proficient in academic language presents a more formidable task.

Scarcella (2002) explains that “there are large and significant differences between the kind of English literacy needed to participate in ordinary, everyday situations and to accomplish daily communicative goals and the kind of English literacy needed to

participate in academic situations and to accomplish...academic goals” (p. 223).

Cummins (1994) initially used the term *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP) to describe language that is more complex and abstract than everyday social language.

More recently, Cummins (2003) shortened the term to academic language. Other scholars refer to this dimension of language proficiency as academic English. I use these labels interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Cognitive academic language proficiency is typically context-reduced in that it offers diminished interpersonal and contextual cues that could facilitate language acquisition. Furthermore, it requires receptive and productive language skills that are tied to academic thinking and reasoning. Zwiers (2004/2005) defines academic English as the language used to “(1) describe content-area knowledge and procedures, (2) express complex thinking processes and abstract concepts, and (3) create cohesion and clarity in written and oral discourse” (p. 60). He considers social English to be the true second language, readily encountered in various school, community, and media settings. He calls academic language a third language full of “new words, figurative expressions, grammar structures, verb tenses, and communication strategies” (p. 60) generally encountered only in the classroom.

Students use academic language to carry out a range of literate and communicative behaviors. Fluency in academic language enables learners to express and support opinions, formulate hypotheses, propose different solutions, describe, generalize, ask and answer informational and clarifying questions, classify, relate information, compare and contrast, explain cause and effect, interpret, infer, draw conclusions, summarize, evaluate, critique, justify, analyze, and persuade (Dutro & Moran, 2003; Williams, 2001; Zwiers, 2008). In short, English language learners use academic

language to describe higher order thinking, complexity, and abstraction as clearly as possible. To do this, Zwiers (2008) suggests that ELLS must learn to make their message explicit, use abstract and figurative language, navigate complex syntax, convey nuance in meaning, soften the message with qualifiers, use prosody for emphasis, use linking strategies to create a coherent message, and condense lengthy explanations into a few words. In addition, they must learn concrete and abstract high-frequency words, multi-syllabic low-frequency words not encountered in everyday conversation, and discipline specific vocabulary.

The task of learning vocabulary is huge for all learners, but monumental for English language learners. Graves and Watts-Taffe (2002) explain that word knowledge is extremely complex. Learners must move from incomplete to increasingly refined word understandings and appropriate multidimensional and interrelated word meanings. They report the work of scholars (Anderson & Nagy, 1992; Anglin, 1993; Nagy & Anderson, 1984; White, Graves & Slater, 1990) who estimate that “students learn approximately 3,000 to 4,000 words each year, accumulating a reading vocabulary of approximately 25,000 words by the end of elementary school and approximately 50,000 words by the end of high school” (p. 142). Snow and Kim (2007) report that adolescents are expected to acquire up to “75,000 words, each with its own meaning(s), syntactic and morphological affordances, pronunciation, and orthographic representation” (p. 136). Upon entering middle school, English language learners potentially lag significantly behind their native English speaking peers in both receptive and productive vocabulary.

Beck and McKeown (2007) suggest that students must learn tier I, tier II, and tier III vocabulary words. Tier III vocabulary is discipline specific and encountered less

frequently in reading, writing, and everyday speech. Zwiers (2008) and Dutro and Moran (2003) call content specific vocabulary linguistic “bricks” and explain that these words range from concrete to abstract. Zwiers explains that “in middle grades and early high school especially, students become inundated with many new bricks on the abstract side of the continuum” (p. 22). In addition to content vocabulary, students must tackle tier II vocabulary, or what Zwiers and Dutro and Moran call “mortar” words. Mortar words are general, yet sophisticated and often abstract, words used across a variety of domains to describe higher order thinking and communicate complex thoughts. Zwiers describes them as “general-utility words that hold the content-specific technical words together” (p. 22). Carlo et al. (2004) explain that for English language learners, “lack of knowledge of the middle- and lower- frequency ‘academic’ words encountered in middle and secondary school texts impedes comprehension of those texts, which in turn impedes the natural process of learning new word meanings from exposure during reading” (p. 191).

Consequently,

Ells are less able to use context to disambiguate the meaning of unfamiliar words because a higher proportion of words in text is likely to be unknown to them.

Furthermore, because they lack full command of the English grammar, they are less able to exploit linguistic cues to word meaning as an EO [English only] speaker could. (p. 191)

Anderson and Roit (1996) explain that even everyday high-frequency words, or tier I vocabulary, can pose a problem for English language learners. They note that vocabulary instruction for ELLs often focuses on concrete and surface aspects of language such as high-frequency nouns, verbs, and adjectives. However, much of the

logic of language lies in abstract high-frequency words that are more difficult to teach and learn. English language learners often “learn these words as part of their sight vocabularies, but confusions about usage and meaning persist” (p. 298). As noted earlier, acquiring and using tier I, II, and III vocabulary is taxing for all children, but daunting for ELLs.

Clearly, cognitive academic language proficiency is more complex than everyday language. Understandably, it takes much longer to acquire. In his study of ELLs in Canada, Cummins (1994, 2003) found that it takes an average of five to seven years to acquire academic language proficiency. In her research of ELLs in the United States, Collier (1989) found that, depending on age of entry to school and level of native-language literacy, it can take students up to ten years to reach academic proficiency in English. This is consistent with Paris’s (2005) explanation of constrained and unconstrained literacy skills and Snow and Kim’s (2007) depiction of large and small problem spaces. Paris explains that some literacy skills are learned quickly and mastered entirely within an early and relatively small acquisition period. He labels these skills constrained. Phonemic awareness and phonics are examples of constrained skills. In contrast, Paris explains that “the course and duration of learning are potentially endless for unconstrained skills such as vocabulary and comprehension” (p. 194). Furthermore, Paris explains that unconstrained skills like vocabulary and comprehension “may reveal enduring differences between individuals over the life span” (p. 190). According to Snow and Kim, learners must navigate both small and large problem spaces in literacy development. Vocabulary is considered an extremely large problem space. They explain that small problem spaces, like learning to recognize 26 letters to mastering a couple

hundred spelling rules, are easier to teach and easier to test, “but it is in mastering the large problem spaces that students become truly literate” (p. 136). Scarcella (2002) posits that without appropriate instruction, many ELLs fail to develop advanced English literacy at all.

Zwiers (2008) underscores this point. He explains that “millions of bright and capable students around the world struggle in school and even give up because they lack the abilities to use language in ways that are expected in academic settings” (p. 1). Several accomplished Latina scholars (Reyes & Halcón, 2001; Nieto, 2000; Valdés, 2001) have documented their struggle to acquire academic proficiency in English. Like many other children in the United States, Valdés (2001) encountered English for the first time upon entering school. As she explains, “I arrived at school as a competent speaker of Spanish. I was incompetent only in terms of my ability to use English to present myself authentically as an intelligent and capable young person. Over the course of a lifetime, I have struggled to acquire an authentic English voice” (p. 4). Nieto (2000) spoke only Spanish upon entering first grade, and was immediately confronted with the arduous task of learning English. She says that “almost 50 years later, I still remember the frustration of groping for English words I did not know to express thoughts I could say very capably in Spanish” (p. 1). In Reyes and Halcón (2001), Reyes recalls that “although all my classmates and I were born in the United States, few of us were fluent in English” (p. 1). She marvels at her resilience to survive and wonders how much more she and her classmates could have accomplished had the school environment been different. This leads to the final section of this introduction: the role of talk and two theoretical orientations linked to it.

The Role of Talk

Latino and English language learners need literacy instruction that promotes the higher level thinking and discourse skills requisite to school success (Bielenberg & Wong Fillmore, 2004/2005; Cummins, 1994, 2003; Jimenez, 2004; Scarcella, 2003; Short & Echevarria, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Valdés, 2001; Waxman & Tellez, 2002; Zwiers, 2008). Research pinpoints a variety of instructional contexts and practices that facilitate Latino and English language learners' acquisition of higher level thinking and discourse skills. One theme consistently emerges: Opportunities to talk – to engage in frequent and sustained discussion with teacher and peers around text, topics, and problems of concern to ELLs – play a central role in the development of a literate mind (Applebee et al., 2003; Bouchereau Bauer & Manyak, 2008; Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, & Tharp, 2003; Faltis & Hudelson, 1994; Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Nystrand, 1997; Thompson, 2000; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000; Waxman & Tellez, 2002). Opportunities to talk – to negotiate both meaning *and* form, to reflect on ones understanding of the world *and* understanding of language, to test hypotheses about life, literacy *and* language – precipitate and cultivate language acquisition. Opportunities to talk are important for all students, but crucial for ELLs.

Boyd and Rubin (2006) underscore this point. As they explain,

Theory, research, and practice all converge on the conclusion that engaged and elaborated student talk in the classroom enhances student learning. Such articulate talk supports inquiry, collaborative learning, high-level thinking, and making knowledge personally meaningful....For second language learners, talk serves the same purpose as it does for native speakers of English, but it is also a vehicle both

for acquiring nonnative communicative competence and for expanding linguistic repertoires in the students' new language. (p. 142)

To further underscore the importance of talk, I now specifically address the array of reasons why it holds historical and current importance.

Britton (1993) suggests that talk is the sea upon which all else floats. A host of scholars join Britton in highlighting the central role that talk plays in learning (Barnes, 1990; Mercer, 1995; Nystrand, 1997; Rubin, 1990). These scholars propose a sociocultural theory of teaching and learning based upon the work of Vygotsky (1964, 1978, 1994) and other more recent like-minded scholars. Vygotsky argued that human thought is intimately shaped by, and connected to, human language. He proposed that thought does not merely express itself in words, but rather realizes itself in them. Green and Dixon (1993) suggest that we literally talk knowledge and understanding into being. According to Nystrand (1997), particular modes of speaking “engender particular epistemic roles for the conversants, and these roles, in turn, engender, constrain, and empower their thinking” (p. 29). These scholars suggest that talk and thought, particularly higher levels of thinking, are intimately connected.

Furthermore, Mercer (1994) explains that “talk is not simply ‘thinking out loud.’ Rather, to talk is to engage in a social mode of thinking” (p. 95). Vygotsky (1981) proposed that all higher psychological processes, like thought and language, originate in interaction with others and are followed by personal appropriation. In Vygotsky’s words, “any function appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First, it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category” (p. 163). The work of Vygotsky and others (Applebee et al.,

2003; Britton, 1993; Cazden, 2001; Fisher, 1996; Mercer, 1994; Nystrand, 1997) points to the central role that talk, especially in the presence of more knowledgeable or differently knowledgeable others, plays in realizing and expressing the literate mind.

In addition to shaping thought, talk plays a crucial role in language development and acquisition. Mercer (1995) explains that “if we encourage and enable children to use language in certain ways – to ask certain kinds of questions, to clearly describe events, to account for outcomes and consolidate what they have learned in words – we are helping them understand and gain access to educated discourse” (pp. 106-107). These scholars voice an assumption central to this study, that is, that talk plays a central role in shaping both higher level thinking and higher level discourse. If this is true, then learners must receive frequent and extended opportunities to engage in talk around topics of meaning and relevance to their lives. Teachers must carefully consider the kinds of talk that foster higher level thinking and discourse and the contexts in which they flourish.

Swain (2000, 2005) explains how opportunities to talk facilitate language development. She challenged the idea that language development and speech are automatically driven forward through comprehensible input, as proposed by Krashen (1981). On the contrary, she proposed that to learn to speak, one must actually speak. Swain based this conclusion on her observations of Canadian children, all native speakers of English, learning French in an immersion context. She found that while they performed at levels of comprehension close to native speakers, the same could not be said of their production abilities. After six or seven years of instruction in French, they continued to make persistent errors when speaking and writing. Students received rich and comprehensible input, but had limited opportunities to engage in extended discourse.

Swain reasoned that L2 learners can comprehend messages with basic word and world knowledge, but for language to move forward, they must *produce* language. The act of creating and expressing linguistic meaning *and* form requires learners to stretch their language skills and process language at a deep level with significant mental effort.

Gibbons (1998) underscores Swain's point. According to her,

The degree to which a classroom is facilitative of second language learning depends largely on how classroom discourse is constructed. The studies imply that there must be a focus on extended opportunities for student talk ...it is important, at times, for learners to have opportunities to use stretches of discourse in contexts where there is a 'press' on their linguistic resources, and where, for the benefit of their listeners, they must focus not only on what they wish to say but on how they are saying it. (p. 103-104)

According to Swain (2000, 2005), as students produce language they engage in negotiation of both meaning and form. Many researchers (Ellis, 1999; Nakahama, Tyler, & van Lier, 2001; Pica, 1994) consider language negotiation critical to second language acquisition. When second language learners produce a message, the listener does not necessarily understand it. The speaker must work to produce a comprehensible message, often in negotiation and collaboration with a more knowledgeable language other. Consequently, talk becomes a site where ELLs negotiate, practice, and internalize language. More importantly, talk becomes part of the learning mechanism itself.

In addition to negotiation, Swain (2000, 2005) proposes three ways in which talk, as precise, coherent, and appropriate output, contributes to second language acquisition. First, through talk language learners notice their linguistic problems or shortcomings.

They experience discrepancies between what they want to say and what they can say, and realize what they don't know or only partially know. Swain calls awareness of this linguistic gap "noticing." She, and others (Ellis, 1999), assert that noticing a language form must occur for it to be acquired. Second, talk provides ELLs with opportunities to test their comprehension and the linguistic correctness of their utterances. Language learners hold certain beliefs, or hypotheses, about their new language and how it works. Swain proposes that language learners externalize and test these hypotheses as they produce language, receive feedback from more knowledgeable language others, and negotiate language use and meaning with their language learning peers. Swain calls this process "hypothesis testing." Finally, talk helps learners develop metalinguistic knowledge of how the target language works. Learners use language to reflect on language. Importantly, the *act of producing language* allows the learner to (a) negotiate meaning and form when misunderstandings occur, (b) notice what he or she does not know, or knows imperfectly, (c) test a language hypothesis by speaking, and (d) reflect upon his or her understanding and use of the target language. Through these processes, English language learners build content and linguistic knowledge and acquire language.

In recent years, Swain (2000) expanded her conceptualization of output, traditionally viewed from a cognitive information-processing perspective, to a more Vygotskian, or sociocultural, theory of mind. She broadens the construct of output to "collaborative dialogue." Swain explains that collaborative dialogue constitutes knowledge-building and problem-solving dialogue through which ELLs co-construct linguistic knowledge. According to Swain, collaborative dialogue "is where language use and language learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning. It is

cognitive activity and it is social activity” (p. 97). Through collaborative dialogue, students regulate and reflect upon each other’s speech, and their own. Swain explains that “together, their jointly constructed performance outstrips their individual competencies” (p. 111). Both sociocultural theory and the output hypothesis acknowledge and privilege the connectedness of interaction, language, and thought. These theories drive the productive practices proposed by Gersten and Jimenez (1994) and others as outlined earlier in this chapter, namely, that ELL and Latino learners need to (a) be highly engaged in learning, (b) participate in learning experiences that foster higher order thinking, and (c) engage in extended discourse. Talk plays a central role in this process.

Obviously, educational struggle and failure cannot be attributed to any single roadblock nor can any single program or approach fix it. The solution is as complex and dynamic as the problem. Therefore, educators must challenge attitudes and structures outside the world of school that result in educational inequity for English language learners. However, what we do *inside* the world of school matters greatly to Latino and ELL students as well. Sarason (2004) calls educators to critically examine the classroom context of learning. He proposes that achievement data, such as low test scores, should fuel this examination. In his words, “The potential significance of a test score is in the degree to which it directs you to examine students’ classroom context of learning” (p. 79). Sarason asks teachers to determine what they mean by learning and to distinguish between productive and unproductive contexts of learning. To do so, he says, determines whether the actions a teacher takes will lead to student success or failure.

To further an empirical attention to these complex challenges, I follow Sarason’s (2004) call to examine students’ classroom context of learning. My overriding goal is to

illuminate, describe, and explore the role that talk about text assumes for English language learners in their everyday middle level reading classrooms. To address this goal, I analyze the opportunities that middle level English language learners have to talk about text in their reading classrooms. I explore their responses and consider how the opportunity and the response engender or constrain ELLs' thinking and language development. Toward this end, I designed and implemented a qualitative investigation that involved three seventh-grade reading classes located in a middle school in Eastern Washington.

To pinpoint the importance and focus of this research, I first turn to a close and thorough review of the existing scholarship surrounding talk opportunities around text in upper elementary and middle level reading classrooms. I report this in chapter two. Then, in chapter three, the methodology section, I explain my study design as well as the methods I used to collect and analyze data. The fourth chapter consists of findings for the three questions guiding this study. In the final chapter, I discuss my research findings, emphasize how they coincide or stray from the types of interactions that scholars propose for English language learners, and share implications for classroom practice.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The opportunities that students receive to talk about text in their reading classrooms are largely determined by the talk structures that teachers employ. These talk structures carry certain expectations for both students and teachers and foster distinct responses. These responses can be considered in light of the epistemic functions they engender or constrain. For example, in response to certain talk opportunities, students might consider alternate possibilities, reflect upon pre-conceived notions, and question existing beliefs. In response to other talk opportunities, they may repeat, remember, or recite previously learned information. Classroom talk structures, the expectations they hold, and the responses they engender or constrain, drive the relationship that students have with self, one another, teacher, text, language, and thought. In the first section of this chapter, I describe two classroom talk structures often associated with talk about text: recitation and discussion. I describe the types of talk and responses that stem from each structure and pay particular attention to the epistemic function or role expected of the student and teacher in each kind of speech exchange.

In the second section of this chapter, I present my review of literature. In this review, I examine the role that talk about text assumes for three groups of students: (a) middle level English language learners, (b) middle level English *only* learners, and (c) elementary level English language learners. I focus on these three groups because a thorough search of the literature revealed only one study (Morocco & Hindin, 2002) that explicitly addressed the role that talk about text assumes for English language learners at the middle level. To better understand the role that talk assumes for middle level learners in general, I analyzed nine studies focused on talk about text at this level (Alvermann,

1995; Alvermann et al., 1996; Applebee et al., 2003; Carico, 2001; Hinchman & Young, 2001; Kucan & Beck, 2003; Phelps & Weaver, 1999; Sandora, Beck, & McKeown, 1999; Seidnestricker, 2000). Finally, I turned to fifteen elementary level studies to understand the role that talk about text assumes for English language learners (Almasi, O’Flahavan, & Ayra, 2001; Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Frank, Dixon, & Brandts, 1998; Garcia, 1991; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Maloch, 2002; Martinez-Roldan, 2003; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000; Prado-Olmos, 1994; Purdy, 2008; Rymes, 2003; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Van den Branden, 2000; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006). The study findings led me to organize my literature review into four broad categories, namely: opportunities to talk increase comprehension, opportunities to talk facilitate second language acquisition, opportunities to talk promote higher level thinking, and opportunities to talk hit the mark and fall short. It was not always easy to dissect studies into neat and precise categories as they often addressed multiple points and could have fit equally well into other sections. Accordingly, some studies are split between sections to indicate their multiple stories.

Classroom Talk Structures

Recitation

Many researchers, teachers, and students would agree that teachers often dominate talk in classrooms across the nation. Consider this comment made by an eighth-grade boy: “Talk is one of the things we are pretty deprived of at school” (Alvermann et al., 1996, p. 253). An English-as-a-second-language (ESL) pull-out teacher said this about her students: “You know, sometimes my students come into the Learning Center, and they talk and talk and talk, and I try to calm them down, and they say, ‘But you don’t

understand. I don't talk all day'" (Coppola, 2003, p. 182). Scholars explain that teachers typically engage students in a question-and-answer routine called recitation. Alvermann et al. (1984) characterize recitation as "a rapid fire question and answer format aimed primarily at ensuring factual or knowledge level learning among students" (p. 5). As a classroom talk structure, or speech exchange system, recitation follows a very strict pattern in which teachers initiate a topic (I), students respond (R), and teachers evaluate (E) the student's response (IRE). According to many scholars, IRE is the most frequently occurring classroom discourse pattern (Cazden, 2001; Mercer, 1995, Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997; van Lier, 2001). Cazden describes it as "the *unmarked* pattern; in computer terminology, it is the *default option* – doing what the system is set to do 'naturally' unless someone makes a deliberate change" (p. 31). In the typical initiate-respond-evaluate sequence, teachers make twice as many utterances as students and student responses are usually limited to a single word or phrase (Ernst, 1994; Harklau, 1994; Nystrand, 1997; Ramirez, Pasta, Yuen, Billings, & Ramey, 1991; Townsend, Fu, Nilsson, Hellman, & Hellman, 1998). In their study of various bilingual education program models, Ramirez, Pasta, Yuen, Billings and Ramey (1991) found that students either listened or responded with non-verbal gestures or actions in over half their interactions with teachers. When students did respond, their answers were typically limited to simple information recall statements.

Almasi (1996) explains that repetitive IRE chains characterize recitation and provide little opportunity for students to interact with one another or construct meaning collaboratively. In fact, most recitation questions have pre-specified, or already known, answers. The students' job is to recite these answers. Consequently, the epistemic

function before students in recitation seems to be that of *reproducer* of knowledge as opposed to *producer* of knowledge. In traditional recitation talk structures, knowledge and meaning reside in the teacher and the text, not in the student. Almasi explains that

In a recitation there is little interaction among students, so the teacher is the member of the group whose thoughts might influence a person's interpretation most significantly. The fact that the teacher determines the questions that will be asked, the order of those questions, and the correctness of students' responses to those questions means that the teacher becomes the ultimate interpretive authority....Students will tend to shape the nature of their responses to meet their perceptions of what the teacher wants or to construct an interpretation favored by the teacher. Meaning is then viewed as being located within the text and can be extracted or realized by students through teacher questioning. (p. 7)

However, as Barnes (1990) and Rubin (1990) explain, recitation serves a legitimate epistemic function in schools. Rubin portrays it as a suitable vehicle for reproducing or reciting content knowledge and calls recitation "knowledge-reproducing talk." Barnes puts recitation forward as way that students present and teachers evaluate learning. Accordingly, he calls this speech exchange system "presentational talk." So, when the goal is to recite or present knowledge, IRE is an appropriate talk structure. However, when the goal is to develop or transform meaning, increase higher order thinking, promote academic language, facilitate unconstrained literacy skills, and navigate large problem spaces, the recitation speech exchange system is a misfit. If Vygotsky (1981, 1994) and Swain (2000) are correct and both higher level thinking and language are *realized* through and within talk, then the overuse or misuse of the IRE talk

structure is potentially devastating for English language learners. Within this common classroom talk structure, opportunities to develop complex language and thinking skills are extremely limited. Barnes explains that

If we take seriously what constructivist theorists tell us about learning, we see that, if teachers rely too much upon presentational talk and writing, this leaves the students no time for 'working on understanding.' We should not expect them to arrive without having traveled. (p. 56)

Discussion

Researchers propose that discussion, an alternative to the recitation speech exchange system, facilitates meaning making, higher order thinking, and academic language acquisition. Discussion provides learners an opportunity to transform knowledge and understanding, a very different epistemic function than reproducing or evaluating it. Consequently, it differs from recitation in myriad ways. One notable difference is that students have extended turns at talk as opposed to one-word or short-phrase responses (Almasi, 1995; Alvermann et al., 1984; Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). Elongated responses provide greater opportunities to develop elaborated and substantive thinking and language. Bridges (1979), defines discussion as an oral exchange between group members around a question, subject, or issue in which discussants offer and examine multiple viewpoints and alternative perspectives or angles, and examine and respond to differing opinions. According to Bridges, this does not require an entirely open mind, but it implies a willingness to understand, appreciate, and be affected by the contributions of others. Alvermann et al. (1984) say that in addition to

offering multiple viewpoints, discussants should “be ready to change their minds after hearing convincing counterarguments” (p. 3).

Vacca and Vacca (2005) call discussions an open exchange of ideas during which both teachers and students ask question and students are as likely to respond to one another as they are to their teacher. According to Vacca and Vacca, students and teacher share power, responsibility, and authority as teachers frame and facilitate, but do not dominate, classroom talk. In short, teachers talk less and students talk more. Students “have opportunities to participate more fully by talking more, and by sharing their understanding, interpretations, and perspectives related to the ideas and concepts under discussion” (Vacca & Vacca, pp. 145-146). Students and teachers negotiate topics and subtopics of discussion, students self-select when to speak, and questions do not always have specific answers. In a classroom that fosters discussion, teaching and learning is about the co-construction and sharing of knowledge. Many voices, not just the teacher’s, “come together and intermingle to organize and support learning” (Freedman & Delp, 2007, p. 260).

Furthermore, discussion provides students with opportunities to engage in the kinds of talk that researchers propose facilitate higher order thinking, discourse, and comprehension (Applebee et al., 2003; Freedman & Delp, 2007; Nystrand, 1997; Purdy, 2008). Authentic and meaningful classroom talk carries many different labels, but shares similar characteristics. Fisher (1996) suggests that students need opportunities to engage in effective educational talk. She describes effective educational talk as “talk within educational settings which leads to the proposal and critical evaluation of ideas relevant to the topic under discussion” (p. 238). Wolf, Crosson, and Resnick (2005) propose that

classroom talk should be accountable. Accountable talk has three characteristics. First, it is accountable to the learning community. For example, students ensure that all participants understand ideas and positions, make efforts to link utterances, and build upon one another's ideas. Second, speakers use accountable talk to back-up their contributions with specific and accurate knowledge as evidence. Third, speakers "explain their thinking by using rational strategies to present arguments and by drawing logical conclusions" (p. 34). Rubin (1990) explains that we use talk not only to present knowledge, but to transform it. Students use transformative talk to sift through observations and evaluate some information as more important than some other, compare claims, arrive at new syntheses, and take schema or metaphor that applies to one domain or experience and apply it to a new domain. Furthermore, Rubin suggests that transformative talk yields critical consciousness or "the power to see oneself and one's world from more than just a single perspective" (p. 19). Anderson and Roit (1996) explain that English language learners need frequent opportunities to engage in real talk. Real talk is much like a natural conversation in which people share problems, solutions, and information. They ask and respond to authentic and critical questions, including language-learning questions, like "How do you say...?" or "Why do you use...?" Through real talk, ELLs learn both content and language in a friendly and unthreatening way.

Mercer (1995) proposes that higher order thinking and academic language proficiency develop as students engage in exploratory talk. He defines exploratory talk as

talk in which learners

engage noncritically but constructively with each other's ideas. Statements and suggestions are sought and offered for joint consideration. These may be challenged and counter-challenged, but challenges are justified and alternative hypotheses are offered. In exploratory talk, knowledge is made publicly accountable and reasoning is visible in the talk. Participants actively seek each others' ideas and all children are actively involved. (pp. 8-9)

Engaging in exploratory talk allows students to take an active part in learning and to assimilate, accommodate, and transform new and existing knowledge and understanding. Barnes (1990) notes that an untidy groping towards meaning often characterizes exploratory talk. He explains that exploratory talk is "usually marked by frequent hesitations, rephrasings, false starts and changes of direction" (p. 28) as students engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas.

Exploratory talk occurs in the extended student utterances usually associated with discussion. Wegerif and Mercer (2000) found that long turns at talk "turned out to be the most reliable indicators of the incidence of exploratory talk" (p. 188). As they explain, reasoning "requires longer turns, as claims have to be backed up by sufficient support, which in practice means linking clauses together in a single utterance" (p. 188). Furthermore, Barnes (1992) found that exploratory talk usually develops within small groups of children with limited teacher presence. The limited presence of a teacher in the students' discussion influences the advent of exploratory language in critical ways: First, the learners control the questions they ask. Second, because the teacher as authority is not present, or is only minimally present, the students have to formulate and evaluate their

own hypotheses by testing them against their existing world knowledge and going back to the text for evidence. Barnes states that “the more a learner controls his own language strategies, and the more he is enabled to think aloud, the more he can take responsibility for formulating explanatory hypothesis and evaluating them” (p. 29).

Clearly, the opportunity to discuss text fosters different student responses than the IRE talk structure. Almasi (1996) explains that within discussion, students assume an active stance in their own learning through four primary roles: inquisitor, respondent, facilitator, and evaluator. As inquisitors, they “negotiate the topics for discussion that are of interest and concern to them” (p. 11) and “ask questions that are personally meaningful because the questions will help them interpret and make sense of the text” (p. 7). As respondents, they are “actively involved in reacting to the thoughts of their peers” (p. 11) and engage in “substantive dialogue with one another in their efforts to resolve interpretive issues and make sense of text” (p. 7). As facilitators, they “steer the discussion and maintain responsibility for their actions” (p. 11) and encourage active participation by all group members. Finally, as evaluators, they offer alternative or divergent viewpoints (as opposed to assessing for accuracy) and “demonstrate their ability to listen and to think critically about their peers’ comments” (p. 11). These acts, or responses to talk opportunities, constitute the critical “travel” of which Barnes (1990) spoke. In the final half of this chapter, I present 25 studies that pinpoint the talk opportunities that English language learners (in 15 elementary and one middle level study) and middle level learners (9 studies) have to talk about text and their responses to them.

Review of Scholarship

Three elementary studies (Garcia, 1991; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Van den Branden, 2000) and three middle level studies (Applebee et al., 2003; Kucan & Beck, 2003; Sandora et al., 1999) link talk about text with increased comprehension on reading tests. The talk opportunities presented in these studies share common elements, but also diverge in noteworthy ways. For example, all students talked about text in conjunction with a reading assessment, but they did so under different grouping conditions. Some students talked in small teacher-facilitated groups, others engaged in whole-class student-guided talk, and still others talked one-to-one with a researcher. Regardless of the grouping condition, students who talked about text increased their scores on reading tests and outperformed their non-talking peers. These studies reveal that talk about text, in the form of discussion and under diverse grouping conditions, promotes deeper understanding of text as evidenced by higher scores on measures of literacy achievement. This holds true for ELLs at the elementary level and middle level learners. Given middle level ELLs' low reading scores nationwide, and the high-stakes nature of those scores, this is an important point.

Opportunities to Talk Increase Comprehension

Elementary English language learners. In an experimental study, Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) explored the impact that literature logs and instructional conversations had on factual and interpretive story comprehension and understanding of theme for 103 English language learners and 13 fully English proficient students in two fourth- and three fifth-grade classrooms. Students participated in three study phases. In phase one, students wrote an essay about the story topic, read the story, then took a comprehension pretest on the story. In phase two, students were matched by language

and reading proficiency then randomly assigned to one of four eight-session treatment conditions: (a) literature logs-only, (b) instructional conversations-only, (c) combined literature logs + instructional conversations, or (d) read and study-only. In phase three, students completed the same essay and took the same comprehension test.

Saunders and Goldenberg found that students in the literature logs + instructional conversations group scored significantly higher than students in the read and study-only and literature logs-only groups on measures of factual comprehension. Students in the combined treatment scored higher, but not significantly so, than students in the instructional conversation-only group on this same measure. On measures of interpretive comprehension, students in both the instructional conversations-only and literature logs + instructional conversations groups scored significantly higher than the literature logs-only and read and study-only groups. On measures of theme explanation and theme exemplification, English only students in the literature logs-only, instructional conversations-only, and literature logs + instructional conversations performed equally well and outperformed students in the read and study-only treatment. However, English language learners only received high scores (on par with their EO peers) on these measures after participating in the combined literature logs + instructional conversations treatment.

This study illuminates the impact that opportunities to talk about text, especially in conjunction with writing, have on factual and interpretive comprehension and thematic understanding of text, particularly for English language learners. Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) explain that in these instructional conversations, students and teachers (a) discussed the similarities and differences between students' and characters'

experiences, (b) clarified factual content, and (c) developed sophisticated understandings of the concept of giving (giving of oneself versus giving a present). In general, they described instructional conversations as structured small-group teacher-led discussions that “allow students to hear, appreciate, and build upon on each others’ experiences, knowledge, and understandings” (p. 297).

In a quasi-experimental study, Van den Branden (2000) sought to understand the impact of modified text versus discussion on the story comprehension of 151 10-12 year old fifth-grade students in a Flemish primary school. The medium of instruction in these schools was Dutch and many of the students were Dutch learners of Moroccan, Turkish, and Italian descent. These second language learners face academic challenges similar to English language learners in the United States. Van den Branden explains that they “face the considerable task of receiving an education in a language that is not their own. This is reflected in their academic results; on average, nonnative speakers of Dutch perform relatively more poorly in Flemish education than native speakers” (p. 431). Participants in the study read a detective story with 12 short chapters and took a comprehension test after each chapter. Students worked through four reading and discussion conditions: unmodified input, premodified input, unmodified input with collective negotiation, and unmodified input with pair negotiation. During the unmodified input condition, students read a chapter silently without any discussion. During the premodified input condition, students read a modified version of the chapter (in which vocabulary and syntax were simplified), but were not allowed to discuss the text with others. In the collective negotiation condition, students read the unmodified chapter then negotiated the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases after reading with the rest of the class and the teacher.

They decided which elements of the text to discuss and sought meaning amongst themselves with limited teacher input. In the pair negotiation condition, students followed the same procedure, but with a friend rather than the entire class. All students took the comprehension tests individually.

Van den Branden (2000) found that the highest scores occurred after the collective negotiation condition followed by the pair negotiation condition. According to Van den Branden, what mattered most for comprehension was not simplified text, but the opportunity to talk about text. He explained that individual comprehension problems were pushed to the surface to be solved in context during collective and pair negotiation. He suggests that “negotiation of meaning has a particularly promising effect on the comprehension of written input if the learners themselves are actively involved in signaling their problems and in trying to solve them” (p. 438). This study makes a second, and very important, point. *Students*, not teachers, chose what to talk about. They identified their own problems and worked collaboratively to solve them.

Garcia (1991) combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies to understand (a) how English language learners perform on standardized reading achievement tests and (b) the relationship between their performance and their actual comprehension of the reading passages. Fifty-one bilingual (Spanish and English speaking) and 53 monolingual (English only) children in grades 4 and 6 from two elementary schools participated in the study. The students read six passages and answered nine questions per passage, for a total of 54 questions. Questions were textually explicit, textually implicit, and scriptally implicit. They also took a vocabulary test that consisted of 64 items and a prior knowledge test assessing general and specific knowledge about the passages, with a total

of 48 questions. Hispanic students scored lower than their Anglo counterparts on the vocabulary test, scored significantly lower on the prior knowledge test, and scored lower overall on the reading comprehension portion of the test.

Following the tests, eighteen children (12 Hispanic and 6 Anglo) participated in retrospective and open-ended interviews with the researcher. While these open-ended interviews were not labeled discussion per se, the researcher implicitly acknowledged the one-to-one discussion-like nature of the interviews. During these post assessment ruminations (which took place in Spanish, English, or a mix of the two), the students revealed their thinking about the test and their responses. They shared and clarified conceptual and lexical misunderstandings, in essence they “made meaning” of the passages, in ways they did not, or could not, do alone. Specifically, they confronted unknown vocabulary and misinterpretation of known vocabulary, tackled the disconnect between literal text and its paraphrased version in questions and answers, made inferences about the content of the passages and the way that language was used, or manipulated, to expose content, and addressed the confusion caused by false cognates. Through talk about the passages, the students both revealed and *transformed* their understandings.

Middle level learners. In a large-scale study, Applebee et al. (2003) sought to understand whether emphasis on discussion differentially impacted the literacy performance of students in lower- and higher- track courses. Toward this end, they observed 974 students in 64 classrooms across five states discuss literature in their middle and high school honors, regular, and remedial English classrooms. Thirty-two percent of the focal students were Hispanic American and six percent were Asian

American. While no mention is made of first- or second-language proficiency, I assume that a percentage of the Hispanic and Asian American focal students were ELLs. Classes were observed twice in the fall and twice in the spring. The researchers looked for: (a) evidence of open discussion, defined as the “free exchange of information among students and/or between at least three participants that lasts longer than 30 seconds”; (b) authentic questions, or questions “that did not have a prespecified answer that the teacher was seeking”; and (c) questions with uptake, or “questions that incorporated what a previous speaker had said” (p. 700). Student performance was assessed in the fall and spring. Applebee et al. found that “students in classrooms with high academic demands and more emphasis on discussion-based approaches show higher end-of-year literacy performance across track levels” (p. 717). Furthermore, they found that both “better and poorer students benefited equally from discussion-based approaches and from high academic demands” (p. 718).

Kucan and Beck (2003) considered the impact of small-group teacher-guided discussion versus one-to-one teacher-student discussion on reading comprehension. This study differs from the previous four in that it does not explore the impact of talking versus not talking on comprehension. All students in this study got to talk about text, but they did so in distinct groupings. I include it here because, like the other studies, it shows a positive correlation between opportunities to talk and increased comprehension. In this experimental study, Kucan and Beck observed twenty-six Caucasian and one African-American seventh-grader, all native English speakers, talk about contemporary children’s non-fiction trade-books in one of two discussion environments. In environment one, students discussed the text with a small group of peers. In environment two, students

discussed the text individually with the researcher. Prior to the intervention, all students participated in a pretest. During the pretest, they read a selection to the researcher and stopped at predetermined points in the text to think aloud. After reading, they responded to questions and recalled what they remembered about the selection. Following the pretest, students participated in three intervention sessions within their respective treatment condition. During these sessions, students in the individual and small-group interventions read the text aloud, stopping occasionally to respond to researcher prompts in a think aloud format. In the individual condition, single students revealed their understanding of the text to a listening researcher. In the group condition, small groups of seven responded to the researchers' prompts and to comments made by their peers in an effort to comprehend the story. The posttest procedure mirrored the pretest, but with a different text. Kucan and Beck found that students in both discourse environments made significant gains in recall and question response from pretest to posttest scores. They concluded that the opportunity to talk about text, whether one-to-one or in small groups, supports text comprehension.

Sandora et al. (1999) note that students often struggle to make sense of text on their own which can result in "sparse responses to text, responses that are either very literal or are characterized by misconceptions and inaccuracies" (p. 181). As a result of these observations, they investigated the effects of two distinct discussion techniques on students' comprehension and interpretation of complex literature. In this quasi-experimental study, Sandora et al. observed sixth-graders engage in a technique called Questioning the Author, in which students engage in whole-class discussion during reading. They observed seventh-graders participate in a whole-class post-reading

discussion technique called Great Books. All but three students in this study were African American. One seventh-grade student was Hispanic, but no mention is made of his or her native language. During Questioning the Author, teachers enable students to create meaning by prompting, guiding, challenging, and focusing discussion throughout reading. Their end goal is not to elicit specific information through questions, as in IRE, but to encourage the construction of meaning. On the other hand, they play a very active role in this technique, as do teachers in the traditional IRE talk structure. This contrasts with classroom discussions in which the teacher's role is purposefully limited or absent, as in student led discussions. In the Great Books technique, students read the text prior to discussion, underline passages, write comments or questions in the margins, focus their thoughts and feelings, and develop questions about the text. Following reading, students act as discussion leaders and pose factual, interpretive, and evaluative questions to the group with the end goal of promoting comprehension and encouraging students to think critically and for themselves within the context of differing opinions. In this study, the researchers departed from both discussion techniques somewhat in that they read the stories aloud to the students, rather than require students to read individually. They justified this choice based upon the students' low reading skills. According to Danks and End (as cited in Sandora et al., 1999) "listening and reading are the same in that both are language comprehension processes that have available to them the same set of strategies to accomplish the task of comprehension" (p. 188).

Sandora et al. (1999) used recalls and responses to open-ended questions to assess comprehension and interpretation at the completion of each story and discussion. They found that Questioning the Author facilitated students' comprehension and interpretation

more than the Great Books technique. Students who participated in Questioning the Author had significantly higher recall across all stories. Their recalls were longer and were more likely to include complex story elements. Furthermore, their responses to open-ended questions were higher across all stories as well. Sandora et al. explained that while both techniques required students to merge personal background and knowledge with the text to construct meaning, students in the Great Books framework only did this at the end of the story. In contrast, Questioning the Author allowed students to discuss the story “at points that have been selected as conceptually useful, for example, points where subtleties or complex ideas may present problems for students” (p. 207). The researchers concluded that distributed discussion facilitates comprehension and interpretation of complex literature. As they explain,

Dealing with a complex narrative during the course of reading may be particularly effective for lower-achieving students. It can scaffold students’ comprehension processes by providing opportunities for students to reflect on events and ideas as they are encountered and to examine connections that accumulate. (p. 209)

Opportunities to Talk Facilitate Second Language Acquisition

Six studies investigated the connection between discussion of text and language development. Four of these studies took place at the elementary level (Frank et al., 1998; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Purdy, 2008; Van Sluys et al., 2006) and two occurred at the middle level (Morocco & Hindin, 2002; Seidnestricker, 2000). One consistent theme emerged across the elementary studies and the Seidnestricker (2000) study: When students, as opposed to their teachers, choose which language problems and vocabulary to address in context, meaningful discussion ensues. The study by Morocco and Hindin

(2002) was the only study I found that explicitly included middle level English language learners as focal students. The element of choice, and student directed learning, manifested itself differently in this study. The teacher chose the vocabulary word and concept under discussion, but turned most of the meaning making over to the students. Across all six studies, the students actively sought to understand difficult words, concepts, or grammatical structures. They did this collaboratively through their collective knowledge, experience, and negotiation.

Elementary English language learners. Purdy (2008) observed two third-grade English language learners talk about text with their native English speaking peers during a small teacher-guided reading group. One boy's home language was Cantonese and the other boy's native language was Vietnamese. Purdy found that the ELLs in the study benefited from discussion focused on learning new words in English. For example, the ELLs in her study grappled with the idea of a "green thumb." They shared their initial understanding of the word and listened intently as other students added to the definition. The shared competency of the group outweighed any individual understanding of green thumb. In a lengthy exchange of ideas and opinions, they grappled with the difference between "spirit" and "ghost." While they did not come to a conclusion, or consensus, about spirit and ghost, Purdy explains that the students used language collaboratively to work through their understandings. On the other hand, Purdy found that the teacher or group left many confusing or unknown vocabulary words unaddressed or under-addressed. She contributed this to three factors: First, the teacher was unaware of a comprehension problem, second, her quick explanations or definitions did not suffice, and third, the ELLs did not voice their difficulties and confusions.

Frank et al. (1998) observed second-graders engage in student-centered, literature discussion groups about the self-selected books they were reading. The researchers sought to understand the cognitive and social processes that were engaged in by students during Book Club. Classroom students were divided into four heterogeneous groups and met once every two weeks to talk about “good books.” The researchers observed a group of four students that included two bilingual (Spanish and English) children and two monolingual English speakers. All four of these children readily engaged in the discussion. In addition to interpreting and comprehending literature, the students engaged in discussion about words in English. One student, a monolingual English speaker, noted that words can have more than one meaning. She noticed this while reading that Amelia Bedelia needed to “draw” the drapes and “dress” the chicken. She and the teacher “constructed a concept about multiple word meanings that was made available to the group” (p. 109). For the English language learners in this group, discussion with native English speakers became a site to explore unknown or misunderstood English vocabulary.

In an interpretive case study, Kong and Pearson (2003) observed four Vietnamese and two Hmong students in a split fourth/fifth-grade classroom participate in Book Club. Daily 70- to 90-minute Book Club sessions provided opportunities to talk about text in various contexts: small-group discussions, whole-class discussions and community share, teacher-directed mini-lessons, reading in groups, and individual writing in response to open-ended teacher prompts. According to Kong and Pearson, English language learners developed English language skills through Book Club discussions. They monitored discussions with questions and requests like, “Could you be more specific?” These

monitoring strategies (a) kept students focused, (b) involved all participants in the discussion, and (c) helped students “gain more control over academic discourse conventions” (p. 111). English language learners helped each other develop new linguistic forms and vocabulary. For example, they helped one another (a) distinguish between the pronouns he and she and (b) understand that in English you must distinguish between pronouns. They explained the meaning of unknown words to their peers. They listened to one another, built upon each others’ explanations, and co-constructed meaning and understanding.

Van Sluys et al. (2006) observed María, a Mexican girl and “a novice with English” (p. 221), and Shelly, a native English speaker, read and discuss several books about hair during a classroom practice called Invitations. Learners in their multi-age (fourth-sixth) elementary classroom engaged in student-led Invitations in order to move beyond “teacher-facilitated critical discussions or whole-class inquiries” (p. 203). Each Invitation consisted of a folder full of books, photographs and pictures, student-produced writings and drawings, internet printouts, questions, and points to ponder around a particular theme. Themes were created in response to student questions and interests and students were “invited” to read and discuss the collection of materials together. Following an Invitations session, students shared their insights, processes, and questions about the Invitation theme with the whole class. Through this mini-presentation, they invited a large group of peers into their small-group or partner discussions. María used Invitations as a site to explore vocabulary in English with her native English speaking friend. For example, on one occasion as they looked at pictures of hair in books and photos, Shelly began to talk about her own hair. She told María, “I hate tangles.” María

did not know the word “tangles.” In a genuine move toward understanding, María asked “What tangles?” to which Shelly replied, “Like when it’s stuck, you know, you can’t brush” (p. 207).

Middle level learners. Seidnestricker (2000) observed seventh-graders participate in small-group peer-led (SGPL) discussion and large-group teacher-led (LGTL) discussion of text. The SGPL treatment implemented elements of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction, an instructional context found to facilitate literacy learning. According to Seidnestricker, five characteristics drive Concept-Oriented Reading instruction: (a) students have a high degree of self direction that is balanced with common group goals, (b) the teacher helps students develop strategies for constructing understanding, (c) students learn how to work well within collaborative settings, (d) students have authentic opportunities to share their learning in ways and to audiences that are personally and culturally relevant, and (e) both content and strategies are integrated in meaningful and coherent learning tasks.

In the SGPL treatment, four to five students participated in a six-week literary unit in which they “controlled topic choice, access to conversation, turn-taking, response evaluation, assignment of readings, and participation” (Seidnestricker, 2000, p. 255). The teacher-researcher only participated when needed. Seidnestricker found that students in the small-group peer-led treatment often identified and explored complex words and concepts in an effort to better understand the story. They chose both the words to study and the method with which to study them. They devised a strategic plan in which one student located the word in the text, one found it in the dictionary, and the others brainstormed prior experiences with the word. They read the passage aloud, tested their

predictions derived from prior experience, read the dictionary definitions, and then selected the most appropriate meaning. They finalized the process by paraphrasing the passage to verify understanding.

Morocco and Hindin (2002) observed four seventh-graders participate in literature discussions. Three of the students had learning disabilities and two of these were also recent immigrants and English language learners. The focal students participated in an instructional approach called supported literacy. In this approach, students read, write, and talk about social dilemmas that arise in adolescent literature. A typical lesson has five components: First, the teacher sets the meaning-making stage through whole-class instruction. He or she may provide relevant background knowledge or activate student interest by posing text-related questions or dilemmas. Next, students read the text independently, with peers, or as a whole class with students and teacher taking turns reading aloud. Then, students develop individual responses and are expected to bring these to a peer-led discussion. In the fourth stage, small groups of students participate in peer-led discussion of the text. They share their individual responses and build shared interpretations. Finally, the students and teacher reunite for a teacher-led whole-class reporting out activity in which they share and expand their interpretations of the text.

According to Morocco and Hindin (2002), the teacher engaged in concept and vocabulary elaboration as part of the whole-class discussion that preceded small-group work. She provided them with a conceptual map for talking and thinking about dilemma, in this case around the concept of choice. She asked students to use their lived experiences to define choice. When students did this, she revoiced their comments and

probed for broader and deeper explanations of the concept and its label. She pointed out the similes and metaphors inherent in their descriptions of choice and connected their personal and socially constructed definitions back to the text. Morocco and Hindin found that all four students contributed to the ensuing peer-led discussion in two primary ways. First, they facilitated and managed discussion by inviting participation, fulfilling teacher assigned discussion roles and supporting one another in these roles, posing questions to the group, and modeling interpretive practices. Second, they negotiated and interpreted the text by: (a) asserting interpretive claims and considering counter claims; (b) challenging, supporting, and revising claims with textual evidence or lived experience; (c) questioning assumptions underlying claims and testing alternative claims against the text; (d) elaborating interpretations; (e) considering their personal world as well as the personal or social world of the text characters; and (f) engaging in hypothetical reasoning about choices and consequences. Furthermore, Morocco and Hindin noted that the English language learners in this study incorporated the teacher's vocabulary and content into their peer-led discussions around text and the theme of choice.

Opportunities to Talk Promote Higher Level Thinking

In this section, eight elementary studies (Almasi et al., 2001; Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Goatley et al., 1995; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Maloch, 2002; Martinez-Roldan, 2003; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000; Van Sluys et al., 2006;) and two middle level studies (Kucan & Beck, 2003; Seidnestricker, 2000) demonstrate how opportunities to talk about text engender higher level thinking and discourse. Several features characterized these studies. For example, students: (a) engaged in extended turns at talk; (b) asked and answered “big, juicy questions” (Kong & Pearson, 2003); (c) created meaning

collaboratively; and (d) engaged in substantive and elaborated talk that included various higher level epistemic functions.

Elementary English language learners. Boyd and Rubin (2002) sought a deeper understanding of elaborated student talk and the conditions that engender elaborated student talk. They observed six ELLs in a fourth/fifth grade English-as-a-second-or-other-language (ESoL) pull-out classroom participate in a six-week literature-based unit about whales. These students were in at least their second year of learning English and spoke Mandarin, Spanish, or Urdu natively. Boyd and Rubin found 52 examples of elaborated student talk in what they termed student critical turns (SCTs). To qualify as an SCT, an utterance had to possess three specific characteristics. First, it had to be linguistically extended, comprising 10 seconds or more of uninterrupted talk. According to Boyd and Rubin, a long turn of talk demands a somewhat sophisticated knowledge and use of vocabulary and syntax. Furthermore, it requires sufficient discourse skills to create cohesion across several sentences. Second, an SCT had to be structurally coherent. Coherence was important because it signaled

an ability to extend and elaborate a topic across chunks of discourse that encompass a speaker's own well-developed conversational turn as well as multiple turns taken by other members of the class.... Moreover, the ability to develop a topic cohesively and coherently across large stretches of talk is fundamental to the kind of literate-oriented language that is typically privileged and cultivated in schools. (p. 496, 498)

Finally, to qualify as an SCT, an utterance had to be socially engaged. They deemed social engagement important because “it reflects an ability to participate in collaborative

inquiry with a community of learners who build on each other's contributions as they collectively address learning objectives" (p. 496).

Boyd and Rubin (2002) found that almost all student critical turns came after the teacher asked an authentic question or requested clarification in an effort to facilitate interpretation or interaction. Boyd and Rubin defined authentic questions as questions that genuinely seek an answer and have a range of acceptable responses in contrast to inauthentic questions whose purpose is to elicit student performance of knowledge or remembering or direct students to a single correct response. Boyd and Rubin found that in most of the student critical turns, students used talk to facilitate interpretation of ideas. This was typically done by extending or elaborating on their previous remarks. To a lesser degree, students facilitated interpretation by extending or elaborating on the remarks of others and by explaining their own remarks. During SCTs, students also responded to what had been said by others and evaluated and challenged each other's ideas by stating if they agreed or disagreed and why.

Almasi et al. (2001) observed fourth-graders discuss literature in a proficient conversational discussion group. They considered a group proficient when students: "(a) add to interaction and interpretation charts, (b) refer to text, (c) respond to one another, (d) relate to personal experience, (e) ask questions, (f) monitor group process, (g) extend comments by adding on or asking questions, (h) critically evaluate the text and author, and (i) teacher scaffolds interaction" (pp. 104-105). Within the conversational discussion format, students silently read a teacher selected story individually from the fourth-grade basal reading series. Discussion began with a five-minute introductory and review phase in which the teacher reviewed group discussion rules and reminded students how to move

interpretation forward when discussion stalled. Next, students discussed the story for twenty minutes in groups of nine or ten, with minimal teacher assistance. They were encouraged to set the discussion agenda, interact in a conversational manner, foster meaningful interpretation of literature, and support one another in their attempts to interpret literature and construct meaning. Discussion concluded with a five-minute debriefing during which the teacher encouraged students to think about the interaction and whether they adhered to their rules and interpretation guidelines. Guidelines were revised or emphasized as needed.

One of the children in the group was a boy named Jiguao, an English language learner from China who had only been speaking English for three years. Almasi et al. (2001) found that he rarely participated in the initial discussions. Over time, his fellow students invited him into the conversation through “process metatalk.” During process metatalk, the group deviated from discussing the text in order to facilitate interaction and encourage participation. Almasi et al. explain that Jiguao, and another boy in the group, eventually “became successful and eager participants in the group” (p. 114). In other words, through small group discussion and the effective use of process metatalk by group members, Jiguao was invited into a community of learners.

Almasi et al. (2001) found that students used three primary strategies to delve deeper into meaning and clarify misunderstandings or confusion, namely: linking, embedding, and returning. The students in this group often struggled with comprehension, especially around confusing or unfamiliar aspects of the text. In an effort to make meaning, they linked the current topic, and the source of their confusion, to previously discussed aspects of the text. Revisiting old topics and making connections

within the story helped the students gain insight into troubling parts of the story and make better sense of it overall. Students also delved deeper into the story in order to refine their understanding. They did this by extending the original topic or by using interpretive strategies (linking to other texts, using the text, and relating to personal experiences) to more deeply examine the topic at hand. The researchers labeled this strategy embedding. Finally, the students performed a series of embedding and returning to the original topic, all in an effort to maximize understanding.

Kong and Pearson (2003) found that students engaged in extended turns at talk and developed cognitive, social, and language skills through Book Club discussions. According to Kong and Pearson, students interpreted text with an aesthetic, critical, and reflective cognitive stance. In the aesthetic stance, the ELLs connected what they read with their own life experiences to make sense of the text and respond to the teacher's prompt. They expressed interest in one another's comments, elaborated upon each other's ideas, and asked one another questions. In the critical stance, ELLs discussed different points of view and multiple perspectives around text. They also questioned the text in relation to their own familial or cultural experience. In the reflective stance, ELLs discussed real-life issues like honesty, bias, the meaning of life, friendship, and responsibility. They explored and developed their world views and value systems and voiced opposing positions. They also challenged one another with "big, juicy questions", a term used by their teacher, like, "Why do you think...?" Big, juicy questions became a tool for framing thinking. Furthermore, students expected each other to support their thinking. The researchers explain that their talk "reflected new habits of mind, as students displayed increasing awareness of the need to support their ideas with textual evidence"

(p. 111). Finally, students learned to express different views and challenge different opinions directly. They learned to maintain a collegial relationship even when confronting opposing points of view.

Goatley et al. (1995) observed five heterogeneously grouped fifth-grade students discuss issues of their choosing during Book Club. One student was an English language learner from Vietnam and another was a Hispanic boy who “was generally quiet in the classroom” (p. 359) though not labeled an ELL in this study. The researchers recorded the number of turns students took speaking during book club sessions, characterized their modes of participation, and analyzed the substance of their contributions, especially as they pertained to meaning construction and text interpretation. They found that the English language learner, Mei, talked the most (35 percent of the time) and the Hispanic student, Andy, spoke the least (12 percent of the time). The researchers attributed this to Mei’s prior experience with Book Club compared to Andy’s newcomer status. As a former book clubber, Mei began the year with considerable confidence and assumed that it was her responsibility to teach her peers about Book Club. According to Goatley et al., her experience, confidence, and leadership assumptions may have served to establish patterns of interaction that the quieter students, like Andy, never challenged.

Next, the researchers examined each student’s mode of participation and the substance of his or her comments. Modes of contribution included: (a) leadership in selecting the topic for discussion (offering focus statements, initiating new topics, and shifting among topics); (b) orchestration of turns and flow of conversation (directing access to the floor and negotiating turns among participants); and (c) participation in response to others’ leads (extending own and others’ comments, signaling agreements,

offering alternative views, bidding for the floor, and clarifying). Mei made over half of the leadership contributions to the discussion. She focused the group on the book, initiated new topics, and changed the topic using both statements and questions. Her cultural knowledge about Vietnam, coupled with her previous Book Club experience gave her status within the group and the other children rarely questioned her leadership contributions. In this instance, coming from a different cultural background was an advantage and significantly enhanced both her and her fellow students' understanding of the story. The Hispanic student, Andy, was "frequently silent" (p. 365) and rarely disagreed with his peers. However, when he did speak, he provided support by sharing and eliciting personal experiences and feelings about the story and extending his peers' responses.

Finally, Goatley et al. (1995) described Book Club as a site where students learned, negotiated, and practiced social skills and strategies for holding discussions and jointly constructed meaning. As Mei explained, when "I don't understand something, I could ask my book club group and then they told me something that I should understand" (p. 367). The book clubbers turned to multimedia materials, features of the book, the text itself, knowledge of story structure, knowledge of other novels by the same author, previous conversations, and more knowledgeable others (like Mei) to clarify confusion, interpret the text, and construct meaning together. Van Sluys et al. (2006) found that Shelly and María turned to their life experience and more general knowledge of the world around them to (a) interpret and discuss the texts about hair, (b) problematize dominant ways of seeing the world, and (c) examine and critique textual intentions. They also considered multiple viewpoints and diverse perspectives to inform their thinking and

moved beyond personal interpretations to explore “issues of power and relations among local, common, and natural ways of understanding the world and larger social systems” (p. 220) during Invitations.

Peralta-Nash and Dutch (2000) observed 13 students of Mexicano/Latino origin and 11 Anglo students participate in literature circles in a bilingual fourth-grade classroom. Ten of the Mexicano/Latino students spoke, read, and wrote Spanish fluently and eight of these were in the process of developing literacy skills in English. Peralta-Nash and Dutch explained that “literature circles were groups of people reading the same book and meeting together to discuss what they read” (p. 30). Students could read in Spanish or English and discuss in either or both languages as well, options that gave native Spanish speakers a sense of empowerment over and ownership of their learning. Groups met six times over a period of one month to discuss their book. Literature circles were highly structured in terms of student roles and participants took turns acting as Discussion Director, Word Finder, Literacy Luminator (or Passage Picker-Outer), Connector, and Illustrator. They used job sheets to prepare for and guide discussions. The teacher monitored group discussions by managing behavior, clarifying tasks, and assisting students with language during communication breakdowns.

According to Peralta-Nash and Dutch (2000), students held very deep discussions of the text. Peralta-Nash and Dutch described this as “moving beyond the text, making text-to-life connections and discussing issues not often addressed in everyday classroom conversations” (p. 35). Specifically, students explored story lines and characters in relation to their own lives and experiences, put themselves in the characters’ place, and provided convincing solutions to predicaments presented in the story. Furthermore,

students posed questions that required one another to explore hypothetical and future situations inspired by the text. Ultimately, Peralta-Nash and Dutch found that students took ownership of literature circle groups and responsibility for their own learning. Discussions were often carried out using both English and Spanish. Peralta-Nash and Dutch surmised that for both ELLs and EOs, freedom to use their native language, whenever and however necessary, in a supportive and respectful climate, resulted in a willingness to take risks with language and learning. According to Peralta-Nash and Dutch, second language learners showed an urgency to participate and contribute to the discussion and those “who had made fewer contributions before, were now taking more risks in order to share their stories” (p. 35).

Martinez-Roldan (2003) observed Isabela, a seven-year-old English language learner, participate in small-group literature discussions in a bilingual second-grade classroom. This student participated in weekly literature circles with her peers. Students read and discussed literature in both Spanish and English. Literature circles provided students with opportunities to make connections with literature, pose questions, develop opinions about social issues, and defend their ideas while also considering other perspectives. Prior to each discussion, the teacher read the story aloud to students who then took the book home, read it independently or with family support, and marked the pages or sections they wanted to discuss. Martinez-Roldan found that Isabela engaged in a wide range of literary talk, including, analytical talk, intertextual connections, and personal responses. In particular, Isabella engaged in storytelling as a response to literature. According to Martinez-Roldan, this way of speaking reflected her family’s way of knowing and helped to construct their social identity and sense of belonging both at

home and in society-at-large. Martinez-Roldan notes that her stories were coherent (e.g., contained a beginning, middle, and end) but non-linear. She told stories in a circular motion, frequently revisiting past aspects of the story and adding new information, thereby making meaning gradually and tentatively. She invited group members to mediate and co-construct the story and considered various story possibilities and moral stances from both the students and the book under discussion. Martinez-Roldan notes that Isabella used narratives to represent and make sense of past experiences, to build worlds, and to construct socio-culturally-situated identities. She explains that listening and responding to others and bringing personal experience to the text demonstrate one aspect of Isabella's identity, that of skillful student. However, she also notes that this type of response occurred only within Spanish dominant groups. In English dominant groups, Isabella performed the role of translator or facilitator of Spanish for students working to recover their Spanish language skills.

Maloch (2002) observed twenty-nine third-graders transition from teacher-led to peer-led literature discussions. Four of these students received English-as-a-second-language services. Prior to participating in peer-led literature discussions, students participated in whole-class activities to familiarize them with literature response. For example, they read and responded to literature as a whole class and practiced interpersonal and interaction skills. The teacher provided explicit instruction about the literature discussion concept and guidelines. When the time came to implement peer-led literature discussion, students read a prescribed number of chapters and recorded their comments and questions in a literature response log. They used this log to formulate and guide discussion topics during weekly meetings with their small group of peers.

During the initial peer-led discussions, students either sat in silence or engaged in talk that Maloch (2002) labeled retelling. They made literal restatements of the text, did not connect their statements to statements made by others, didn't respond to each other, and didn't seem to understand one another. When students engaged in retelling, the discussion was stilted and marked by "awkward pauses and little in-depth treatment of topics" (p. 104). They looked to the teacher to solve problems, answer questions, and provide general group leadership. The teacher considered their first attempts at peer-led discussion to be unfocused and unproductive. Gradually, she introduced discussion strategies closer to Mercer's (1995) definition of productive, or exploratory, talk.

Maloch (2002) found that the students' dialogue began to take on characteristics of exploratory talk. First, students moved from individual statements to involving others. They called each other by name and attempted to bring others into the conversation. The teacher encouraged students to ask one another follow-up questions. In the beginning, students answered these questions with one-word responses. The teacher believed that one-word answers would not facilitate a rich discussion so she encouraged students to share the reasoning underlying their responses. Eventually, the students asked each other questions, shared their reasoning and invited others to share their reasoning for an answer as well. In this stage of discussion, students broadened and deepened their talk. Their language shifted from surface connections (such as "I agree with") to more substantive connections (like "when 'X' said... it reminded me of...").

Middle level learners. In her investigation of small-and large-group literature discussion, Seidnestricker (2000) found that students in the small-group peer-led treatment had multiple opportunities to speak and seemed to take ownership of both the

discussion and their comprehension strategies. In addition to clarifying vocabulary to facilitate meaning making as mentioned previously, students in the small-group treatment shared opinions and emotional reactions to the text, and questioned one another until understanding was reached. On the down side, Seidnestricker noted that they engaged in a “chapter-by-chapter rehearsal of the events of the reading” (p. 259). Despite her efforts to steer students away from this literal retelling, which she considered void of any personal reaction or evaluation of content, students persisted. In an analysis of characterization, Seidnestricker found that students in the SGPL treatment focused on physical characteristics and recounted character actions rather than inferring character traits or engaging in analytic thought around the story characters. Furthermore, despite the teacher-researcher’s urging, students in the SGPL treatment devoted very little time to character analysis and evaluation. Seidnestricker surmised that “the small groups may not have provided the cognitive models needed to illustrate analytic thinking. Without the presence of more knowledgeable peers, these average readers may not have been able to engage in collaborative character analysis” (p. 261). She also explains that students in the SGPL treatment may have needed more teacher guidance, in the form of models, questions, probes, and summary statements. Finally, Seidnestricker notes the possibility that students’ mode of presenting characterization did not require in-depth analysis and may have limited their cognitive processing.

Seidnestricker (2000) explains that in the large-group teacher-led treatment, students also participated in a six-week literary theme, but the teacher-researcher “selected the book to be read and controlled discussion topic choice, access to conversation, turn-taking, response evaluation, and participation” (p. 255). However, she

used open-ended questions that valued students' ideas and feelings, encouraged multiple interpretations of text, facilitated contiguous discourse "in which interactions connect and build upon the ideas of previous exchanges" (p. 255), and provided high-level evaluations. The teacher provided significant scaffolding along with clear models of higher level thinking (e.g., around characterization). Seidnestricker found that students in the LGTL treatment displayed better developed character understandings than students in the small-group peer-led treatment. Seidnestricker explains that "although the SGPL students had more opportunities to contribute to their discussions, the more highly developed LGTL character analyses suggest that the LGTL discussion may have provided more support for analytic thinking" (p. 261). She posits that the large-group teacher-led discussion "may have provided an effective forum for the acquisition of interpretive processes at a time when instructional support and modeling were critical" (p. 261).

Kucan and Beck (2003) investigated the kinds of talk that developed when student discussed text one-to-one with a researcher and with each other in small groups. As noted earlier, comprehension gains did not differ between the two conditions, but the kinds of talk that developed in each group differed substantially. Kucan and Beck saw shifts in personal, textual, and intellectual talk as a result of the specific intervention. In talk characterized as personal, students shared their personal experiences related to the text and commented that they knew or did not know about information presented in the text. In talk classified as textual, students paraphrased and summarized the text. Intellectual talk consisted of efforts to understand and interpret text ideas by making inferences and asking questions. Kucan and Beck defined intellectual talk as dialogic, or talk that moves

beyond simple conveyance of information to talk that questions and extends information to many possible perspectives or interpretations. Kucan and Beck explain that intellectual language, like exploratory talk, is characterized by words or phrases like “probably”, “maybe”, “could have”, and “it depends.” Intellectual talk conveys a sense of tentativeness. They suggest that this implies awareness that knowledge is uncertain and ideas are open for further comment, interpretation, and exploration. According to Kucan and Beck students in the individual treatment shifted from personal to textual talk and showed little to no growth in intellectual talk. Students in the group discussion treatment remained consistent in their use of personal talk but shifted from a textual to intellectual talk focus.

Opportunities to Talk Hit the Mark and Fall Short

Two elementary level studies (Prado-Olmos, 1994; Rymes, 2003) and five middle level studies (Alvermann, 1995; Alvermann et al., 1996; Carico, 2001; Hinchman & Young, 2001; Phelps & Weaver, 1999) show ways that discussion can hit the mark but also fall short of its intended goals. The elementary level studies reveal what happens when recitation masquerades as discussion. The middle level studies reveal the dual-nature of small-group discussions at the middle level. On the one hand, they can be used to draw students in and open opportunities to talk. They can lead to increased text comprehension, higher level thinking and discourse, and language development. On the other hand, peer-led discussions in particular can exclude students based on a number of potential factors such as, gender, ethnicity, culture, and status.

Elementary English language learners. Rymes (2003) observed an English language learner, René, from Costa Rica who had attended school in the U.S. since

kindergarten and repeated second grade due to low reading achievement. She observed him during his repeated second-grade year and during third grade. His second-grade teacher continually tried to engage him in discussion around literature to no avail. The teacher told personal stories in response to text in an effort to model book talk. The teacher's modeling followed a typical teacher-student teacher-student discourse pattern in which she asked a question or presented an example and he was expected to follow. Rymes posits that the teacher's co-tellership, together with quick interjections by other students, actually backfired as it subsumed both the need and opportunity for René to speak. Furthermore, the teacher's modeling and sharing of personal examples had an undesired effect in that it placed ownership of knowledge squarely with the teacher and not the learner.

It wasn't until his third-grade year that René began to share narratives within extended turns at talk. However, these narratives did not occur around text and they did not occur within the mainstream classroom. Instead, they occurred in serendipitous conversations with his ESL teacher and his Spanish-speaking peers during what Rymes (2003) labeled the margins of instruction, or those few minutes after the ESL teacher's intended instruction and prior to returning to class. During these minutes, René co-authored spoken text with the other students in his small group and his ESL teacher around topics that mattered to him. He and the other Spanish speaking students in the group described life events unique to their cultural background. The teacher, unaware of these aspects of the students' lives, asked genuine and probing questions that drew extended speech from René. In this context, students collaborated rather than upstaged one another, and their experience, rather than the teacher's, counted as knowledge.

Importantly, the dialogue in these unplanned conversations followed a teacher-student-student-student framework as opposed to the teacher-student teacher-student speech exchange system in his second-grade classroom.

Prado-Olmos (1994) found that talk structures can silence students, even when given the opportunity to read and discuss in ones native language. She observed four third-grade ELLs in a bilingual classroom engage in discussion around text within a language arts program called Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (BCIRC). Within the larger BCIRC structure, each basal or literature-based story is divided into two parts. Students read the first part of the story independently, discuss comprehension and prediction questions with their small group, then write individual responses to the questions. This process is repeated for the second half of the story. The ELLs in this study read the story in Spanish. Prado-Olmos found that the students rarely engaged in discussion of the story related comprehension and prediction questions. Instead, they answered the questions individually directly after reading the story.

Prado-Olmos (1994) surmised that the students did not consider discussion essential to answering the comprehension and prediction questions. Prado-Olmos explains that the students only engaged in discussion when instructed to do so by the teacher, instructional aide, or researcher. They also engaged in discussion when they saw the video or audio equipment set up in their classroom. In fact, Prado-Olmos only witnessed the students engage in discussion spontaneously or without adult intervention once. According to Prado-Olmos, when students did discuss text under adult direction, their discussion followed an IRE talk structure. Each student took turns reading a question, chose someone to respond, and then evaluated the response. Prado-Olmos

explains that what counted as discussion was actually “formulaic patterns of talk and interaction that did not include an elaborate exchange of ideas, but rather a formatted pattern of interaction that allowed students to proceed through the activity efficiently and expediently” (pp. 150-151). Consequently, what was valued in the end was fidelity to an assigned role (e.g., “question reader” and “response evaluator”) and the written answers to teacher provided questions.

Middle level learners. Carico (2001) met with four middle school girls weekly over a five-month period to discuss the characters in two books, *Roll of Thunder* and *Lyddie*. Three of the girls were European American and one was African American. All were native speakers of English. Carico designed the small-group interactions around Rosenblatt’s (as cited in Carico, 2001) conception of reader response theory. In Rosenblatt’s view, the reader, the text, and the work of making sense are all vital parts of the reading experience. Personal connections to text - what a reader knows, thinks, and believes - are an integral part of literature study. Building on Rosenblatt’s conceptualization, Carico says that “it is possible to learn about oneself, about others, and about life through literature. It is indeed powerful to realize that what I know is important and can be used, often in collaboration with others, to know more and to be more” (p. 511).

Carico (2001) participated in the discussions as both leader and responder. She initiated each response session with a prompt and asked the girls guiding questions as necessary. After each discussion, Carico summarized comments, typed them up, and brought copies to following sessions. The girls read the summaries and reflected on previous discussions. Carico allotted each participant time to talk about the summaries.

She considered these sessions the most productive because the girls listened to one another and probed each other's responses to find out why remarks were made and where they originated.

Carico (2001) categorized the girls' talk as real, inappropriate, and privileged. She described real talk as meaningful communication that reveals attitudes and values, and offers opportunities for discovery, reflection, critical thinking, and examination. According to Belenky (as cited in Carico),

'Really talking' requires careful listening: it implies a mutually shared agreement that together you are creating the optimum setting so that half-baked or emergent ideas can begin to grow. 'Real talk' reaches deep into the experience of each participant; it also draws on the analytical abilities of each. (p. 514)

During real talk, the girls negotiated meaning as they struggled to explain their interpretations of the text and took turns probing and questioning until they reached a place of understanding. Inappropriate talk included negative comments about students or teachers not present to defend themselves, slang or off-color language, or "put-downs" that caused discomfort to group members. On the one hand, this talk produced discomfort, but, on the other hand, it furthered discussion. These comments were not directed at one another and did not occur in isolation. They were a part of processing the text and occurred as the girls became personally involved with the text and shared their reactions to the text. Carico defined privileged talk as the language of eloquence. She said that the three European American girls possessed the language of eloquence. She defined this as fluency of speech, memory for detail, and a command of language that was pleasant and provocative to hear. Hope, the African American girl, often mixed up details

and spoke in halting patterns. Carico admits that she did not always attend to Hope's words, "waited out" her responses, and offered "niceties" rather than relevant responses to Hope's comments. Carico states that she, and the other participants, privileged eloquent language which made it easier for the European American girls "to appear (and perhaps feel) 'smarter' than Hope, not intentionally, but smarter nevertheless" (p. 516). This exclusionary behavior, based in part upon less than standard use of English, is seen in the following studies as well.

Alvermann et al. (1996) explored students' mixed perceptions of how they experience text-based discussion. The middle level focal students included 28 African Americans in a regular language arts class and 14 students of diverse backgrounds in a gifted language arts class. In disaggregated data from these middle level classrooms, the researchers found that students preferred small peer-led discussions to teacher-directed whole-class discussions. Students reported that opportunities to talk were curtailed in whole-class discussion because (a) they were too nervous to talk in front of the big group, (b) it took too long for the teacher to call on them, (c) other students "cut in front" or interrupted their turn, and (d) the subject changed before they got a chance to speak. On the other hand, small-group discussion promoted involvement "by increasing the number of times they could talk and by decreasing the risks they took when expressing personal or tentative thoughts" (p. 255). These middle school students, especially the ones in the gifted class, saw discussion as helpful in understanding what they read. In particular, they reported that their understanding of text improved during small-group discussion of text when they listened to others, voiced and argued opinions, and attended to vocabulary. The students in the gifted class did not want the teacher to preteach vocabulary.

Alvermann et al. explain that “attention to vocabulary seemed to be most highly regarded when the students identified and resolved troublesome words while interacting with each other in their attempts to comprehend assigned texts” (p. 262). Students also reported downsides to peer-led discussions. They expressed frustration with students who did not read the assignment and were unprepared to participate in the discussion yet still wanted the answers. They also reported that it was easy to stray from the topic and this hindered their comprehension of the text. Finally, they said that if they were not interested in the topic, they simply didn’t talk about it or they talked considerably less.

Alvermann et al. (1996) report that while small-group discussion was the norm in each class, the discussion task differed substantially between groups. In the gifted class, the teacher expected students to interpret, compare, and introspect during their small-group discussions of text. In her words,

I want something to emerge from discussion that wasn’t there in individual readings: a new way of seeing, an uncomfortable sense that the world may not be quite as one had always assumed, a flash of insight into personal attitudes and beliefs, or just a sense of having worked well together. Whatever form it takes, something more than the simple sum of each reader’s separate experience. (p. 258)

She set the discussion agenda by asking questions at the beginning of each discussion.

Alvermann et al. report that the students read and discussed the text, but did not feel obligated to use the teacher’s questions to guide their discussion. Rather, they tended to use her questions as a “lead-in”, but then followed their own discussion agenda.

Discussion tasks in the regular language arts class looked quite different. Students in this

class were expected to read from their literature anthology and then discuss the questions and projects in the student resource book prior to submitting the page. The students rarely discussed the text or the text questions, even though this was a clear expectation. When the task wasn't demanding enough to require discussion, students simply worked alone.

Alvermann (1995), Phelps and Weaver (1999), and Hinchman and Young (2001) reexamined the above data and found that talk around text occurred in complicated, and sometimes, devolving ways. Specifically, they found that conflict along with power, status, and gender differentials within small-group discussion tended to silence certain students. Alvermann noted that one girl became increasingly withdrawn from discussion as the school year progressed. The girl explained her decreased participation this way: "I used to like talking. I don't like it as much anymore because it is like I have gotten to the point that I get tired of people telling me how I talk or when I am wrong and stuff like that.... So I must don't like to talk as much anymore" (p. 283). She said she preferred teacher-led discussions because she could just "sit back, watch, and not be a part" (p. 283). She, and the other two students highlighted in Alvermann's analysis, didn't feel safe enough to voice their opinions. They feared criticism, misunderstanding, and put-downs. Another student in the group, a boy, liked to talk. He felt that "you get a lot more out of learning when you get into the topic rather than mope around in the corner" (p. 285). However, less than halfway through the school year, fellow students became less tolerant of his talk and even shut him out of the discussion. Finally, the students Alvermann interviewed were concerned about the argumentative nature of their small group discussions. They believed that, in their zeal to make a point, students became argumentative and angry with one another.

Phelps and Weaver (1999) examined the conflict that occurred among participants in the gifted language arts class as certain parts of the story were summarized or interpreted. They found that conflict resulted in students giving up on talk or drastically altering their initial discussion style. Hinchman and Young (2001) examined the decline in Desuna's talk, an African American girl in the gifted language arts class. They explained that she knew the conditions for good text-based discussions but did not always practice them. While she perceived herself to be quite outspoken, she was often silent and inattentive during both whole-group and small-group discussions. Her reticence developed over time. Initially, she tried to respond to text by sharing her insight into the story. Her peers ignored her remarks and instead shifted the focus to other students. She attempted to bring elements of pop culture into class discussions. Neither the teacher nor her classmates held her contributions in high regard. She responded by making increasingly more "off the wall" interpretations of text. Furthermore, if she did not find the topic or book interesting, or if she disagreed with the opinions expressed by others, she would not participate in the discussion.

In this chapter, I pinpointed the classroom talk structures and kinds of talk that, according to these researchers, foster, or constrain, deeper understanding of text, higher level thought, and academic language acquisition. To do this, I analyzed 15 studies that explored elementary level English language learners' opportunities to talk about text, and their responses to these opportunities, during reading instruction. These studies revealed that elementary level ELLs benefited in multiple ways from the opportunity to talk about text as discussion rather than recitation. Interestingly, grouping practices varied widely in these studies. English language learners had opportunities to develop language, thinking,

and comprehension in small peer-led and teacher-led discussions, large teacher-led and peer-led discussions, and one-to-one student-led and teacher-led conversations. What seemed to matter most in terms of students' responses was the talk structure and the expectations it held, regardless of the grouping conditions within which it unfolded. I examined 10 studies at the middle level regarding talk opportunities around text, and students' responses to them, in reading classrooms. This body of research is smaller and more conflicted than similar research conducted at the elementary level. First, it seems that small peer-led or teacher-guided groups hold potential to increase talk and promote deeper understanding of text, higher level thinking, and second language acquisition. However, at this level, it appears that students also benefit from whole-group teacher-guided discussion (versus recitation) around text, especially around complex themes and vocabulary. Finally, small peer-led groups at this level are often difficult for students to manage in terms of social interactions and power differentials. They can be a site of exclusion from talk, and its potential benefits, rather than inclusion.

Finally, I found only one study that directly explored the role that talk around text assumes for middle level English language learners in their reading classrooms. This study presented a very positive picture of small-group teacher-supported talk around text, similar to most findings at the elementary level. On the other hand, this lone study pinpoints a significant gap in the literature. This dearth of research surrounding the opportunities that middle level English language learners have to talk about text in their middle level reading classrooms, and their responses to them, inspired my present study and research questions, namely: (a) What kinds of talk opportunities around text do middle level English language learners receive in a reading classroom setting?, (b) How

do English language learners respond to these various opportunities?, and (c) How do English language learners explain and regard the talk opportunities they receive and their participation in them? Given the explosive population growth of ELLs nationwide, their highly documented academic struggle, and the central role that talk plays in both realizing and expressing higher level thought and language, answers to these questions seem timely.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Selecting a Research Tradition

According to Merriam (2002) “when you want to understand a phenomenon, uncover the meaning a situation has for those involved, or delineate process (how things happen), then a qualitative design would be most appropriate” (p. 11). Because I seek to describe context and provide insight into behavior, I designed and conducted my study using a qualitative framework. In essence, I use a basic qualitative study (Merriam, 1998) to find and tell a localized story. This story is (a) grounded in data, (b) richly descriptive, and (c) designed to enrich understanding. My study is a particular tale of particular individuals who are engaged in a particular activity that occurs in a particular place (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). First, my study is bounded by participants. My focal students are all English language learners, mostly of Mexican descent. Second, it is bounded by space. I observe three reading classrooms located at one middle school. Third, my study is bounded by time. I observe each classroom over a six-week period. Finally, my study is bounded by an overarching issue, the opportunities that English language learners have to talk about text. I examine their responses to these opportunities and elicit their perspectives around both the talk opportunity and their response. In the remainder of this chapter, I present my selection process, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Selection Process

Sites. I began my site selection process in January of 2006. I targeted the school district in Eastern Washington where I began my teaching career 17 years ago. I chose this district for several reasons. First, it is a local example of the Latino and ELL population growth witnessed across the nation. In the 14 years since my departure, Latino

student enrollment in this district has grown considerably. When I left in 1995, approximately 1 in 5, or 19 percent, of students were Latino. In 2008-2009, nearly 1 in 3, or 32 percent of students enrolled in this district were Latino. This represents a 56 percent increase in the Latino population over a 14-year period. While the school district's overall enrollment has decreased by 4 percent in the past 14 years, the Latino and ELL population has increased dramatically. Second, ELL and Latino students at the middle level score dismally low on the reading WASL, also a reflection of broader statewide and national patterns of academic struggle (OSPI, 2009). Finally, I chose this district based upon its dedication to English language and Latino learners, my continued relationship with district administrators, and its relative proximity to my current residence.

I contacted the coordinator of Bilingual and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) Services for the district. I explained my project to her and she expressed interest in working with me. After meeting with her personally, I contacted the assistant superintendent via email regarding my proposed study. We met in person the following week and she granted me permission to conduct my project in her school district. I chose Carville Middle School (a pseudonym) for my study location because of its large Latino and ELL population. After meeting with the vice-principal at Carville Middle School, who welcomed my idea and pledged her support, I was ready to meet the teacher participants. I worked closely with the coordinator of Bilingual and ESL Services to select classrooms for data collection. I learned that ELLs at Carville are assigned to reading classes based upon their level of English language proficiency. Beginning language learners attend an ESL reading class and intermediate learners attend an intensive reading class. These classes are comprised solely of English language learners.

ELLs with advanced levels of language proficiency attend a mainstream reading/literature class along with their native English-speaking peers.

Teachers. The coordinator of Bilingual and ESL Services recommended three teachers whom she considered especially cognizant of the academic and linguistic needs of English language learners. She spoke with each teacher about my study and they agreed to participate. Prior to beginning my observations, I made the two and one half hour drive to Carville Middle School and introduced myself to each teacher and the middle school reading specialist. The teacher of the ESL reading class, Mrs. Karr (all names are pseudonyms), was in her second year of teaching in the district. Mrs. Olsen taught the intensive reading class and was completing her sixteenth year teaching with the district. Mrs. Anderson, the mainstream reading/literature teacher, was in her eighth year of teaching with the district. All three teachers were English only speakers. The ESL and intensive reading classrooms received instructional support from paraprofessionals as well. Mrs. Garcia worked daily in Mrs. Karr's ESL classroom as did Ms. Milton. Mrs. Garcia was proficient in both English and Spanish, whereas Ms. Milton was very proficient in English and moderately proficient in Spanish. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Mrs. Lyle assisted Mrs. Olsen with small phonics groups in the intensive reading class. Mrs. Anderson and the students in the mainstream reading/literature classroom did not receive additional support.

Students. Thirty-one seventh-grade English language learners participated in this study. Twenty-nine of these students were of Mexican origin and two were of Russian origin. Ten students (6 girls and 4 boys) attended the ESL reading class designed for beginning level English language learners. Seventeen students (8 girls and 9 boys)

attended the intensive reading class designed for intermediate level English language learners. Four English language learners (3 girls and 1 boy) attended the mainstream reading/literature class along with their 22 English only peers. All student names in this study are pseudonyms. I sought both student and parent consent to participate in my study. I created bilingual consent forms for the Spanish speaking students and their parents (Appendixes A-D). Because I did not have access to a Russian translator, I gave the two Russian ELLs in the intensive reading class consent forms in English only. All forms went home with students in the second week of February. Every focal student in my study was identified as having a primary home language other than English (a federal category abbreviated as PHLOTE) and limited English proficiency as indicated by the Washington Language Proficiency Test II (WLPT-II). This test is administered annually to English language learners in grades K-12 and assesses their English language reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency. English language learners enter and exit bilingual and ESL programs according to their score on the WLPT-II. The coordinator of Bilingual and ESL Services provided access to this data and I relied heavily upon her recommendations and knowledge of student status.

Data Collection

To gain insight into the opportunities that middle level learners received to talk about text and their responses to these opportunities, I collected data from multiple sources. Prior to data collection, I gained access to the school and the classrooms and obtained permission from students and their parents. Then, I observed the classrooms, recorded interactions around text with hand-written field notes and audiotape recordings, and transcribed the recordings. Finally, I interviewed students and collected the books, or

copies of text, that students and teachers discussed. Before turning to an explanation of these data sources, I set the stage by explaining my roles during this process.

Within this data collection process, I took steps to ensure that my presence did not influence or alter students' or teachers' behaviors. I assumed the role of friendly observer (Lewis, 2001). I spent the first week of observations familiarizing myself with each classroom environment and allowing students to acclimate to my presence. I introduced myself and explained that I was there to watch students talk about the books they read in class. I spoke in Spanish and English to the ESL students and in English to the students in the intensive and mainstream reading/literature classes. I made these language decisions based upon the lead I perceived from both students and teachers. However, I told students in all three settings that I spoke both English and Spanish and was happy to speak with them in the language of their choice. I explained that I would be taking notes and also tape recording whole-class and small-group interactions beginning the following week, after procuring both student and parental consent. I told them that at times I would sit on the sidelines, watching the entire class. At other times, I would pull a chair up close to a small group and listen in on their conversations about books. The students and teachers were very receptive to my presence during the entire observation period.

Like Lewis (2001), who observed literacy practices in middle school classrooms, I positioned myself as a friendly observer rather than a participant. As a friendly observer, Lewis never took part in book discussions as she feared this might influence the nature of student responses. I followed her lead. Initially, students in the ESL and intensive reading classes asked me the meaning of unknown words. They saw me as a teacher figure and freely asked, "What does this word mean?" or "¿Qué significa esto?"

At moments like this, I explained that I wanted to see what they did, without my help, when they came to unknown words or complicated passages in the story. They seemed to accept this answer and, after the first couple of observations, carried on without asking for my assistance. None of the students in the mainstream reading class asked for my help at any point. With these explanations of my goals, roles, and actions in mind, I now explicitly explain the data that I collected.

Field notes and audiotape recordings. I took careful, objective, and descriptive field notes of what occurred in these reading classrooms over a six-week period in February and March of 2006. I observed classrooms on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays. Due to my own teaching schedule, I was unable to observe students on Wednesdays and Thursdays. However, upon talking to each teacher, I found that they followed the same weekly or daily instructional framework. I felt fairly confident that the classroom interactions on Wednesdays and Thursdays mirrored those of my observation days. For each observation, I arrived just prior to the beginning bell and left at the end of the class period, 50 minutes later. My field notes contained detailed renderings of what the teacher and students said and did during each one hour class period (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). In addition to handwritten notes, I audiotaped every class session. I typed all of my field notes and transcribed each session. In short, I observed, recorded, and transcribed the talk opportunities around text that were available to my focal students and their responses to them during these reading classes.

I did not observe students in April due to the students' spring vacation and Statewide WASL testing. The first week of May was dedicated to WASL retakes and the seventh-grade three-day class trip. Teachers were receptive to a mid-May return, but I

chose not to return. I made this choice for several reasons. First, and most important, I felt that I had reached redundancy in what I observed in terms of the opportunities presented to students to talk about text and their responses to these opportunities. Second, when I left in March, I had seen a full unit of study in Mrs. Olsen's classroom. Mrs. Karr and Mrs. Anderson did not teach with thematic units. Finally, each teacher said that beginning in mid-May, much of their teaching would be a wrap-up of the school year and not reflective of their usual study of literature.

Interviews. I used my observations, field notes and memos to shape the formal and informal interviews with my focal students. As Krenske and McKay (2002) state, "If researchers do not ground observations in the experiences of the participants, they run the risk of imposing a fictional 'reality' onto the field" (p. 272). Bogden and Biklen (1998) describe interviewing as a technique that is used to "gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p. 94). According to Weiss (1994), we learn about people's experiences, how they perceived them, and how they interpreted their perceptions through interviews. Throughout my study, I conducted semi-structured formal interviews with 16 of my focal students. Five of the students were in the ESL class, seven were in the intensive English class, and four were in the mainstream reading/literature classroom. Each interview lasted between fifteen and thirty minutes. I audio recorded all formal interviews and transcribed them verbatim. I began each interview with general "getting-to-know-you" questions designed to set the interviewee at ease and give me a sense of him or her as a person and a student. Then, I drew from a list of preconceived questions (Appendixes E-F), but allowed the interview to take shape around the particular context

of the classroom, the opportunities to talk about text in the classroom, and the student's responses to these opportunities. I conducted interviews in Spanish and/or English, depending on the student's preference.

Documents. Whenever possible, I collected or copied the classroom texts used by teachers and students in whole or small group discussion. In this study, I specifically examined talk around text. Consequently, the text must be considered for its impact on both the texture and quality of text-based discussion (Gambrell, 1996; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995). Text type and content, in addition to classroom talk structures, motivates students to engage, or not, in discussion. Morocco and Hindin (2002) explain the potential impact that high-quality text has on classroom discussion and student learning. They state that

When students can talk about a common literary text with peers, they not only enjoy the literature, but also build interpretive skills, gain motivation to be lifelong readers, and deepen their understanding of social issues embedded in the text....They participate in a valuable kind of conversation that experienced readers use to make sense of a text....That kind of conversation about a text is a form of literary discourse that differs from students' everyday conversation. (p. 144)

Several studies explicitly explore the relationship between text type and content and quality of discussion. While that is not the focus of this particular study, I did consider the ways that text impacted students' talk during classroom discussions around text.

Data Analysis

Using Creswell (2003) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) as a guide, I began by organizing and preparing my data for analysis. I transcribed interviews, typed field notes, and stored them in a three-ring binder according to the classroom observed. Then I read the field notes and interviews carefully to obtain a general sense and overall meaning of the data. At this stage, I began recording first impressions and general thoughts about my data in the margins, using what Maxwell (1996) calls researcher memos. According to Maxwell, memos “refer to any writing that a researcher does in relationship to the research other than actual field notes, transcription, or coding” (p. 11). Memos are used to facilitate reflection and analytic insight. They are subjective in nature and emphasize “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 123) about what is observed. Next, I began a detailed analysis of one classroom at a time using a coding process. I segmented data into categories, clustered together similar topics, and labeled these categories with a code. This coding process allowed me to generate a description, or detailed rendering, of the talk opportunities available around text and the responses they elicited from middle level English language learners. From these rich descriptions emerged a small number of themes that occurred in individual cases and across cases as well. These themes became my major findings, or “the lessons learned” (Cresswell, p. 194). Within this general procedure, I included several specific actions: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding.

Open coding. Initially, I used open coding. During open coding, data are fractured by line, sentence, or paragraph, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Data are grouped together by similar concepts and given a name, or code,

that represents them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Next, I collapsed these concepts into categories and subcategories. Subcategories are created by explaining the when, where, why, how with what consequence and so forth of a category. Categories and subcategories are developed in terms of their specific properties and dimensions. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), properties are the general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category/subcategory and dimensions represent the location of a property along a continuum or range. Categories and subcategories are developed until new data no longer provide insight into them. Finally, categories and subcategories represent multiple voices rather than the experience of just one person in the study (Brott & Meyers, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically, through open coding, I closely examined three areas of importance for this study: (a) the opportunities and kinds of talk available to English language learners, (b) the responses that ELLs have to these various opportunities, and (c) how ELLs explain and regard these talk opportunities and their participation in them.

Axial coding. Next, I used axial coding. This involves reassembling fractured data in novel ways by linking, or relating, the various categories and subcategories formed through open coding. Specifically, during this phase I asked and answered the questions of who, when, where, why, how and with what consequences, in order to relate structure with process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define structure as the conditions, or circumstances, in which categories are situated. Process denotes the actions and interactions that occur as a result of these conditions and their consequences. Finally, the primary purpose of axial coding is to present data as a set of interrelated concepts, not just a listing of themes or categories. Combining data sources, I unveiled the talk

opportunities around text that these middle level English language learners experienced in their reading classrooms, their responses to and perspectives around them, and the intersections, or lack thereof, with the types of interactions that scholars propose for English language learners.

Selective coding. At this juncture, it is important to note that I diverged slightly from an entirely inductive analysis of data. I followed Boyd and Rubin's (2002) reasoning. They propose that

Although a good many content analytic schemes proceed de novo, so as to use only emergent categories and not to impose a priori distinctions that might not fit the data, we concluded that the virtues of the opposite approach outweighed its disadvantages. First by adopting categories explicated in previous research, we are able to draw some comparisons between our findings and those found in previous studies in similar settings. Second, by using a set of categories driven by theoretical considerations and by previous research, we are able to ascertain what classroom behaviors are not present in our data set. When one uses only categories that emerge from the data, it is impossible to detect the absence of phenomenon, yet what is missing from classroom interaction can often be as important as what is present. (p. 500)

In this study, I approached data analysis with certain categories in mind, driven by my theoretical framework and existing scholarship (Table 1), but I also identified emergent categories and themes (Tables 2, 3, and 4). Specifically, I examined opportunities to talk in light of talk structures. Within these opportunities, I looked for indications of deeper understanding of text, higher level thinking, and academic language proficiency as

presented and defined in my literature review. Finally, I used selective coding to discover and represent the main theme of my research. I wove both emergent and existing categories together to reveal a central experience of all my participants in terms of talk opportunities around text and their responses to them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the following chapter, I share my analysis of data and present findings.

Table 1

General A Priori Coding Categories

Code	Code meaning
IRE	Initiate-respond-evaluate
IR	Initiate-respond
DE	Discussion event
KRT	Knowledge-reproducing talk
TT	Transformative talk
HLT	Higher level thinking
TU	Text understanding
AL	Academic language

Table 2

Emergent Coding Categories: Research Question One (Talk Opportunities)

Code	Code meaning
QAS	Question-answer session
TGAQ	Teacher-generated assessment questions
TGLQ	Teacher-generated leading questions
TGAuQ	Teacher-generated authentic questions
TGPQ	Teacher-generated procedural questions
SGAuQ	Student-generated authentic questions
SGAuQ-V	Student-generated authentic questions-vocabulary
SGAuQ-C	Student-generated authentic questions-content
SGAuQ-P	Student-generated authentic questions-procedure
TLR	Teacher literal retelling
SRR	Student-reconstructed retelling
TVD	Teacher vocabulary define
SVD	Student vocabulary define
SVG	Student vocabulary generate

Table 3

Emergent Coding Categories: Research Question Two (Students' Responses)

Code	Code meaning
LR	Literal response
BR	Brief response
TR	Tentative response
TBR	Text-based response
SR	Superficial response
FITB	Fill-in-the-blank
SubR	Substantive response
ExR	Extended response
NR	No response
RTT	Respond to teacher
RTP	Respond to peer

Table 4

Emergent Coding Categories: Research Question Three (Students' Perspectives)

Code	Code meaning
DUT	Doesn't understand text
DUQ	Doesn't understand question
BT	Boring text
TF	Too fast
AT	Afraid of teacher
AP	Afraid of peers
E	Embarrassed
H	Humiliated
SEG	Student excluded based on gender
SEL	Student excluded based on language
SEO	Student excluded based on other
TC	Teacher controls

Chapter Four: Findings

As previously explained, I sought to understand the role that talk assumes for English language learners in their middle level reading classes. To accomplish this goal, I closely observed three reading classes across a six-week period, conducted student interviews, and collected classroom texts. In this chapter, I organize my findings around my first two research questions together, as one is intimately connected to the other. These questions are: (a) What kinds of talk opportunities around text do middle level English language learners receive in a reading classroom setting? and (b) How do English language learners respond to these various opportunities? Then, I report my findings around my third question: (c) How do English language learners explain and regard the talk opportunities they receive and their participation in them? Prior to addressing my research questions, I first provide background for the three distinct teaching and learning environments. I highlight their features across these classrooms, alert a reader to their general implications for classroom practice, and specify the question they directly impact. Four specific contextual features held importance for subsequent findings: (a) classroom composition, (b) personnel support, (c) grouping practices, and (d) text type and use. Therefore, I begin with an explanation of them.

Contextual Variations

Classroom Composition

The ESL reading class was quite small. Only ten English language learners (6 girls and 4 boys), all of Mexican origin, attended this class. Eight of these students were recent immigrants (within the past one and one half years) and two had been in U.S. schools since first grade. Seventeen English language learners (8 girls and 9 boys)

attended the intensive reading class. All of the students but two were of Mexican origin. The remaining two immigrated from Russia during elementary school. According to their teacher, some of the students in her class had been in U.S. schools since early elementary while others had been in U.S. schools since late elementary. The mainstream reading/literature class was the largest of the three. Twenty-six students comprised this class (14 girls and 12 boys), four of whom were English language learners of Mexican descent who still qualified for English language services. The English language learners in this class (Lili, Yesenia, Bernal, and Erica) were all born and raised in the United States. Classroom composition can impact teaching and learning in a number of ways. For example, the size of a class often drives grouping practices and pedagogy. Furthermore, it can impact ELLs' willingness to talk and participate. I address the impact of classroom composition in my analysis of question three.

Personnel Supports

Three adults co-taught the ESL reading class: Mrs. Karr, a teacher and native English speaker with limited Spanish proficiency; Mrs. Garcia, an instructional assistant and native Spanish speaker of Mexican origin, fluent in both English and Spanish; and Ms. Milton, an instructional assistant and native English speaker, with moderate proficiency in Spanish. Mrs. Olsen, an English only speaker, taught the intensive reading class with help two days per week from an instructional assistant, Mrs. Lyle (also an English only speaker). The mainstream reading/literature class was taught by Mrs. Anderson without additional instructional assistant support. Additional personnel support can make it easier to implement small groups and individualize instruction. Also, when support personnel speak the students' native language, as in the case of Mrs. Garcia and

Ms. Milton, students may have greater opportunities to learn and process learning in their native language. The impact of personnel support is addressed in my analysis of question three.

Grouping Practices

Mrs. Karr, the ESL reading teacher, employed two overall grouping practices. She began each class with a whole-group teacher-led read-aloud event. Following this whole-class event, the students and teachers dispersed into three small teacher-led reading teams that consisted of three to four students each. English language ability formed the basis of each team. The most advanced team, called the Roses, consisted entirely of girls: Celeste, Carina, and Fernanda. The latter two had been in the U.S. since first grade and Mrs. Karr explained that they would most likely test out of her class at the end of the year. Celeste came to the U.S. in fifth grade. Humberto, Aida, and Delia had been in the United States between one and one and one half years and called their team the Panthers. The last team, the Eagles, included Andrés, Libardo, Olga, and Josué. They had only been in the U.S. for six months or less. Mrs. Olsen taught the intensive reading class through whole-group teacher-led instruction characterized by frequent small-group student-led break-out discussions. Small groups included three to four students at most. Students formed a group with their assigned table-mates. Mrs. Olsen made sure to include boys and girls at each table. Mrs. Anderson, the mainstream reading/literature teacher, directed teaching and learning exclusively through whole-group instruction. Grouping practices have been shown to facilitate and constrain student talk. I address the impact of grouping practices in the classrooms I observed in my analysis of questions one, two, and three.

Text Type and Use

Mrs. Karr began each period with a 10- to 15-minute read-aloud from a high quality, often award winning, adolescent chapter book. At the time of my observation, Mrs. Karr read *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt, 1975). For small-group instruction, she downloaded fiction and non-fiction leveled books from a website called Reading A-Z. These books ranged from 8 to 22 pages. Mrs. Olsen engaged students in 6- to 8-week book studies of young adult chapter books on tape. During my observation, the students listened to and read a 216 page book called *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). The students in the mainstream reading/literature class read one short story per day. These came from their seventh-grade literature anthology or photocopied reading comprehension passages. Text type, length, and content inspire distinct possibilities for talk. For example, texts may or may not be interesting to students and may or may not be at an appropriate reading or listening level. I address the impact that text type and implementation had on students' responses in my analysis of question three.

Contextual differences matter. At a basic level, they impact the choices teachers make about classroom instruction. The actions teachers take, based in part upon diverse classroom contexts, drive teaching and learning. In this study, contextual differences played a role, to a greater or lesser extent, in shaping the opportunities that students received to talk about text and their responses to these opportunities. In the following section, I present my findings around my first two questions: (a) What kinds of talk opportunities around text do middle level English language learners receive in a reading classroom setting? and (b) How do English language learners respond to these various opportunities?

Opportunities for Talk and the Responses They Elicit

Despite obvious contextual differences, the classrooms I observed shared one noteworthy characteristic: opportunities to talk almost always presented themselves within the traditional recitation framework. Consequently, discussion rarely occurred in these classrooms. Most speech exchanges followed the initiate-respond (IR) or initiate-respond-evaluate (IRE) sequence described by Cazden (2001) and others (Alvermann et al., 1984; Nystrand, 1997). Teachers initiated classroom talk with three types of questions: (a) assessment questions, (b) leading questions, and (c) genuine information questions. The primary purpose of these questions was to address vocabulary and phrases in the text and preview or review story content. Within this IR or IRE participatory structure, teachers typically (a) controlled turn-taking, (b) maintained continuous control of the topic, and (c) preserved interpretive authority. I found that teacher questions, united as they were in purpose, topic, and function, shaped the opportunities that students received to talk about text in these middle level reading classrooms. These opportunities, in turn, shaped students' responses. A close analysis of data revealed that students most often responded to the talk opportunities they received by: (a) providing brief, factual, tentative, and superficial answers to teacher-generated questions; (b) asking their own authentic questions of the teacher, the text, and each other; and/or (c) not talking at all, even when called upon. I explain these opportunities and responses in detail below.

Opportunities to Talk Engender Limited Responses

The vast majority of teacher-generated questions in the classrooms I observed were assessment questions. In the literature, assessment questions are also referred to as closed, known-answer, display, test, and inauthentic questions (Boyd & Rubin, 2002;

Nystrand, 1997). In most cases, the asker (usually the teacher) already knows the answer to the question he or she is asking. In the following example, Mrs. Karr and the Eagles are engaged in a choral reading of an 8-page, 53-word text called *Yummy, Yummy* (Roberts, 2002). During their 20-minute teacher-led small-group exchange, Mrs. Karr asked 140 closed questions during 87 question-answer exchanges. This excerpt exemplifies two typical occurrences: First, teachers asked many assessment questions. Second, these questions often came in rapid-fire succession.

- Mrs. Karr: What color are carrots?
- Josué: Carrots.
- Mrs. Karr: Because I don't really see any carrots on there. It's kind of hard when the pictures aren't colored. Which ones are the carrots?
- Josué: Red.
- Mrs. Karr: They're red?
- Libardo: No, no, no!
- Josué: Look!
- Mrs. Karr: They're those. And what color are those usually?
- Josué: Red.
- Mrs. Karr: This kind?
- Olga: No.
- Libardo: Orange!
- Olga: Orange.
- Mrs. Karr: Orange. What color are the peas?
- Students: Green! Green! Green!
- Mrs. Karr: Green. And they're little?

Libardo: Yeah.

Mrs. Karr: Okay. And the next page? What does he like?

In typical fashion, students responded to the teacher's assessment questions with one-word replies. This is not uncommon, as assessment questions generally have a single, pre-specified, correct answer. Most often, the answer is easily located in the text.

Consequently, the opportunity or need to engage in expanded or elaborated talk is rare.

Furthermore, when questions occur in rapid succession, as they often did in the classrooms I observed, students have little time to engage in substantive talk.

As the above example indicates, opportunities to talk around assessment questions often resulted in abbreviated responses. In the next example, Mrs. Olsen engages students in a whole-class teacher-led question-answer session also guided by assessment questions. Like the students in Mrs. Karr's ESL class, the students in this intensive reading class provided short, text-based answers to Mrs. Olsen's overarching question: Which words in this paragraph describe sound? However, this example demonstrates two further characteristics of assessment question sessions. First, the teacher often controlled turn-taking. Second, interpretive authority rested with the teacher, not the students. In the following example, Mrs. Olsen engaged students in a whole-class share out following a student-led small-group work session in which students were to find as many sound words as possible in a select paragraph. For the most part, she decided who got to talk, when, and for how long. In this three-minute exchange, Mrs. Olsen controlled turn-taking on 17 occasions. Students responded to Mrs. Olsen's questions without being called upon 9 times. She rejected three of these turns by (a) explicitly stating that it was not a student's turn or (b) ignoring the call-out and not incorporating it into future talk.

Furthermore, virtually all interpretive authority rested with the teacher. This can be seen in part by sheer volume of talk. Mrs. Olsen uttered 536 words compared to the 64 words uttered between 12 of her students.

Mrs. Olsen: Attention. Okay, let's take a look. I know you may have more because sometimes a word that isn't really, by itself, doesn't really represent a sound, but in this situation, you know it's making a noise. So, we have blood-curdling shriek, who would like to add something else to that. How about if I just use the cards and call on you? Tell me one of your sounds, words that represent a sound. Okay, Hector?

Hector: Wild barking.

Mrs. Olsen: Okay, that was the next thing I had. Wild barking. And who's doing that?

Vigo: Winston.

Mrs. Olsen: Winston is, and it said, it says later that he's doing it steadily doing it. That means his barking doesn't stop. So, with all the other noises going on, the barking is continuous. It's not like one stops and the other starts. So, by the time we get to the end of this page, there's going to be a bunch of noises on top of each other. And there will be a good word at the end to describe what that is. So, what's another one. Julieta?

Julieta: Squeezing?

Mrs. Olsen: It could be. It doesn't work by itself, but show me where it was. Okay, "came running in and squeezed her way between them." Okay, in this case it could have made some noise. So you may or may not have had that. It depends on how good your imagination is, how good your mental picture is, whether you can hear a sound with some of these words. Some of these words are very obviously sounds. Wild barking is a sound no matter what's going on in any story. But, this one, somebody squeezing, and the way they were squeezing between things and running being involved, it probably did represent a sound. Okay, what else? Marishka?

Marishka: Um, smashed?

Mrs. Olsen: Smashed. There's a good one. That's definitely going to make a lot of noise.

Antonio: Running!

Mrs. Olsen: Uh, it's not your turn yet, Antonio. Lucy?

Lucy: Singing "The Lonely Goatherd."

Mrs. Olsen: Again?

Lucy: Singing "The Lonely Goatherd."

Mrs. Olsen: Right. They were singing, okay.

Carlos: Sobbing.

Mrs. Olsen: Sobbing. Right. (she makes a sobbing sound). They've been crying. Now who was that?

Carlos: That was uh, Gaby, that one girl.

Mrs. Olsen: The little macho's girl. Dora, what else did you find?

Dora: Running.

Mrs. Olsen: Running? Okay, in the way it was happening in that room, you would have heard that too. Lucrecia, what do you want to add?

Lucrecia: Butted.

Mrs. Olsen: Say it again?

Lucrecia: Butt-ed?

Mrs. Olsen: Okay, when that goat butts something, you know that that's going to make noise. What has he normally, what has he been butting most of the time?

Lucrecia: Tables.

Antonio: Noooo!

Mariel: The gate!

Mrs. Olsen: Yeah, the gate. Every time they put him away, they can barely get the gate shut before he butts against it. He just likes to butt anything. Zulema, what would you like to add?

- Zulema: The daughter's voice.
- Mrs. Olsen: Louder.
- Zulema: The daughter's voice.
- Mrs. Olsen: Okay, the daughter's voice? What was she saying? Besides sobbing, she was going "Mommy, help!" So, it was probably a pretty loud voice doing that. So, then there's sobbing. We talked about Winston's barking steadily and then we have smashed. Antonio, is there anything else you don't have up there?
- Antonio: Is dove a word?
- Lucrecia: Like "She dove underneath the table?"
- Mrs. Olsen: Do you think that would have made any noise?
- Students: Yeah!
- Mrs. Olsen: To dive. Sure. Ignacio, is there anything else?
- Ignacio: No, I, I got nothin'.
- Mrs. Olsen: Nothing new? Okay. We're getting to the end. Who's got a new one. Juan?
- Juan: Tipped over a glass of kool-aid.
- Mrs. Olsen: Right. With the glasses and the kool-aid that would have made a noise.
- Mariel: I know one! I know one!
- Mrs. Olsen: So the glasses probably would have been breaking glass sound and the
- Mariel: Kool-aid!
- Mrs. Olsen: Antonio, what else?

In the above example, brevity, recitation, and lack of substance characterized the students' responses, whereas, extended utterances and interpretation characterized the teacher's. Furthermore, assessment questions generated brief, textually-based answers

regardless of the grouping condition. These findings held true during the frequent small-group student-led sessions that occurred exclusively in Mrs. Olsen's class as well. When the talk opportunity presented itself around assessment questions, no matter the grouping condition, students responded with brief, often one-word, replies because the opportunity to talk did not require anything more.

Teachers also asked what I refer to as leading questions. These questions seemed to seek genuine information, but in reality had a teacher-expected answer that may or may not be present in the text. In this talk opportunity, teachers engaged students in guessing games in which (a) there were correct answers, (b) the students tried to figure them out, (c) the students reported them with uncertainty, and (d) the teacher confirmed or denied the answers. For example, during the small-group teacher-led reading of *Yummy, Yummy* (Roberts, 2002), Mrs. Karr asked Josué to tell her one more thing that he thought was yummy, yummy. She seemed to seek genuine information, as she most likely did not know what foods Josué liked or disliked. He responded to her question with a question of his own, "Corn?" She implicitly rejected his answer when she said, "Say something that's in your stomach right now that you told me was good. That you had for lunch. And you said you're gonna bring me one on Monday. What did you say you were gonna bring on Monday?" He tried another answer, "Soda?" At this point, Libardo jumped in and offered a clue. "Food," he said. Mrs. Karr ignored this comment and returned to her line of questioning. She asked Josué again, "Can you tell us? What did you have for lunch today? He ventured a third guess, "Um, milk?" at which point Mrs. Karr gave up and continued reading. Josué and Libardo engaged in a guessing game in

which they tried, unsuccessfully, to provide the information the teacher sought. Later in the exchange she told them what she was expecting to hear (and receive): cookies.

In this second example, Mrs. Anderson guides the class through a round-robin reading of a comprehension passage entitled *Crossville Soccer Tournament*. The passage contains multiple and complicated driving directions to the tournament. She stops Michelle, who is reading, and says, “It’s confusing, isn’t it? Why Michelle?” In a very 21st century reply, Michelle states, “Because it’s got so much in it. You just need a GPS and then you wouldn’t have to do all this.” Mrs. Anderson asks her next question. “Do you know why it says ‘Cedar Drive’ and in parenthesis ‘Exit 14?’” Elisa, an ELL, responds that the exit is called Cedar Drive. Peter says that “on a map, it doesn’t say Cedar Drive, it says Exit 14.” Mrs. Anderson asks her final question, the one she has been leading up to. She says, “What’s easier to remember, a name or a number?” When Elisa provides what Mrs. Anderson considers to be the wrong answer (“A number?”), Mrs. Anderson supplies the answer she was looking for: a name. The answer to this question is arbitrary. I think it’s possible that Elisa, an English language learner, finds exit numbers easier to remember than exit words. But that was not the point of the exchange.

The real point, it seemed, was to provide the answer the teacher sought, even if it took awhile to find it. This guessing game exchange characterized by leading questions, also resulted in brief answers that lacked substance. However this opportunity revealed a new response: tentative and uncertain answers often posed as questions. I found that students were often unsure if their answers would be acceptable, especially in this question-answer context. As a result, they frequently hesitated and guessed as they tried

to figure out what the teacher wanted. In the end, it was her thinking that mattered, not theirs.

Less frequently, teachers asked questions that sought genuine information. In the literature, these are also referred to as authentic, or open questions. They are asked to “get information, not to see what students know and do not know” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 7). Boyd and Rubin (2002) explain that “authentic questions genuinely seek an answer” (p. 499). In this respect, they are questions that do not have pre-specified answers and as such, place a premium on thinking rather than remembering or reciting. I found that while teachers sometimes asked questions that genuinely seemed to seek information, they rarely allowed students to answer these questions in any depth or used the students’ responses to further discussion. Many of these questions took on a rhetorical quality, in that it seemed they neither sought nor expected an answer. I illustrate these points through three examples. Two came from the ESL reading class and one came from the mainstream/literature class.

In the following example, Mrs. Karr had just finished a 10-minute read-aloud from *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbit, 1995). These pages contained astounding and critical story details. For example, the Tuck family revealed their story of everlasting life to Winnie, an outsider. They explained that the source of their changelessness was a spring deep within the woods. They described the ultimate test of this changelessness: Angus, husband and father, put a rifle to his chest and shot a hole through his heart. They told Winnie that “It scarcely even left a mark. Just like – you know – like you shot a bullet through water. And he was just the same as if he’d never done it” (pp. 40-41). Winnie heard the grief that Miles, son and brother, felt when his wife and children left him,

convinced that his eternal youth was the act of black magic, or selling his soul to the devil. After hearing these details and more, Winnie was faced with the decision of drinking from the spring and forever leaving behind life as she knew it. Despite the fact that this text was complicated and difficult to understand both in terms of content and language, Mrs. Karr read, in typical fashion, without stopping to discuss content, unusual vocabulary, stylistic language, or comprehension. When she finished reading, she asked eight seemingly open, or authentic, questions. Mrs. Karr's questions seem designed to elicit her students' feelings and views connected to the story and thereby bring their voices into the discussion. However, she asked the questions in rapid-fire succession, did not wait for responses, and ignored the students' responses that were given.

Mrs. Karr: How would you feel if today exactly how you are, you got to stay? You never got to get married, have kids, get a job? You just stayed exactly like you are? How would you feel?

Humberto: (to Josué and Libardo) Para siempre, no trabajar, no tener hijos, nada. [Forever, not work, not have kids, nothing.]

Mrs. Karr: How would you feel if you never got to grow up, never got to be big? How would you feel?

Libardo: No. No viviría sin hacer cosas. [No. I would not live without doing things.]

Mrs. Karr: Girls, what if you never got to have a quinceañera (a girl's fifteenth birthday celebration)? How would you feel? Okay, now start writing.

This exchange represents a missed opportunity for discussion that might have generated higher level thinking and discourse. Both Humberto and Libardo attempted to engage with Mrs. Karr's questions. Humberto provided a Spanish translation for his less English proficient peers. His translation indicates his understanding and engagement with the question. Libardo, in turn, provided an answer in Spanish. Instead of encouraging and

developing Libardo's line of thought, Mrs. Karr initiated another question. This dismissive move effectively ended the opportunity for talk and cut any student responses short.

In the next example, Mrs. Karr asks several variations of another seemingly authentic question, ("How do you feel?") preceding the small-group reading of *Anna and the Magic Coat* (Siburt, 2003). This question holds potential for meaningful conversation, especially when it comes to the variation she asked Humberto. Humberto's parents sent him to the United States in sixth grade in hopes of a better education for their son. At the time of this study, he lived with an aunt and uncle, who, according to Mrs. Karr, were busy with their own children and did not have much time for Humberto. In fact, they were considering sending him to Los Angeles at the end of the school year to live with other family members. After a full year away from his parents, 12-year-old Humberto visited them in Mexico. In this exchange, Mrs. Karr asks him how he felt when he saw his parents. This question seems authentic and quite promising, especially considering that the other two group members also recently left family and friends behind in their native Mexico. However, she does not wait for his response. When he does respond, she accepts his one-word reply with passing consideration and moves immediately to her next question. Again, in typical fashion, a promising opportunity to talk was cut short when the student's response was not elaborated upon and incorporated into future talk opportunities.

Mrs. Karr: Humberto, how did you feel when last summer you got home and got to see your mom and dad?

Humberto: ¿Cómo? [What?]

Mrs. Karr: How did you feel when you got home? After not seeing your mom and dad for a year? Nothing? Okay, well let's see how Anna feels.

Humberto: Happy.

Mrs. Karr: You were happy? Okay. Can you read with me?

In this next example, Mrs. Anderson is preparing the class to read a short story about a princess who slays dragons. In this modern twist on a fairy tale, Princess Penelope breaks the stereotypical princess mold. She is athletic, strong-willed, and resilient – hardly the passive, submissive, or decorative girl portrayed in so many stories. Mrs. Anderson leads the class through a question-answer session about stereotypes that holds potential to spark dialogue between students in this class of Mexican- and European-American learners. However, their responses to her questions were brief and showed a very superficial understanding of stereotypes.

Mrs. Anderson: So what does that mean? What is a stereotype?

Michelle: Um, people look at some type of people, they think they're one way, or something.

Mrs. Anderson: So if you meet a person of a different culture, and maybe from a different place, do you then believe that everyone from that culture behaves that same way?

Justin: Yeah.

Mrs. Anderson: Can you give me an example?

Justin: Canadians are the best at soccer.

Mrs. Anderson: Oh?

Peter: All Canadians are good at soccer.

Mrs. Anderson: Or hockey.

Justin: Oh! Hockey!

- Micah: Mexicans, or what's their names? Puerto Ricans, or something, are good at soccer. I don't know. There's this one country that's really good.
- Mrs. Anderson: Okay. So can stereotypes of people, do you think they can be overcome?
- Lisa: No.
- Micah: Yes.
- Mrs. Anderson: If you believe that Canadians are the best at hockey, can somebody change their mind about that?
- Students: Yes. Yeah.
- Justin: They didn't win, at the Olympics.
- Mrs. Anderson: Cool. Alright. Interesting.

In this section, I pinpoint a disconnect between possibility and reality. Sometimes teachers' questions seemed designed to bring student voices into the conversation. These questions could have resulted in longer utterances and elaborated and substantive responses. But, more often than not, they didn't. Teachers typically moved too quickly to the next question without encouraging the students to extend or elaborate their thinking, thereby cutting possibilities short. However, this is not to say that genuine information questions never generated student talk. They did, but not usually through teacher-generated questions. In the next section, I share a rare opportunity to talk and the responses it engendered.

In addition to answering a plethora of teacher-posed questions, students sometimes posed questions of their own. Their questions were virtually always authentic. They revolved around (a) procedural expectations, (b) vocabulary, and (c) story content. When student-generated authentic questions were given serious consideration, student

talk ensued. But, as we can also see in the following example, these were often lost (or almost lost) opportunities, especially when the teacher tried to maintain control of the topic. In the following example, the students in Mrs. Olsen's intensive reading class are discussing *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). In this example, they have just learned that Randolph (who is directing *The Sound of Music*) has decided to cast a black woman for the role of María, two black children for the roles of Louisa and Freidrich, and two Vietnamese children for the roles of Liesl and Kurt. He calls this a "rainbow cast" and justifies his color-blind casting as "the right thing to do" (p. 114). Randolph's teenage daughter, E.D., questions his choice of a multi-racial cast.

Mrs. Olsen says, "This chapter really made me think of, is if we the readers are thinking so far, does what the characters said about this colorblind casting fit who they were? E.D. had something to say and it fits what we know about her as a character. Randolph said things that fit; Jeremy said things that we would expect him to say about it. So, what I've done is..." At this point, Mariel interjects a question. "Is E.D. racist?" Lucrecia immediately responds with "No." Mrs. Olsen ignores Mariel's question and continues: "...I've given you five things that actually fit their character. It's kind of like a 'Who said?' So, you're gonna have what was said and then the names and I want you to match the two things. So do this in your groups you've been working with. First, do your best to think about who said it and then use your book to figure it out." About 5 minutes later, Mrs. Olsen reconvenes the class and asks them to share what they decided. Mariel volunteers to talk about E.D. and goes back to her question about racism. This time, her comment is taken-up by both the teacher and the students. Mrs. Olsen still follows an IRE format, but different possibilities emerge as students state their opinions, defend their

positions, question the positions of others, link their comments to those made by peers, and ask clarifying questions. For example, in this excerpt Mariel also asks, “What’s that Vietnamese?” and Ignacio tells her that it means from Vietnam. This is an important exchange because the cast’s various ethnicities are key to understanding the issues of colorblind casting and a rainbow cast. Mariel’s relatively long comment about Mexicans, Whites, and Blacks, is marked by the “frequent hesitations, rephrasings, and false starts” (Mercer, 1995, p. 28) consistent with exploratory talk.

Mrs. Olsen: Okay, something that E.D. said. Everybody look at what you said E.D. said and see if you agree with Mariel says.

Mariel: (she reads from the text) “I get it that the show isn’t a [do...docu...documentary. Uh, something like that.]. But won’t the audience have trouble understanding it? The Von Trapp children all have the same parents. There’s biology to think about. You can’t have three different races in one family! It doesn’t make sense.” (p. 114).

Mrs. Olsen: Okay, why does it make sense that E.D. is the one who would say that? What do we know about her?

Zulema: Because it’s mean! She’s mean!

Mariel: She’s racist.

Lucrecia: She is not.

Mrs. Olsen: Is there any proof from our reading

Lucrecia: No.

Mariel: Yeah.

Mrs. Olsen: that E.D. is racist?

Mariel: She’s’ trying to say, she’s trying to make a point about saying that, she’s trying to make a point that, that like, probably was trying to say that, like they can’t be like, like, say there’s like Mexicans in the same family with black people in the same family and, um, white people in the same family.

- Lucrecia: But, it *can* happen.
- Mrs. Olsen: Okay, but she's saying that they're in a play
- Mariel: If they're adopted.
- Mrs. Olsen: In other words when you watch *Sound of Music* videos
- Mariel: White children.
- Mrs. Olsen: It's believable to you because the man had seven children, he and his wife had seven children, if neither one of them who were black or oriental, then none of their children would look that way. So, E.D., E.D. is this student remember who is very detail oriented. She's not the kind of artistic who thinks of these out of the box sort of things. She just wants things to be normal the way they really are in nature. So, she says it's biologically, meaning science says that a family wouldn't work like that. Isn't it, it's a good question. Is it going to confuse the audience to see a black mother and two black children and two Vietnamese children all together in one group?
- Ignacio: There could be a Vietnamese dad!
- Mariel: What does that Vietnamese mean?
- Ignacio: From Vietnam.
- Mrs. Olsen: It's the children of Captain von Trapp and his wife.
- Vigo: Do they have a Vietnamese dad?
- Mrs. Olsen: We don't know yet. All I'm saying is, does it make sense, that the question be asked?
- Lucrecia: No!
- Mariel: Yeah, it does.
- Mrs. Olsen: What's wrong with the question?
- Mariel: Sounds kinda racist.
- Lucrecia: No, it's not.

Mrs. Olsen: Is it gonna confuse the audience? Okay, Ignacio, give me another one.

On other occasions, student-generated questions became lost opportunities to talk and engage in critical thinking around controversial topics personally meaningful to the students who asked them. For example, when students in the mainstream reading class read the passage about Abraham Lincoln, they learned that he had a dream in which he foreshadowed his assassination. Michelle was intrigued by the idea that Lincoln foreshadowed his own assassination. She asked, “How does our brain know that something is going to happen?” Mrs. Anderson countered with a question of her own. “Do you think our brains *know*?” (She emphasized the word *know*). Michelle’s answer was simple. “No.” Mrs. Anderson’s emphasis of the word *know* implied that Michelle’s assumption was incorrect. Mrs. Anderson positioned herself as authority and effectively ended the exchange.

On another occasion, students in the intensive reading class were reading about a delinquent boy who burned down a middle school in *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). He was sent away to an alternative school. Mariel didn’t believe that anyone could burn down a school and not be punished. She asked, “Does he ever go to juvy?” Mrs. Olsen ignored her question in favor of the topic at hand (which happened to be defining a vocabulary word from the text). Mariel persisted, and asked her question again a few minutes later. “This story is so fake. How can you burn down a house and not go to juvy?” Still, her question was not addressed by the teacher or students. Four days later, she asked her question one more time and it went unanswered again. “Why won’t Jake go to juvy if he does all that stuff?” The examples in the last two sections show that genuine information questions, both teacher- and student-generated, hold promise to open talk

opportunities around text. However, these opportunities and possibilities were often missed.

Opportunities to Talk Promote Literal Retelling

Morrow (1996) explains that retelling “indicates a reader’s or listener’s assimilation and reconstruction of text information, and it reflects comprehension” (p. 267). She describes retelling as an active process that: (a) involves the learner in text reconstruction; (b) allows interactive behavior between teacher and students; and (c) allows the learner to provide not only literal, but personal interpretations of text. In all three classrooms, retelling was a site for students to talk about text, but it did not seem to reach its full potential. In most cases, the teacher provided the bulk of the summary and students inserted occasional words or phrases. Inserting words or phrases correctly and at the appropriate time is one indication of comprehension, at least of literal story elements or events. However, inserting the occasional word does not necessarily lead to or support meaning making. Also, because the teacher did most of the talking, the students lost out on a chance to produce and negotiate language and in so doing, encounter and confront their second-language problems, misunderstandings, and gaps. Furthermore, the teacher did most of the higher level thinking as she did the work of analyzing and synthesizing story content during her retell presentation. Again, this seemed to be a missed opportunity for students to develop their own higher level thinking skills. Their overall role during retell sessions was generally quite passive. The following excerpts, taken from the intensive reading class and the mainstream reading/literature class, demonstrate these points. In the following example, Mrs. Olsen leads the class through a teacher-heavy retell of previously read material from *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). In this

retell, she utters 272 words compared to 16 student uttered words (across three separate sentences). In addition to dominating talk in this exchange, she asserts her place as primary holder of knowledge. Lucrecia tries to correct Mrs. Olsen and show her understanding of the story. Mrs. Olsen accepts her contribution, but goes on to explain her previous point. The remaining student responses are simple fill-in-the-blank phrases.

Mrs. Olsen: And the last time he checked... on the butterfly, Priscilla, the other girl who auditioned, wants to go with him. So, they both go out to check on the butterfly, but, people start noticing they're not back yet. And that's trouble (she laughs). When Destiny is gone for a long time that's enough trouble, but Destiny and Priscilla now. So, they send Jake, they send Jake to go

Lucrecia: No. Jake went to go see Rachel.

Mrs. Olsen: Right. And he checked the classroom, this is about in the middle of 164, it wasn't until Govindaswami announced ginger saffron ice-cream for dessert that everybody noticed that Destiny and Priscilla had not returned. Jake was sent to find them. In moments he was back. They're not in the schoolroom. Now that's where they would have been going to check on the butterfly, right? So, Mrs. Montrose worried about her daughter, says, "Where do you suppose they went?" And her voice was carefully polite, but tinged with alarm, in other words she's a little worried. And you can tell in her voice. But before anyone can answer her, the answer was clear. From outside came the sound of two voices. One of them shrill and off-key, singing "The Lonely Goatherd."

Students: (laugh)

Mrs. Olsen: Jake says, "Uh-oh." Raise your hand, why did he say "Uh-oh." What is he thinking?

Mariel: They're herding the goat.

Mrs. Olsen: That, right. And he knows from the last experience of Destiny herding the goat, what could happen. So, Randolph sits up a little straighter, listening. Jake got up from the table and started toward the front of the house. "I just better make sure Destiny hasn't -" Now, look at the last line on 164. He was interrupted by...

Lucrecia: By a blood-curdling shriek.

In the next example, Mrs. Anderson and her students are engaged in round-robin reading. After every paragraph or two, Mrs. Anderson stops the reader so that she can recap specific points, make personal observations, and pose rhetorical questions. Consider the following examples: “What? Knit a vest for the palace poodle? Slam! Is he being stereotypical?” This comment elicited a response from Michelle: “Because his daughter wouldn’t normally go out and slay dragons.” Mrs. Anderson initiates a new observation and set of questions, neither of which build upon or acknowledge Michelle’s previous response. She says: “The king is more proud of her beauty than anything else. How many people find that odd?” At this point, Bernal, one of the ELLs in the class, raised his hand as if to answer her question, then put his hand back down. Mrs. Anderson embeds her retell in a series of questions: “Who’s the more take charge person? The king or the queen? Does the princess take after her mom or her dad? Is that a bad thing that she doesn’t behave as a stereotypical princess?” In this example, students remained mostly silent. Mrs. Anderson reiterated interesting points and posed thought-provoking questions, but students seemed to understand that their verbal participation was not expected or necessary.

Of course, there are exceptions to every rule and that was also the case here. On occasion, retellings resulted in language work, especially in Mrs. Karr’s class. She and the other adults in her room frequently provided corrective feedback in the form of word or sentence recasts. Recasts can be simple, as when a teacher repeats a word back correctly, or elaborated, as when a phrase or sentence is rephrased in a generally grammatical form (Gass, 1999). Also, students occasionally took the lead in the retell which gave them an opportunity to collaboratively shape both meaning and language.

Whether engaged in choral, round-robin, or shared reading, Mrs. Karr, Mrs. Garcia, and Ms. Milton stopped frequently to recap or retell what had just been read. Most often, the teachers provided the bulk of the retell and students inserted key words or answers, almost like a fill-in-the-blank exercise. In the following example, Ms. Milton and the Panthers are in the middle of a read and retell session around *The Golden Flute* (Morgan, 2002). Humberto's authentic question about the meaning of a word prompted this retell. Ms. Milton does most of the retelling and the students respond with single words. However, her retell provides important linguistic input that Aida partially appropriates. For example, Ms. Milton asks what "tears streaming down her cheeks" means. Aida responds with the word "cry." Ms. Milton provides corrective feedback when she recasts Aida's response to "She's crying." When Ms. Milton asks what she is doing again, Aida adds the -ing ending and responds with "Crying." Humberto demonstrates his understanding as well when he says that the little girl is "llorando [crying]."

Humberto: Y estos, ¿qué son "tears?" [And these, what are "tears?"]

Ms. Milton: Tears. Tears are what's in your eyes, the water. The liquid. So, "tears streaming down her cheeks", what does that mean?

Aida: Cry?

Ms. Milton: So what is she doing? She's *crying*. And what is chiseling? Chiseling is right here (she points to the illustration). Chiseling, so she's taking a little chisel, it's what it's called, it's like a tool and hitting it (she makes a chiseling motion and sound). And it takes the rock off of the cave. So, it says that he saw a girl in red chiseling away at the cave and tears were streaming down her face. But what is she doing?

Aida: Crying.

Humberto: Llorando. [Crying.]

Ms. Milton: Crying and working. She's working hard and she's crying and crying. Good.

Occasionally, students received the opportunity to lead the retell. In the next example, Mrs. Garcia and the Panthers are talking about *Anna and the Magic Coat* (Sibert, 2003), a story the students read earlier with Mrs. Karr. She appears to be unfamiliar with the story and asks them to explain the gist of it to her. The opportunity to retell the story, or in this case, *reconstruct* it, exposed their language struggles, stretched their language capabilities, and resulted in lengthier, co-created utterances.

Delia: When the girl had the weird coat, uh, when she, when she

Humberto: Es que yo pienso [It's that I think]

Delia: When she take-ed her

Humberto: Cuando se lo quita [When she takes off]

Delia: coat off

Mrs. Garcia: Did she take her coat off?

Delia: Yeah. It start to rain.

Mrs. Garcia: Okay.

Delia: And...

Aida: Because the girl come running and play with other kids in the finish she thinking of the coat and come running and

Delia: She have to take her coat on.

Humberto: Una pregunta...[A question...]

Mrs. Garcia: So, she had to keep it on all the time?

Delia: Yes. If she take it off, start rain.

Mrs. Garcia: Oh, I see. I can see why it's called *Anna and the Magic*

Coat. So, if she takes off the coat, it starts to rain?

Delia: Mmhhh.

Aida: She has to keep it.

Mrs. Garcia: Oh, so she has to keep it on?

During this exchange, Mrs. Garcia provided language models in the form of corrective feedback and recasts four times. She modeled *take* in place of Delia's misuse of the past tense *take-ed* (although the more appropriate recast would have been the word *took*). She modeled *keep it on* in response to Delia's *take her coat on*. She modeled *if she takes off* in place of Delia's *if she take it off*. Finally, she recast Aida's sentence from *She has to keep it to She has to keep it on*. Through the collaborative language efforts and capabilities of Aida, Delia, and Mrs. Garcia, the story unfolded.

In the intensive reading class, Mrs. Olsen did the bulk of the retelling. On occasion, her retellings and interpretations led students to make personal connections with the text which Mrs. Olsen encouraged them to share. These personal connections helped them to engage with the story on a deeper level and practice their English language skills beyond the standard one word or fill-in-the-blank reply. The following example came after Mrs. Olsen summarized and interpreted an event in which one of the goats charged a little girl in *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). She tends to retell the students' stories as well. But in this case, her voice is one among many and her retells facilitate a multi-vocal conversation.

Mrs. Olsen: Hector has a story from when he was only 6 years old and didn't know any better. Hector, you want to tell us what happened with your grandpa's goat?

Hector: I took 'em to eat and then I put 'em back so I could go back and play and

- Mrs. Olsen: Explain how you were taking them to eat.
- Hector: Like, with a rope. And then
- Mrs. Olsen: How many were there?
- Hector: Three.
- Mrs. Olsen: Three goats, one rope, taking them to eat.
- Hector: And then, um, I took 'em back to the shed thing, I tied 'em up, and then I left and when my grandpa came back they were all dead.
- Students: (the class laughs)
- Mrs. Olsen: What happened while you were gone?
- Hector: They got caught in the rope, in the rope thing.
- Mrs. Olsen: Yeah, they got caught in the rope. And they were fighting against each other, trying to get out of there, and butting each other with their horns and trying to get out, but they got tangled up in the rope. But being only six, being only six he didn't know better than to leave them like that. So, Vigo?
- Vigo: In Russia, we um had a goat and, yeah, our dad put the goat out in the garage, put the goat in, and closed the doors, and like it would try and like open the door, so it like would ram the door with the horns and it broke the door.
- Students: (they laugh)
- Mrs. Olsen: Goats are often wanting to run and butt things with their heads.
- Zulema: (inaudible)
- Mrs. Olsen: Yeah, and in this case, Wolfie is the one who wants to get the food from Hazel and the other goats. It's kinda like Wolfie's a bully.
- Mariel: Who?
- Mrs. Olsen: Grabbing Hazel's food and everything.
- Mariel: My dad, he has like a huge back yard and he likes to plant things like cucumbers and everything, and right next to him, there's this

guy and he has a huge back yard too and he has a lot of goats and they got like all together and got out of the gate and ate all my dad's corn and everything and he gets so mad.

Mrs. Olsen: It's hard to keep goats penned up sometimes. If they can figure their way out, they will. And you know from the story that Wolfie got out before and Cornelia was chasing him. Okay, here's two more questions. Turn to page 101, and this is a fill-in-the-blank. Find the word that is missing here, two words, from page 101.

Opportunities to Talk Foster Vocabulary Learning

Opportunities to talk about vocabulary occurred before, during, and after reading through direct instruction of both tier 1 and tier 2 words (Beck & McKeown, 2007). Teachers typically selected the words to be defined. More often than not, the definitions came easily from story context or the students' own background knowledge. Teachers usually (a) provided the definition upfront, (b) asked students for the definition, or (c) gave the definition if students could not provide it. The following examples from the ESL class and mainstream reading/literature class demonstrate these points.

Ms. Milton: Okay, so it says, through misty eyes she watched her son march away. What does that mean, misty eyes?

Aida: A little...

Ms. Milton: A little bit of what?

Humberto: Así como mojados. [Kind of like wet.]

Aida: Red.

Ms. Milton: Uh huh, your eyes start getting red and you know you're gonna cry. So that's what misty eyes means.

In this next example, the students in Mrs. Anderson's class are reading a comprehension passage entitled *Lincoln's Dream*. Mrs. Anderson calls on Ashley, who begins to read aloud. She comes to the word "subdued" and the teacher stops her. Mrs.

Anderson repeats the word and asks the students if they know what it means. In unison, they respond with “No.” She tells the class what it means and instructs Ashley to continue reading. Seconds later, she stops Ashley at the word “mourners.” “Mourners,” she says. “Who are they?” A few students say that they are people who mourn. Michael says “Lament.” The teacher is pleased with this word and tells him so. “Good. You used a vocabulary word.” Stephanie calls out, “Family.” Mrs. Anderson doesn’t acknowledge her response. She nods at Ashley who resumes reading. This time the teacher reads the word “corpse” for her. She asks the students if they know what a corpse is. Peter says that it is a dead body. “And funeral vestments?” asks Mrs. Anderson. Tricia says that they are really nice clothes. Bernal raises his hand. Mrs. Anderson looks at him and asks, “Is your hand up?” Bernal nods and says, “They’re in a tuxedo.” Michelle says, “When my grandma died, they dressed her in a nice dress and wool socks so her feet wouldn’t get cold.” Mrs. Anderson doesn’t respond to either of these comments. Instead she poses a new question. “Where was the president at?” She begins to read from the first paragraph of the passage, “ ‘I fell into a slumber...’ and answers her own question. “So, he’s in his house.”

I found two exceptions to the general patterns described above. First, students in Mrs. Karr’s ESL reading class asked about word meanings often. This happened less often in the intensive reading class and much less often in the mainstream reading class. Second, the students in Mrs. Olsen’s class met regularly in small groups to engage in “vocabulary clarifications.” Mrs. Olsen chose the words to be clarified, but she did not usually give an upfront definition nor did her word choices have simple “right there” definitions in the text. The students’ job in this case was to work collaboratively to

generate word meanings. After their small-group meetings, Mrs. Olsen reconvened the students for a whole-class share-out of the word meaning. At some point during this sharing of student definitions, Mrs. Olsen always made sure to provide a teacher definition.

In the following example, the class prepares to read about Jake, a delinquent teenager accused of burning down a middle school in *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). He has just arrived at his new foster home. He is wearing a silver-spiked black leather collar, a Vampire Zombies from the Beyond T-shirt with skull and fangs that dripped bright red blood, and his most ferocious scowl. Despite his appearance and reputation, Lucille Applewhite says, “A radiant light being, that’s what you are. A radiant light being!....And don’t ever let anyone tell you different” (p. 23). Mrs. Olsen tells the students to get into their groups and do a “vocabulary clarification” around the phrase “radiant light being.” She tells them to use the story context and, if necessary, a dictionary to figure out the meaning of this phrase. As was often the case, the students struggle to define the word together. They are somewhat antagonistic towards one another and clearly see this talk opportunity as a means to an end. The end in this case is figuring out the correct definition.

Mrs. Olsen: You’re not expected to figure it out by yourself. You’ve got someone to talk to.

Mariel: Wait, so what do you do?

Lucrecia: I don’t know.

Mariel: I didn’t write nothing on there. I wasn’t here.

Lucrecia: So what do you think?

Juan: (laughs)

- Mariel: So what do you think?
- Juan: He's a nice person from the inside.
- Mariel: Mrs. Olsen dijo eso. [Mrs. Olsen said that.]
- Lucrecia: You can write it Mariel.
- Mariel: I don't think we can say that.
- Juan: How do you spell E.D.?
- Mariel: Are you serious?
- Mrs. Olsen: (approaches group) What do you think radiant light being means?
- Juan: Ay, donde era? [Ay, where was it?] I don't know.
- Mrs. Olsen: Where is it?
- Mariel: I guess...What do you think?
- Lucrecia: I think...
- Mariel: Are there any dictionaries? (she gets a dictionary) What is it?
- Lucrecia: Radiant. R- A-
- Mariel: Radiant. I got it. I found it. Oh here it is. Reflecting light. Radiant. Um...Let's see... radiant, radiant, I don't know.
- Mariel: How 'bout you just stay on the topic?
- Juan: I am on the topic.
- Mariel: Mrs. Olsen, can you help us? Mrs. Olsen? They won't listen to me.

At this point, Mrs. Olsen stops the small-group discussion and calls for attention. She asks students to share their definitions and concludes with her own explanation. While the students' group work was not exemplary, these vocabulary clarifications hold potential. They require students to do the meaning-making work collectively and with

minimal teacher help. As their responses indicate, they tried to give meaning to this new phrase that did not seem to fit the story character at all.

Mrs. Olsen: I need to hear from each person.

Vigo: Radiant – light – being means he’s glowing with love.

Mariel: No sabe. No sabe. [He doesn’t know. He doesn’t know.] It’s happiness. (She says in a whisper.)

Critobal: It’s like light stands out. Jake’s being himself. Jake stands out.

Zulema: She can find in anybody happiness.

Marishka: She sees something special in him.

Mrs. Olsen: Radiant – light – being. We said that a radiant person may have a happy expression. This does not seem to fit Jake, but Lucille is the one who said it. She said, and let’s use the word that the book said – we’ll put it in quotations because it comes right out of the book – “pathologically sunny.”

I conclude this section with a brief summary of things learned. I found that almost all of the opportunities that English language learners received to talk about text in the middle level reading classrooms I observed constituted recitation rather than discussion. Classroom talk was dominated by question and answer exchanges. Most often, but not always, teachers posed known-answer questions around both vocabulary and story content. Sometimes, both teachers and students tried to break the mold and asked questions that seemed to seek genuine answers, especially around story content. In the vast majority of cases, even these promising questions fell short as teachers dominated classroom talk and controlled (a) topics, (b) conversational flow, (c) turn-taking, and (d) interpretive authority. In the following section, I present the students’ perspectives around the talk opportunities they received and their participation in them.

Students' Perspectives About the Talk Opportunities They Receive and Their Participation in Them

Students report several reasons for their limited talk: (a) They don't understand the text, (b) they are scared and embarrassed, (c) the pace is too quick, (d) they are excluded by peers, and (e) the teacher is too controlling. I explain these reasons, and their consequences, in this final section.

Aida had been in the U.S. for just one year at the time of this study and explained that she understood very little that was said or read during read-alouds. She expressed a keen desire to learn English, considered herself a dedicated and hard-working student, and described herself as an avid reader in Spanish. At the time of this study, she was reading *Harry Potter y la cámara secreta* [*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*]. She said that she always listens to Mrs. Karr read, but understands only “unas cosas [some things].” She would like to talk about what happens in read-aloud books, like *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt, 1975), but can't. She conceded, “pues, no entiendo esta historia muy bien [well, I don't understand this story very well].” Aida is supposed to make connections between her life and the story in her response journal. But, she explained, this is hard to do because (a) she doesn't understand the story, and (b) “en este libro, no pasa nada absolutamente que coincide con mi vida [in this book, there is absolutely nothing that coincides with my life].” Like Aida, Andrés has been in the U.S. for only a short time. He doesn't understand the stories that Mrs. Karr reads aloud either. He finds school very difficult and doesn't like it when the teacher asks him questions about the text. When she does, he simply doesn't respond. In his own words, “Cuando hablan a mi,

como me pongo rojito. No entiendo nada y me quedo callado nada más [When they talk to me, I get all red. I don't understand anything and I stay quiet, that's all]."

At the time of this study, Fernanda had been in U.S. schools since first grade. Like Andrés, she chooses not to talk about books during the read-aloud event, but not for lack of understanding. Unlike Aida and Andrés, Fernanda understands the story. It is being unable to answer a question that she fears. She explained, in a barely audible whisper, that when the teacher calls on her to talk, she feels "asustada" [scared]. Even her teacher's reassuring comments like "It's okay. We're all family." aren't enough to pry a word from her. For example, when Mrs. Karr asked her to share her reading response entry in front of the whole class, Fernanda simply looked down, then back at the teacher, smiled, and didn't say a word. Sometimes she's afraid that the questions will be difficult and she won't know how to answer them. At other times, she explained, "No sé como responder y simplemente digo 'No sé.'" [I don't know how to answer and I simply say, 'I don't know.']

Marishka is a twelve-year-old girl from Russia who considers herself a poor reader. She doesn't read anything at home and is embarrassed to read aloud at school, a practice many of her teachers use. Marishka gets nervous when asked to read in front of people because she says that she gets words wrong and the other students laugh at her. "Like I would say something and they laugh at me and then the teacher would say the word right and then they would make fun of me after class." Even her friends belittle her attempts at speaking English. Marishka says, "When I'm at lunch and I ask my friends what something is, they'll say that you're stupid for getting the wrong answer and they'll say that it was easy." Marishka is also afraid and embarrassed to talk in front of her

classmates. She explained that it's not as bad when the class is small, but "if I'm in a bigger class then I don't like to 'cause they like all laugh at me and I don't like that... so then I never get help when I need it 'cause I'm always embarrassed that people will make fun of me."

During six weeks of observation, two English language learners in Mrs. Anderson's class, Yesenia and Lili, never said a word before or during the whole-class teacher-led reading events. They were not called upon to read, nor did they ask or answer any questions. Yesenia explained that she doesn't answer the teacher's questions because "it's embarrassing." When I asked why it was embarrassing, she said, "If I don't say it right, I don't know." She also said that it's embarrassing because, "I don't have a loud voice... when I answer, they're like 'I can't hear you.' So I have to repeat it again and again." She doesn't like that because she feels like everyone is watching her. Sometimes she wants to give an answer but feels like she can't. She says, "Like, I'm gonna say something and sometimes some people already said it. Like we had the same idea. Or you think that it's not the right answer and then it was." Yesenia says that most of the time, there is one right answer. When I asked her who decides if an answer is right or not, she replied, "The teacher, she tells you if it's right. If not, she says a page."

Like Yesenia, Lili remained silent during classroom conversations and was never called upon to read. This suited her just fine for she equated reading aloud with talking out loud and said that if she were called upon to read "it might be embarrassing because I don't really like to talk out loud." She does however love to read and enjoys talking about books with her twin sister. Lili is currently reading *Alice in Lace*, one in a series of books written for adolescents. She and her sister share books and talk about "how they were...if

they were good books.” She says that she sort of likes it when the students and teacher talk about stories they are reading together as a class. She says that “it gets you to understand the book. And like if there’s words that we don’t know, people know ‘em and they tell like hard words...” She doesn’t include herself as one of those “in the know” when it comes to hard words. In fact, when she doesn’t understand a word or something that happened in the story, she won’t ask for help. It would be “too embarrassing” because she might not know how to pronounce a word and if she mispronounces it, the other kids might look at her. If the teacher calls on her, which I never saw happen, Lili says, “I answer if I know.” However, as our conversation progressed, Lili admitted that in some classes, like math, she really talks a lot. Her math class takes places right after lunch. Lili said that maybe she talks so much in math because she eats cookies during lunch and that makes her hyper. But her twin sister is also in that class and she’s not embarrassed because there’s lot of people that she’s known since fifth grade in that class. In fact, she said that she even likes reading out loud in her math class.

Like Yesenia and Lili, Bernal was never called upon to read. I saw him volunteer three answers, none of which exceeded four words, and ask one question, “What is texture?” Bernal says that he is a quiet boy at home. Softly laughing, he tells me that his three-year-old brother is anything but quiet. Bernal likes to watch television, play video games, and play on the computer. He also enjoys talking to his older sister and often shares his problems with her. Bernal says that he is shy. But being quiet does not seem to be a problem for Bernal at home. This is not the case at school. For him, being quiet in class is embarrassing and hinders his chances at developing new friendships.

Bernal attributes his quietness in school to several factors. Sometimes he's quiet in class because he doesn't know the answer to the teacher's questions. When this is the case, he doesn't say a word, even when the teacher calls on him. He is embarrassed by his silence " 'cause the teacher, everybody's looking at you." He's quick to point out that if the teacher calls on him and he knows the answer, he says it. Sometimes he needs more time to come up with an answer than the teacher or his classmates are willing to give. By the time he is ready to speak, the class has moved on to something new. He also finds the pace too fast to ask questions. In Bernal's words, "people are very fast" and his question is "about something else and then they're talking about something else." Consequently, Bernal almost never asks questions in class. Bernal also thinks that he and other students are quiet because they don't have enough things to say. He finds the class reading boring. He says that the stories are too long and they don't show pictures. He really detests answering questions about the reading. Finally, he admits that he really doesn't like reading that much. Bernal says that he would probably talk more if they read stories that were interesting to him, like mysteries and comics.

Bernal's experience is somewhat different in his math and health classes. He says he talks a lot in those classes. These classes are cool because he gets to sit by his friends. They talk about what they're "going to do later and stuff" and they help each other with homework. He even talks in front of the whole class because "there's less people there and I just like to talk there more." He also gets to work in small groups in these classes and Bernal finds it easier to talk in this setting. He says, "There's that much people to talk to. And when you need something, 'cause there's something that's hard, then there's like more people to, if someone doesn't know it, then there are other kids that could help

you.” He says that the pace is slower when he works in a small group. It doesn’t go too fast for him to ask questions. The bottom line is that Bernal would like to talk more in his reading class. He believes that when you are quiet in class, people talk to you less and that makes it hard to make friends. He says that “if you want someone to be your friend, you have to talk to ‘em.” If he talked more, “then people would talk to me more ‘cause I talk a lot.”

Elisa, on the other hand, is not afraid to talk at all. In fact, she talked as much or more than most of the English only students in Mrs. Anderson’s mainstream reading/literature class. She volunteered to read and was called upon often. She both answered and asked questions. Elisa loves to read. She especially likes to read love stories, mysteries, and “classic books” like *Anne of Green Gables* which she began reading after seeing the movie. If she doesn’t understand something that is being read in class, she unselfconsciously asks the teacher for help and “she tells me and then I say what I think about that and it helps me learn more about the story... like if I don’t understand something like a word or something and I find out the definition, I put in the definition instead of that word... like I usually say I don’t get this. Or, like, what is going on in the story. And then sometimes I’d be like, ‘What does this word mean?’ ”

According to Elisa, her friends know they can come to her for help with their school work. She has a positive self-image and says, “I’m like one of the students that are like smart and stuff.”

The English language learners in this study excluded (and were excluded) one another based on ethnicity, language, and gender. Marishka, a native Russian speaker, explained that native Spanish speakers often ignored her. When she meets to discuss

books with her classmates in Mrs. Olsen's class, she is usually the only non-Spanish speaker in the group. Her experience with Lucrecia and Ignacio, both Spanish speakers, illustrates a typical small-group book discussion for Marishka. For the first several minutes, Marishka repeatedly tried to engage in the conversation about the book, *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). Lucrecia and Ignacio were speaking to each other in Spanish. Marishka's attempts to enter the discussion were ignored, especially by Lucrecia who didn't appear to be listening to her at all. When this happens, Marishka explained, she has two recourses. First, she tries to find one person in the group who will listen. If she finds that person, she focuses her attention in his or her direction. If she can't find that person, she simply quits trying and does her work alone. Her classmates have ridiculed her repeatedly, especially for mispronouncing words, and have excluded her because she does not speak Spanish. Most of the time, Marishka finds it easier to work alone and not talk at all.

Anita, Juan, and Zulema feel silenced, or silence themselves, based on gender. Anita doesn't say much at all during small-group work because she feels excluded by boys in the group. For example, she described one occasion in which she tried to talk about characters in the story *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002) as per Mrs. Olsen's request, but the boys ignored her. She didn't try again. She says that being the only girl in a group "makes me more quiet" and if there were other girls in the group "I would talk to them about the answers and stuff." Her response to being left out of the conversation is to tune out. Whether Juan will engage in small-group discussion depends on who is in the group with him. When he is the only boy in a group of girls, Juan doesn't talk much at all. He will answer questions when asked by the teacher and he will complete the

assignment, but he won't interact with his female peers. Juan says that being the only guy in the group is "just not cool." Furthermore, according to Juan, the girls usually just copy off his paper and don't share answers with him. Working with boys is a completely different experience. First, if he is working with other boys, Juan says, "Then I'll talk." According to Juan, there is a spirit of collaboration and sharing among the boys that simply doesn't exist with girls. He says, "We [the boys] all do the same thing. So if one of us finds it [the answer] then they tell the other one and then some other friend finds another one and then it keeps on going like that. But them [the girls], they just look off my paper, and then they got it." Zulema says that her peers often engage in off-task talking during small-group work, especially the girls. When this happens, she says that "I just try to ignore them and not try to get into it 'cause then I won't like understand anything. I'm confused and I'm gonna be really behind. I just try to do what I can do and not try to get into anything else."

Ignacio is one of those very talkative boys. He says that he can't control his talking and sometimes he just blurts out stuff for no reason. "I mean, God gave me this gift to just blurt stuff out. I do it in every single class." According to Ignacio, his teachers are "okay" with his God-given gift. But Ignacio also has certain conditions under which he "blurts stuff out." When he works in a small group under the guidance of Mrs. Olsen, the teacher, he gets frustrated because her management style restricts opportunities to "blurt stuff out" at will. Mrs. Olsen keeps tight procedural control. Ignacio says, "I already know how to do it and so I want to work ahead, like I'm already done with it, but she wants to do it step by step and I don't like that... and then so everyone's done and she's giving all these directions like about a word and it takes like 5 minutes and for me it

takes those same 5 minutes for maybe 50 words.” Mariel echoes this sentiment. When Mariel meets in small groups led by Mrs. Olsen, she feels annoyed and bored. “We already know what to do and she won’t like, we know what to do and she won’t like let us get ahead. She wants us all to work together but it gets annoying because they’re slow.”

Mariel wanted to make meaningful connections to the text, for example around real-life consequences and racism, but was mostly ignored. When Mariel asked questions about juvy, this resonated with Dora, who is in trouble with the law for shoplifting. At the time of this study, she and a friend had been caught shoplifting make-up and costume jewelry. As a consequence, Dora spent time in juvenile detention (juvy) and was going through a legal process called Diversion. According to the Department of Court Services, Diversion is a different way of dealing with youth charged with an offense. They do not go to court, there is no trial before a judge, and there is no detention process. The Juvenile Center requires her to attend classes that, according to Dora, “teach me not to shoplift.” She has to write letters of apology to the store, the police officer who apprehended her, and her parents. She also has to read a book about a girl named Kit who was caught shoplifting. She relates to this character, is personally involved with juvy through her experience and that of a friend, is open about her experience with teachers and peers, but did not engage with Mariel’s question. She explains that it doesn’t matter who is in the group (although she would rather be with friends), “I wouldn’t talk about what we’re working on.”

However, not talking doesn’t mean that she’s not listening. When she is interested in a text, and especially when she gets to choose the text, she pays more attention. She

explains that when she was in elementary school, “well, we have groups and we read different books. Like one group, there was three groups, one group choosed this airplane book, the other group, I don’t know what they choosed, and then this group, our group, well my group, choosed *Freak the Mighty*. So we watched three movies ‘cause we finished all books. And then we watched *Freak the Mighty*, the airplane one, and I don’t know.” She said this book was the most interesting book she’s ever read. According to her, it was about two boys who are bullied by their peers and eventually kidnapped by their escaped-convict father. Dora said that one of the boys dies and that is was a sad book. Dora explained that her group talked about *Freak the Mighty* and that helped her understand it better. When I asked her what she talked about she said, “Mmmm, *I* didn’t talk about it. I was just listening to ‘em.” She said that she has nothing she wants to say – she’d rather just listen.

Humberto wants to be able to speak Spanish. He likes to help his fellow students and feels proud that he can provide translations and answers to their questions. He gets frustrated when teachers always tell him to say it in English and ignore him just because he is speaking in Spanish. He is proud of Spanish and humiliated by his limited English. He says that his relationships with his teachers have worsened because they think that he talks too much (in Spanish). In fact, Mrs. Karr placed a phone call to his aunt and uncle to discuss his frequent disruptions (in Spanish). Humberto said that because of this trouble, his aunt and uncle are considering sending him to Los Angeles to live with other family members. He wonders if he shouldn’t just go back to Mexico.

The big story is that ELLs in these classrooms *want* to talk. When they don’t, it is for very real reasons. First, they truly don’t understand the text or the teacher and

therefore cannot (versus will not) answer questions or contribute to the conversation. Second, they don't want to be embarrassed. They are unsure of their understanding, their answers, and their English pronunciation. They have been laughed at, teased, and ridiculed before, and are unwilling to risk it again. Third, the conversational pace is simply too quick. English language learners need time to formulate both their ideas *and* the language through which these ideas are expressed. For ELLs, both factors require equal attention. Fourth, there are power differentials at play even within classrooms composed entirely of English language learners. In particular, students are excluded based on gender and native language differences. Marishka, a native speaker of Russian, is a language minority student both among native English speakers *and* English language learners who are native Spanish speakers. Her dual minority status leads to even greater exclusion. Finally, students are silenced by teacher practices that take away their freedom and desire to participate.

These students suffer real consequences for their silence. First, they experience constant humiliation. Their humiliation is two-fold: On the one hand, they are embarrassed and teased when they do speak. On the other hand, they are embarrassed to remain silent. They are not part of the "smart" crowd and they don't make friends. They associate talking with fear and inadequacy. The consequences of silence become less than those associated with speaking. Finally, they don't get the help they need because they are too afraid to ask or the moment passes too quickly.

Looking across the findings for my specific research questions lead to the following overall understandings. First, the interplay of contextual, instructional, and social forces impacts English language learners' opportunities to talk, their responses to

these opportunities, and their overall willingness or ability to participate in these opportunities. In this study, classroom composition, personnel support, grouping practices, text type and implementation, and the participatory structures enacted by the teacher converged in greater and lesser degrees to facilitate certain kinds of thinking and speaking and to constrain others.

For example, students talked the most in the ESL reading class. This is not surprising given the (a) small class size, (b) additional personnel support, (c) grouping practices, and (d) shared cultural and linguistic background of all class members. When they met in small groups, they had a ratio of 1 adult per 3 to 4 students. Compare this to Mrs. Olsen's 1 to 17 ratio and Mrs. Anderson's 1 to 26 ratio. English language learners talked the least in the mainstream reading/literature class. In fact, two girls never said a word (beyond whispering to each other during free time) during my six weeks of observation. They were, quite simply, well-behaved and silent. Large-group teacher-led instruction facilitated their silence. It made it hard to answer questions because there were too many competing voices that were all quicker than the voices of these ELLs. On the other hand, it made it easy because they could simply fade into the background amidst the more dominant classroom voices, teacher included. Mrs. Olsen dominated talk during whole-class instruction but afforded her students multiple opportunities to break into small student-led groups to talk about story vocabulary and content. Their talk did not rise up to discussion perhaps because (a) the students viewed the meeting as a means to a teacher-determined end, (b) they lacked experience and support with the types of talk and interactions that occur within discussion versus recitation, and/or (c) social forces undermined the interactional relationships and trust that discussion is built upon. On the

other hand, these small group meetings and Mrs. Olsen's extended turns at talk preceded the longest (albeit infrequent) student turns at talk that I observed in any of the three classrooms.

Second, contextual variations aside, the *kinds* of talk that occurred across all three classrooms were remarkably similar. While students in the ESL class talked more, their responses, like those of the other students, were generally brief, textually explicit, tentative, and/or superficial. Most often, but not always, I found that teachers asked and students told, teachers lead and students followed, teachers produced and students reproduced. Students rarely engaged in the kinds of talk and interactions that researchers propose matter for English language learners. Almost without fail, the teachers in this study enacted classroom recitations rather than discussions.

Classroom recitations have a long history in the U.S. and around the world (Barnes, 1992; Nystrand, 2006). The students in this study, especially those who had been in U.S. schools their entire lives, most likely entered these classrooms with ways of knowing and being in school that were grounded in the interactional patterns, behaviors, and expectations associated with recitation. In this respect, teachers and students enacted a complicit relationship that is both historically and culturally grounded. It is hard to break long-standing classroom interactions like recitation. But, if (a) higher level language and thought are realized (and not simply expressed) through talk as Vygotsky (1964, 1978, 1994) proposes and (b) we literally talk knowledge into being as Green and Dixon (1993) propose, then we must find ways to move beyond traditional talk structures that limit and constrain students' opportunities to talk. In the next chapter, I discuss ways

that these findings coincide and stray from the types of interactions that scholars propose for English language learners and their classroom implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Lindfors (1990) asks, “What have we done in our educational system to bring about the extraordinary situation in which children – who from birth onward are relentless in their use of talk to make sense of their world – do not use their talk this way in classrooms, the very places which our society has established for the express purpose of increasing children’s understanding and control of the world?” (p. 38). I consider this an authentic question and I hope my study contributes to the answer. She does not say that children don’t talk in school, indeed, they do. Many of the students in this study talked. Not all, but many. In fact, at times they talked frequently, as answering 140 questions in a 20-minute exchange requires. But, while frequent opportunities to talk are an important part of the answer, they are only part of a more complex system. Lindfors explains that children do not use talk in school in ways that allow them to *make sense of their world*. In this study, English language learners had relatively few opportunities to engage in meaning-making talk.

Meaning-making talk is strongly associated with discussion (as described in chapter 2) and the many opportunities and possibilities it offers. Barnes (1990) suggests that the kinds of talk that occur in legitimate discussion constitute the journey of learning. He says that we should not expect learners to arrive “without having traveled” (p. 56). In this study, English language learners had few opportunities to travel and many opportunities to arrive. One way that this manifested itself was through the always present recitation talk structure in which teachers asked questions and students told answers.

Opportunities to Talk and Question-Answer Sessions

More often than not, teachers asked assessment questions around story vocabulary and story content. Question–answer strings provided frequent opportunities to talk, especially in classes with smaller numbers or small groups. However, regardless of group size, the responses that assessment questions engendered did not rise up to meaning-making talk. Boyd and Rubin (2002) explain that the overall pattern of discourse shaped by teacher’s instructional practices matters more than grouping practices per se. When teachers ask known-answer questions, the answer is the same in both large and small groups. What matters most is the participatory structure, with its expectations, possibilities, or constraints. Ramirez et al. (1991) found this to be true on an even larger scale. In their assessment of various bilingual education program models, they found that, regardless of the model, students talked very little when asked to respond to known-answer question chains. Their answers were typically limited to simple information recall statements that consisted of a few words at best. Scholars propose that to truly make sense of their world, English language learners need opportunities to engage in extended utterances that push both thinking and language far beyond the confines of a single word response.

This leads me to questions of my own. Is there a place for assessment questions in the education of English language learners? It is a practice with a long history and, as this study shows, still prevalent in classrooms. What place, if any, should assessment questions assume as talk opportunities? Assessment questions can play an important role in the teaching and learning process. For example, Barnes (1990) explains that they are an effective way for students to present knowledge and for teachers to evaluate it. Rubin

(1990) explains that knowledge-reproducing talk has its place in teaching and learning. He suggests that all children need some fact-base and that we do them a disservice when we “denigrate the importance of knowledge-reproducing talk in a blanket fashion” (p. 10). Finally, teachers can use assessment questions to get the facts on the table, review essential points of information, embellish a topic, or engender curiosity so that the class can “engage in an intelligent discussion of more interesting questions” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 5). In this way, assessment questions become part of the means and not just the end. The issue is not the use of assessment questions, but the *overuse*.

Mercer (1995) explains that “the problem is how to provide learners with the right balance of different kinds of opportunities and guidance” (p. 19). Students need different ways of interacting with knowledge if they are to develop cognitive and linguistic flexibility. While assessment questions certainly have a place in education, especially as a precursor to more interesting and substantive conversations, they should not be the only, or even the primary, talk opportunity. Whereas assessment questions seek known-answers, genuine information (or authentic) questions genuinely seek an answer, as their name implies. In addition to assessment questions, teachers also asked authentic questions.

Kong and Pearson (2003) called these “big, juicy questions” and found that they were a useful tool for both framing and supporting thinking. English language learners in their study asked questions of one another and the text that called them to take various aesthetic, critical, and reflective cognitive stances. These are additional and critical ways of interacting with knowledge that move learners beyond the more efferent stance associated with assessment questions. Furthermore, their authentic questions revolved

around language issues, including both vocabulary and grammatical features of English. Authentic questions, posed by both teachers and students, that sought genuine answers created new ways of thinking and speaking. Boyd and Rubin (2002) explain that teacher generated authentic questions preceded almost all student critical turns (defined as socially engaged, structurally and topically coherent, extended utterances lasting at least 10 seconds). Within these longer turns at talk, students interpreted ideas, extended and elaborated on their remarks or those of others, and evaluated and challenged ideas. Sandora et al. (1999) explain that authentic questions encourage the construction of meaning versus the explicit recall of information. They recommend that both teachers and students ask questions across the entire reading event, but especially during reading when students encounter complex ideas and language. For English language learners, even tier I vocabulary words as described earlier by Beck and McKeown (2007), which would not normally be described as complex, can present challenges to comprehension and meaning making.

Teachers in this study asked “big, juicy questions” on occasion. These questions typically revolved around story content or story theme. For example, consider Mrs. Karr’s questions inspired by *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbit, 1975) and Humberto’s reunion with his parents on pages 101, 102, and 103. These are the kinds of questions that scholars propose foster comprehension, higher level thinking, and elaborated discourse, for both English only and English language learners (Boyd & Rubin, 2002; Morocco & Hindin, 2002; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Sandora et al., 1999; Seidnestricker, 2000). However, in my observations, rather than providing opportunities to engage in meaning-making talk as scholars propose, authentic questions seemed more an opportunity lost.

On most occasions, students answered these questions with the same brief and relatively superficial responses that assessment questions inspired. This is not altogether surprising given students' lack of experience with this kind of question. In the case of the ESL class in particular, it is not surprising given their relative newcomer status with English.

Another explanation could be that students' responses did not always matter. When teachers allowed questions to go unanswered or minimally answered, as they did, without probing or coaxing for more information or incorporating their ideas into subsequent dialogue, it's possible that students did not see their voice as important. Students need to know that what they have to say matters.

Clearly, English language learners need opportunities to talk in ways that foster higher level thinking and discourse. Authentic questions provide one such opportunity. But, as this study showed, students don't always respond to these questions. Rather than (a) ignore student silence, (b) proceed to a new question, or (c) provide his or her answer and interpretation (as teachers often did), teachers can scaffold the authentic question event.

Scaffolds are contextual, social, and temporary frameworks that build on acknowledged student strengths. Through scaffolding, teachers provide support that enables a learner to complete a task or achieve a goal that would have been unattainable without assistance. They can be designed with a particular event in mind or can occur spontaneously. Reyes (1992) calls this assisted performance and says that, while all students need such help, it is critical for English language learners whose ways of learning require strategies tailored to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. She says that teachers must do more than lead from behind. She explains that "when students are

not comprehending a task or performing well, teachers must not water down concepts, but must participate directly in providing assistance in understanding those concepts through questions, feedback, and scaffolding...” (p. 440).

Meyer (2000) proposes that students’ lack of participation in events like answering authentic questions could be due to heavy “language load” and heavy “learning load.” Teachers need to consider both the language and learning loads their expectations, including questions, place on English language learners. She explains that the sheer number of unfamiliar words in both text and teacher talk can be intimidating, terrifying, and cumbersome. Teachers also need to evaluate if students can be successful at what they are being asked to do or say, given their developing proficiency and literacy in English. She recommends that before asking students to do certain things, like answer big, juicy questions, teachers provide them with a “language bath.” While this includes making use of visuals, gestures, enactments, manipulatives, direct activities, actions, etcetera, it also involves teachers “embedding and highlighting in their talk the same vocabulary and language structures the students will need to use themselves later” (p. 234). She posits that “after an effective language bath, English learners will probably be willing to contribute their own thoughts on the topic, with the teacher’s help and support, using as a tool the language structures in which they have just been bathed” (p. 234).

Some might consider this “just good teaching” and I don’t disagree. It is beneficial and important for all learners. But, teaching like this, in which language and learning loads and supportive actions are seriously considered, is critical for English language learners, who are learning not only content, but the language through which content is being delivered. When they respond to authentic questions, they must give

equal attention to both the content of their response and the language through which it is delivered. This involves word consciousness at both surface and deep levels, facility with everyday and complex grammatical constructions, awareness of social and cultural discourse conventions, and more. To be responsive to ELLs' additional learning needs, a teacher needs to be knowledgeable on many levels and then needs to trust her or his expertise. Teachers must adapt and implement principles of learning in thoughtful, reflective, and informed ways. Reyes (1992) calls teachers to tailor their teaching to students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. By making appropriate adaptations to instructional practices, diverse learners are more likely to experience success.

In my review of literature, teacher support in the form of modeling and coaching occurred frequently. Kong and Pearson (2002) noted that in the beginning, students were reluctant or unwilling to participate in discussions. Their teacher believed in her students' capabilities and maintained high expectations. However, she did not just expect them to succeed without considerable effort and support on her part. Morocco and Hindin (2002) explain that after explicit cognitive and linguistic support from the teacher, ELLs incorporated her academic vocabulary and content into their peer-led discussions. Finally, by providing scaffolded learning, teachers keep expectations high. Applebee et al. (2003) found that students benefited from talk that included authentic questions paired with high academic demands. We can and should expect students to answer complicated questions because it is in these kinds of questions that complex thinking and language grow. But, we must help them along the way.

Sarason (2004) suggests that in a productive context of learning, teachers expect, encourage, and stimulate questions. Scholars propose that students, as well as teachers

(and perhaps even more than teachers) should pose their own questions (Kong & Pearson, 2003; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000; Purdy, 2008; Sandora et al., 1999; Van den Branden, 2000; Van Sluys et al., 2006). A consistent theme emerged across my review of literature: When students identify their own comprehension and vocabulary problems and confusions, meaningful talk ensues. Student choice and direction impacted both the opportunities to talk and the responses they engendered. Talk assumed an important role within this context: It was a vehicle through which students identified, negotiated, and resolved their problem areas. As such, talk was a site in which and through which students developed their *own* thinking rather than a place to recite the thinking of others, be it the teacher's or the author's.

In the classrooms I observed, students posed questions with much less frequency than teachers. Almost all of their questions were authentic and most revolved around procedures or vocabulary. These were almost always answered by the teacher. However, some of their questions involved complex and even controversial issues. These were often unaddressed or underaddressed by both teachers and peers. Take for example, Michelle's question about the brain's capabilities on page 108. Rather than open Michelle's question to discussion, Mrs. Anderson closed talk down with a dismissive evaluation. Mariel's questions about jury went unheeded as well. However, on the occasions that students' questions were valued and addressed, classroom talk opened in ways reminiscent of discussion. For example, Mariel's question about racism sparked an exchange between students that involved genuine opinions and opposing viewpoints. Mrs. Olsen interjected questions and evaluations, but did not control the entire flow of conversation nor did she maintain sole interpretive authority, as was often the case.

Opportunities to Talk and Retelling

I found that students engaged in frequent literal retellings of text. Seidnestricker (2000) calls these “chapter-by-chapter rehearsals” (p. 259) and characterized them as void of any personal reaction or evaluation of content. This description fits the retellings that I observed as well. Maloch (2002) also observed students retell text with literal restatements marked by “awkward pauses and little in-depth treatment of topics” (p. 104). Kucan and Beck (2003) found that students often engaged in textual talk, which they described as talk used to paraphrase and summarize text. These scholars proposed ways to move students from retellings into more intellectual and analytic ways of talking and responding. While I agree with this stance, I also see value in retelling for English language learners. Like assessment questions, the issue is a matter of balance. We must diversify opportunities as different opportunities offer distinct epistemological possibilities.

Retelling seemed to have a legitimate place in the classrooms I observed. It was most effective when students were allowed to reconstruct text as opposed to simply filling-in-the-blanks during a teacher-dominated retell. For the students in this study, particularly those in the ESL reading class, retelling was a safe and supported way to test their growing language and comprehension skills in English. They ventured words from the text through both literal and paraphrased statements. Teachers accepted their efforts and provided corrective feedback by revoicing, recasting, and modeling single words or entire sentences with correct grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. On many occasions, students appropriated these words or phrases into subsequent turns. Retelling became an opportunity where language and content were addressed collaboratively.

However, in many instances, teachers provided both literal and interpretive retells while students simply listened or filled in the occasional blank. In these instances, the opportunity to talk fell squarely with the teacher and students lost a chance to engage in any kind of cognitive or linguistic negotiation. Anderson and Roit (1996) are critical of retelling, especially when done by English language learners. They explain that to retell verbatim part or all of a text is “of dubious utility for native-English speakers, but it is simply poor practice for language-minority students. Although these students are often quite good at retelling, *they may have little understanding of what they have retold*” (p. 304). They recommend that ELLs be encouraged to (a) explain what text means and (b) discuss and compare their explanations with other students. Anderson and Roit suggest that the act of explaining text and sharing ideas increases comprehension, verbal elaboration, and English-language flexibility. They consider English-language flexibility (the ability to express oneself in a number of different ways) a key ability that, when developed in ELLs, increases both their understanding of text and oral language proficiency.

Opportunities to Talk and Vocabulary

In the three middle level reading classes I observed, opportunities to talk often revolved around vocabulary. Scholars agree that sustained attention to vocabulary development is critical for English language learners (Anderson & Roit, 1996; August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Carlo et al., 2004; Snow & Kim, 2007). The opportunities I observed both coincided and strayed from recommended vocabulary practices. For example, researchers like Purdy (2008), Frank et al. (1998), Sandora et al. (1999), Van den Branden (2000), Van Sluys et al. (2006), Alvermann et al. (1996), and

Seidnestricker (2000), all found that ELLs benefit from choosing their own problem words. Then, they benefit from discussing these words together. For the most part, teachers in this study selected which words would be addressed before, during, and after reading. I did not see students grapple with meaning making. Students offered parallel definitions, but they rarely connected to or built upon the ideas of others. Even when working in groups, they tended to generate definitions alone or with minimal interaction.

On the other hand, student did receive frequent opportunities to talk about vocabulary. Teachers recognized the important place that vocabulary plays in both reading comprehension and oral language proficiency. Teachers distributed these opportunities across the reading event, to greater and lesser extents. Mrs. Karr and Mrs. Olsen discussed vocabulary before, during, and after reading. The vocabulary work in Mrs. Karr's classroom tended to be new English labels for known concepts whereas the work in Mrs. Olsen's room focused more on words that represented new and difficult concepts. Scholars like Fitzgerald and Graves (2004) acknowledge that both kinds of work play an important role in the vocabulary development of English language learners. On the other hand, Mrs. Anderson almost exclusively discussed vocabulary during reading. Fitzgerald and Graves highlight the critical role that pre-teaching vocabulary plays for English language learners. They state that "the purpose of such activities is to provide students with this information before they read so that when they meet these words in the text they don't have to focus on deciphering individual word meaning but can focus their attention on the ideas the author is presenting" (p. 128).

Finally, scholars propose that depth of word knowledge, as opposed to a singular focus on breadth, is critical. Verhallen and Schoonen (as cited in Fitzgerald and Graves) explain that

“Depth” of word knowledge has to do with the ideas that really “knowing” a word can be quite complex. For instance, you might “know” a word’s literal meaning, its connotations, the kinds of syntactic uses it has, whether it can have different affixes, and an array of semantic relationships, including synonyms,onyms, and so on. Results of at least one study suggest that acquiring “depth” of word knowledge can be difficult for second language speakers, even for frequently occurring words. (p. 128)

Students in this study rarely had opportunities to dive into words at any real depth. Both teachers and students provided definitions that scratched the surface of meaning, but failed to explore the full potential of words. However, if anyone tried to move away from this surface level consideration to a deeper understanding, it was Mrs. Olsen.

Furthermore, the ELLs in Mrs. Karr’s class seemed hungry for English labels. The real opportunity lost for significant vocabulary development seemed to be in the mainstream reading/literature class.

Opportunities to Talk and the Students’ Voice

In the vast majority of cases, English language learners in this study talked very little. They answered frequent questions, but their responses were typically quite brief. Varied reasons explained their reticence, but one theme emerged consistently across all three classrooms: fear. Fear of not knowing the answer, fear of mispronunciation, fear of ridicule, and fear of exclusion. These issues did not rise up in my analysis of elementary

studies regarding talk about text and English language learners, but they certainly impacted students' willingness to talk at the middle level. For example, In Mrs. Karr's class, Aida, Fernanda, and Andrés feared being called upon because they were afraid they would not know the answer. Students in Mrs. Olsen's class and Mrs. Anderson's class in particular saw their use of English language as something that would keep them out of the group. Their mispronunciation or lack of linguistic knowledge was reason to be ridiculed by peers, both native speakers of English and fellow English language learners. In particular, the Russian student, Marishka, felt ostracized and shamed by her native Spanish speaking classmates. Not only did she not have an adequate command of English, she was not one of them in terms of speaking Spanish. So, she was left out of two groups, native English speakers and native Spanish speakers.

Several of the middle level studies included in my literature review document similar experiences with other middle level learners. Carico's (2001) study noted that both teacher and students judged Hope, an African American, because of her lack of eloquence when speaking. She often mixed up details and spoke in halting patterns. Even the teacher "waited out" her responses and offered "niceties" in place of authentic feedback. Students in Alvermann's (1995) study feared criticism, misunderstanding, and put-downs. Phelps and Weaver (1999) report that the English-only speakers in their study closed students out of the conversation by ignoring comments or holding them in low regard. The English language learners in my study experienced the same sense of exclusion, but along linguistic lines.

Exclusion along linguistic lines is documented in other research as well, including studies of secondary education. While I did not include secondary studies in my review

of literature, I share some findings here that corroborate the experience of many of the middle level learners English language learners in my study. Pappamihel (2001) found that students were silenced due to linguistic differences. She used a paired t-test to analyze differences between anxiety levels in ESL and mainstream classes. She found that Mexican girls are more concerned about English language difficulties than Mexican boys and therefore less likely to participate in classroom discussions. The girls in this study disliked speaking English with native speakers because they were afraid of being laughed at or socially rejected. Indeed, they were repeatedly teased by other girls because of their limited English proficiency. As a consequence, they retreated from verbal interactions. Phelps and Weaver (1999) found that Katya, an English language learner from the Ukraine, was inhibited by her perceived lack of skill with English. She spoke animatedly in English when in comfortable informal situations but rarely uttered a word in public discussion around academic content. Meera, a Sri Lankan immigrant who participated in Peterson and Calovini's (2004) study, was ignored by most of her small group peers when she tried to contribute to a discussion about living in distant environments. It seems that when students' talk approximates that of the linguistic and cultural mainstream, they are accepted into the discussion circle. When it does not, they may be excluded. Lindfors (1990) states that "to share a group's way of speaking is often to be *in* that group, while to speak in other ways is to be an outsider to that group.... You're one of us; you're not one of us. You belong, but *you* don't. 'I talk like you' becomes 'I am like you' becomes 'I like you.' And so talk gives children social power – to connect with or include others, but also to separate from or exclude them" (pp. 32-33).

Conclusion

English-language learners face the extraordinarily complex task of acquiring English and learning academic content at a level on par with their native-English speaking peers. As the preceding section shows, this task is impacted by social factors in addition to the obvious cognitive and linguistic ones. How their learning best occurs is widely contested in many circles both inside and outside education. How one views learning can lead to dramatically different curricular choices, pedagogical approaches, classroom climates, and educational outcomes (Nieto, 2000). Teachers must determine what they mean by learning and distinguish between productive and unproductive contexts of learning. To do so, Sarason (2004) notes, determines whether the actions a teacher takes will lead to student success or failure. Valdés (2001) underscores this point with the following statement:

For non-English background students, whose futures depend on their learning English, how well this teaching is done and how successful schools are in creating a context in which students have access to English during the school day will largely determine whether they acquire English at all and whether they receive an education. (p. 147)

It is imperative to understand, create, and sustain the kinds of school and classroom conditions that bring about the most effective language and content learning. According to Lindfors (1990) classrooms are “the very places which our society has established for the express purpose of increasing children’s understanding and control of the world” (p. 38). I hope that this is true. I want it to be. I believe the teachers in my study wanted it to be as well. But we must find a way to wed what we want for English

language learners with the opportunities they actually receive. Mercer (1995) explains that teachers must “become critically aware of the ways they use language, whether these are a matter of cultural convention or personal style. A question which teachers and researchers need to address is whether established, habitual ways of talking provide, in the circumstances, the best kinds of guidance” (p. 24).

In my introductory chapter, I proposed that the goals we have for English language learners are the same goals we have for all students. We want them to: (a) be engaged in a learning process that is joyful, challenging, supported, relevant, meaningful, collaborative, shared, mindful, critical, authentic, transformative, and on-going; (b) graduate from high school with the content, literacy, language, and social skills foundational to expanded possibilities and opportunities; and (c) be proficient and fluent in the literacy practices suited to, and shaped by, our 21st century realities, opportunities, and demands. How students get there is the real question. Sarason (2004) reminds us that there is a universe of alternatives available. I have touched upon some of those things in this study. Sarason cautions teachers to weigh their alternatives carefully. He asks, “Can you explore that universe of alternatives without keeping in mind that you should (I would say must) judge each alternative by the degree to which it contributes to sustaining contexts of unproductive learning or creating contexts of productive learning?” (p. 73).

Talk plays a powerful role in understanding, cognitive development, and linguistic growth. The real question is not whether or not English language learners should or need to engage in talk. Instead, it turns to the role that talk will assume in their

academic lives. In a powerful push for talk, Lindfors (1990) eloquently states that

Talk is part of our very biological heritage by virtue of our membership in the human species. Talk is an imperative for us. It is an imperative for us to connect with others through talk, it is an imperative for us to explore our worlds through talk, and it is an imperative for us to express our self-hood through talk. Are our classrooms places in which speaking creatures flourish according to their nature, or are they places in which the imperative to talk is quashed? (p.21)

How can educators help English Language Learners develop the higher level thinking and discourse skills requisite to school success and beyond? There is no simple answer to this question. If there were, the achievement gap between native speakers of English and English language learners would not persist. I do not have an easy solution to this question nor do I propose that one exists. Despite incredible difficulty, educators must continue to seek and find answers to this compelling question. We can and should examine what has worked, or not, for others. As we explore a universe of possibilities, let's not forget the power of talk. I propose that talk, especially in the form of meaning-making talk, can and should assume a primary role in the education of English language learners.

Appendix A

**WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
PARENT CONSENT FORM**

Research Title: Talk Opportunities Around Text and the Responses They Elicit From
Middle Level English Language Learners

Researcher: Jennifer A. Cowgill, Doctoral Candidate

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Jennifer Cowgill and I am a doctoral candidate at Washington State University. During the rest of this school year, I will be observing in your child's reading classroom as part of a study that I am conducting. I am particularly interested in better understanding the opportunities that English language learners have to discuss text and the ways that they respond to these opportunities. In addition, I want to understand how these opportunities impact text comprehension and second language acquisition. The WSU Institutional Review Board (WSU IRB) has reviewed and approved this study for student participation. I would like your permission to have your child serve as one of my participants – a person who will talk with me about what he or she does during discussions about texts and how he or she responds to these discussions. I consider the students' viewpoints central to my study. These conversations (about 2-30 minutes in length) will occur during class at a time agreeable to the teacher. The longer interview will occur only once at the beginning of the study. Students' names and comments will remain private – not shared with the teacher or anyone else. Even with your permission, if your child hesitates to chat with me or feels uncomfortable responding to any question, he or she may decline to do so. In addition, either you or your child may withdraw from a personal involvement at any time without penalty.

When I observe students as they talk about books, at times I would like to audiotape and/or videotape their responses. When I conduct interviews or engage in brief conversations regarding book talk, I would like to audiotape your child's responses. If you do not want me to videotape and/or audiotape your child, please indicate this in the space provided below.

Should you have any questions about this request, please contact me (Jennifer Cowgill, 509-432-5083, jcowgill@wsu.edu). Should you have any questions regarding your child's rights as a participant, you can contact the WSU IRB at 509-335-9661.

I appreciate your attention to this request and hope that you will allow your child to participate. Your signature at the bottom of this page provides the permission I need to proceed.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Cowgill

(Insert child's first and last name) _____
has my permission to be observed and converse with Jennifer Cowgill as part of the research she is conducting in my child's classroom.

It is okay to videotape my child: YES NO

It is okay to audiotape my child: YES NO

Name (please print): _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix B

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
HOJA DE PERMISO DE LOS PADRES

Título de la investigación: Las oportunidades disponibles para tratar sobre los textos y las reacciones que derivan de éstos para los que aprenden inglés como idioma segundo del nivel intermedio

Investigadora: Jennifer A. Cowgill, Candidata Doctoral

Estimado Padre o Guardián,

Mi nombre es Jennifer Cowgill y estoy sacando mi doctorado en la Universidad del Estado de Washington (Washington State University, WSU). Estoy haciendo una investigación escolar sobre las oportunidades que tienen los estudiantes hispanohablantes de hablar sobre los libros que están leyendo en sus clases de lectura. Me interesa saber más de estas oportunidades y cómo reaccionan los estudiantes a estas pláticas. Además, quiero entender cómo estas pláticas sobre el contenido de sus libros afectan la comprensión del texto y el aprendizaje del inglés.

Durante el resto de este año estaré observando en la clase de literatura de su hijo/a. El Comité Examinador Institucional de WSU (WSU IRB) ha repasado y ha aprobado esta investigación para la participación de los estudiantes. El director de _____ Middle School y la maestra de su hijo/a también me han dado permiso de hacer esta investigación escolar.

Por lo tanto, quisiera conseguir su permiso para que pueda observar y entrevistar a su hijo/a y preguntarle sobre su participación en las pláticas sobre los libros. Para mí, la experiencia y la opinión de los estudiantes es de suma importancia. Estas conversaciones de 2 a 30 minutos ocurrirán durante la clase en un tiempo designado por la maestra. Los nombres y los comentarios de los estudiantes serán privados. No los compartiré ni con la maestra ni con cualquier otra persona. Si su hijo/a decide que no quiere hablar conmigo o se siente incómodo al responder a cualquier pregunta, no tiene que contestar.

Al observar su hijo/a hablar sobre los libros, quisiera grabarlo/a por videocámara y/o grabadora. También, me gustaría grabarlo/a durante las entrevistas y conversaciones que tendremos. Si usted no quiere que grabe a su hijo/a, avísame abajo.

Usted o su hijo/a puede dejar de participar en esta investigación en cualquier momento sin ningún reproche. Si Ud. tiene cualquier pregunta sobre esta petición, favor de contactarme (Jennifer Cowgill, 509-43-5083, jcowgill@wsu.edu). Si Ud. tiene cualquier pregunta con respeto a los derechos de su hijo/a como participante, puede contactar el WSU IRB en 509-335-9661. Gracias por su atención. Espere que Ud. deje participar a su hijo/a en esta investigación escolar. Su firma abajo servirá como permiso para incluir a su hijo/a en mi investigación.

Sinceramente,

Jennifer A. Cowgill

Mi hijo/a _____ (ponga el nombre aquí),
 tiene permiso de hablar con Jennifer Cowgill como parte de esta investigación escolar que se
 llevará a cabo en la clase de literatura.

Está bien grabar a mi hijo/a (por videocámara): Sí No

Está bien grabar a mi hijo/a (por grabadora): Sí No

Nombre del padre/guardián: _____ Fecha: _____

Firma: _____

Appendix C

**WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
ASSENT FORM**

Research Title: Talk Opportunities Around Text and the Responses They Elicit From
Middle Level English Language Learners

Researcher: Jennifer A.Cowgill, Doctoral Candidate

Hello! My name is Jennifer Cowgill and I am a student at Washington State University. I am getting my Ph.D. in education, with the hopes of becoming a professor. In order to graduate, I must conduct a research project. For my research project, I would like to observe you in your language arts classroom at _____ Middle School. In particular, I want to watch you talk about the books you read in class. I want to hear what you say during those talks and find out how your participation helps you understand the books better and learn English. I would like to videotape some of these discussions about books, if that is okay with you. If you don't want to be videotaped, just let me know and I won't videotape you. I would also like to audio record (tape record) you when you talk about books. If this is not okay with you, just let me know.

In addition to watching you talk about books, I will ask you questions about your participation in those book talks. One of our conversations will be rather long and last from 10 to 30 minutes. We will only talk this long when your teacher says that it is okay. At other times, I will just ask you one or two quick questions about something you said or did while talking about the book. This kind of conversation will only take a couple of minutes. If it is okay with you, I would like to audiotape our conversations on a tape recorder. If this is not okay, simply tell me so and I will not tape record your answers.

I will observe you and talk with you during your regular class time. It will not take any additional school time to participate. When I write a paper about my observations and our conversations, your name will not appear anywhere in the paper.

In order to collect this research, I had to get permission from many people. First, I got permission from a group of people at Washington State University called the WSU Institutional Review board. They looked at my plan and gave permission for students to participate. Next, I got permission from your principal and your teacher. Then, I got permission from your parents. Now, if you would like to be part of my research project, you can give me your permission.

If you don't want to participate, that's okay. There will be no bad feelings if you don't want to do this. You can ask questions if you do not understand any part of the research study. In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact the WSU Institutional Review Board (the group of people at Washington State University who approved my plan) at 509- 335-9661.

Do you understand? _____ Is this okay? _____ Do you want to participate? _____

Is it okay if I tape record our conversations? _____

Is it okay if I videotape you when you talk about books? _____

Is it okay if I tape record you when you talk about books? _____

If you agree to participate, please sign below.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
HOJA DE ASENTIMIENTO

Título de la investigación: Las oportunidades disponibles para tratar sobre los textos y las reacciones que derivan de éstos para los que aprenden inglés como idioma segundo del nivel intermedio

Investigadora: Jennifer A. Cowgill, Candidata Doctoral

Me llamo Jennifer Cowgill y soy estudiante en Washington State University. Estoy sacando mi doctorado en educación para que pueda ser catedrática en la universidad. Para graduarme, tengo que hacer una investigación escolar sobre la lectura. Quisiera hacer mi investigación en _____ Middle School, en tu case de lectura. Para mi investigación, quiero observarte hablar sobre los libros. Quiero saber si las pláticas sobre los libros te ayudan entenderlos mejor y aprender inglés. Me gustaría grabarte (por videocámara y grabadora) durante estas pláticas. Si no quieres que te grabe, avísame abajo.

Además de observarte hablar sobre los libros, quiero hacerte unas preguntas sobre tu participación en estas conversaciones. Puede ser que nuestra primera conversación dure de 10 a 30 minutos, siempre con el permiso de tu maestra. Adicionalmente, hablaré contigo de vez en cuando entre 2 o 3 minutos sobre lo que dices durante las pláticas. Con tu permiso, me gustaría grabar estas conversaciones (con una grabadora).

Solamente te observaré y entrevistaré durante tu tiempo regular de la clase. No tomará ningún tiempo adicional de la escuela para participar. Al escribir sobre mis observaciones y nuestras conversaciones, jamás usaré tu nombre.

Para poder hacer una investigación, tuve que conseguir permiso de varias personas. Primero, conseguí permiso de la universidad. Un grupo de personas llamado el WSU IRB me dieron permiso de observar a los estudiantes de _____ Middle School y también hablar con ellos. Segundo, conseguí permiso del Sr. _____ y tu maestra. Entonces, me dieron permiso tus padres. Ahora, si te interesa participar en mi investigación, me puedes dar tu permiso.

Si tú no deseas participar, está bien. No me sentirá mal si no participas. Puedes hacerme preguntas si no entiendes cualquier parte de la investigación. Además, si tienes preguntas sobre tus derechos como participante, puedes contactar el WSU IRB en el 509-335-9661.

¿Entiendes? _____ ¿Está bien? _____ ¿Quieres participar? _____

Si estás de acuerdo participar, favor de firmar abajo.

Nombre (letra de imprenta): _____

Firma: _____

Fecha: _____

Firma de la investigadora: _____ Fecha: _____

Appendix E

Interview Questions in English

1. Tell me about yourself as a person.
2. Tell me about yourself as a student.
3. What kinds of things do you like to talk about and with whom?
4. Describe your talk here at school. What do you talk about inside of class?
What do you talk about outside of class?
5. Describe the things that you and the class talk about in this classroom.
6. Describe what you do when the class, or the group that you are in, talks about a book? Why do you behave in this particular way?
7. How do you feel about discussing books you read in class? How do you feel when books are being discussed?
8. I noticed that you said _____ during the discussion today.
How come?
9. How did you feel when _____?
10. I noticed you didn't say anything during the discussion today. How come?
11. I noticed _____. Can you tell me more about this?
12. Is there anything you want to tell me about today's discussion or talk about books?

Appendix F

Interview Questions in Spanish

1. ¿Cómo eres tú como persona?
2. ¿Cómo eres tú como estudiante?
3. ¿De qué te gusta hablar y con quién?
4. Describe tu manera de hablar aquí en la escuela ¿De qué hablas adentro de la clase? ¿De qué hablas afuera de la clase?
5. Describe las cosas de las cuales tú y los otros estudiantes hablan en esta clase.
6. Describe lo que haces cuando el grupo grande o pequeño habla de los libros. ¿Por qué te portas así?
7. ¿Cómo te sientes acerca de la oportunidad de hablar de los libros? ¿Cómo te sientes cuando estás hablando de los libros?
8. Noté que tú dijiste _____ durante la plática hoy. ¿Por qué?
9. ¿Cómo te sentiste cuando _____?
10. Noté que tú no dijiste nada durante la plática hoy. ¿Por qué?
11. Noté que _____. ¿Me puedes decir más de esto?
12. Hay algo más que quieres decir sobre la plática de hoy?

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