

CHAPTER 9

The Effects of an Instructional Conversation on English Language Learners' Concepts of Friendship and Story Comprehension¹

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A recent review of research involving English language learners (ELLs) conducted in the United States over the past 20 years found that both direct instruction and more interactive approaches to instruction (singly or together) are successful with ELLs (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2004). Although the U.S. empirical literature on the effects of these instructional approaches on ELLs remains relatively small, this finding represents a new synthesis.

As recently as 20 years ago, researchers and educators often had to extrapolate from non-ELL research to identify instructional approaches that might be effective with ELLs. Because of the persistent underachievement among language minority populations (e.g., Committee for Economic Development, 1991), findings derived from studies of low-achieving non-ELL students were often presumed to apply to ELLs. For the most part, this resulted in an emphasis on direct instruction and explicit teaching of specific skills:

Low-achieving students need more control and structuring from their teachers: more active instruction and feedback, more redundancy, and smaller steps with higher success rates. This will mean more review, drill, and practice, and thus more lower-level questions. (Brophy & Good, 1986, p. 365)

No doubt there is a broad literature demonstrating that direct instruction is effective when done well. Modeling, demonstrations, clear explanations, lectures,

feedback, correctives, and practice all promote learning (Gage, 1978; Gage & Berliner, 1988; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986; Walberg, 1990).

At the same time, second-language acquisition theories (Cummins, 1989; Krashen, 1987) emphasize the importance of social interaction in the language acquisition process. Indeed, several studies document the paucity of interaction in ELL classrooms (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996; Berman et al., 1992; Ramirez, 1992) and/or the tendency to weight ELL instruction toward lower level skills lessons and factually oriented lessons (see, e.g., Barrera, 1983; Goldenberg, 1989b; Hiebert, 1983; Knapp & Shields, 1990). Such findings, as well the emergence of newer studies documenting the potential value of interactive instruction (Palinscar & Brown, 1985; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), served to stimulate and justify increasing interest in interactive approaches (Dalton, 1998; Tharp, 1997) and the promise of programs specifically for ELLs that utilized both direct instruction and interactive approaches (August & Hakuta, 1998; Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998; García, 1992; Gersten, 1996; Goldenberg, 1996; Saunders, 1999).

Much of the research conducted in the United States over the last 20 years has focused on the comparative effects of specific language-of-instruction programs, such as English immersion, transition bilingual education, maintenance bilingual education, and two-way bilingual education (Genesee et al., in press). As such, the emergence of research on specific instructional approaches, including the singular and combined effects of different approaches like direct and interactive instruction, represents an important advance in ELL research.

At this point, however, existing research constitutes just a beginning. There remains an urgent need to continue conceptualizing and studying instructional approaches that assist ELLs in acquiring knowledge, skills, and higher level concepts, both in their primary language and in English. Over the past 15 years, we have been researching and developing a middle to upper elementary grades language arts program for ELLs applicable to both transitional bilingual and English immersion contexts: Opportunities through Language Arts (OLA; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2001, 2003). The program incorporates direct instruction for some areas of literacy instruction (e.g., reading comprehension strategies, writing conventions) and interactive instruction for other areas (e.g., studying literature, writing process). At the heart of the OLA program is Instructional Conversation (IC), an interactive approach to the study of literature. For us, and for the many teachers with whom we have worked, IC is a way to capitalize on the teaching and learning potential of "talk about text."

In this chapter, first we overview and provide background on the concept and practice of IC and review some of our previous research on IC. Next we describe the methods and report the results of a study we conducted to examine the effects of an IC lesson on fourth-grade ELLs' conceptual understandings and literal comprehension of a story about friendship. We also analyze the content and sociolinguistic properties of IC lessons in contrast to more conventional approaches to story discussions. Finally, we discuss the implications of the study's results and additional questions that need to be pursued to more fully assess and understand the potential of IC as an interactive instructional approach.

BACKGROUND ON INSTRUCTIONAL CONVERSATION AND THE STUDY

Turning a Good but Elusive Idea Into a Concrete Model

The idea of instructional conversation is by no means a new one. Since the time of Socrates, philosophers and educators have talked about and encouraged teachers to engage students in substantive interactions (Goldenberg, 1991). From the early part of the 20th century up through today, researchers have promoted the value of discussions for developing critical thinking, productive social interaction, intellectual risk taking, and academic engagement (Thayer, 1928; Wilen, 1990). At the same time, the past two decades have produced the first body of actual research on the status and nature of classroom talk or discourse. Contrary to what we might assume, good discussions rarely occur in American classrooms. Elementary and secondary students generally spend less than 5% of class time participating in “real” discussions (Goodlad, 1984; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). More often than not, classroom interactions conform to a predictable pattern of “recitation,” with the teacher asking a question, a student responding, and the teacher evaluating the response and then moving on to another question (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979, 1991).

Recitation has a number of well-documented strengths, including promoting active participation (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993) and effective review and practice (Stodolsky, Ferguson, & Wimpelberg, 1981). But because it is characterized by known-answer questions, short student responses, and minimal continuity from one question to the next, recitation does not allow for the exploration and development of ideas that characterize “real” discussions. Researchers have put forth a variety of explanations for the paucity of discussion and the predominance of recitation. Some argue that recitation is deeply rooted in Western belief systems about teaching (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Others suggest that it is extremely difficult for teachers to give up the familiar and traditional role of knowledge giver and enter into new, more collaborative relationships and interactions with their students (Langer, 1987).

Our work with teachers, however, has led us to a different assessment. Many teachers are eager to engage in meaningful and productive discussions with their students, but they are uncertain about how to do it well and have few concrete models to inform their efforts (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1996). Our work on instructional conversation (or good classroom discussions) arose out of this identified need. Building on research conducted at the Kamehameha Early Education Program (e.g., Au, 1979; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), we have been working in language-minority schools over the past 15 years to elaborate the concept of IC, to specify its elements in clear and plain terms, and help teachers instantiate ICs in their classrooms (Goldenberg, 1992–1993; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2000; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Hamann, 1992; Saunders, O’Brien, Lennon, & McLean, 1998).

What Is an Instructional Conversation?

At present, we have identified 10 elements that seem to define the essence of instructional conversation. They are presented, in abbreviated form, in Table 9.1 (see Goldenberg, 1991, 1992–1993, for more extensive descriptions).

TABLE 9.1
Elements of the Instructional Conversation

INSTRUCTIONAL ELEMENTS

1. Thematic focus. The teacher selects a theme or idea to serve as a starting point for focusing the discussion and has a general plan for how the theme will unfold, including how to “chunk” the text to permit optimal exploration of the theme.
2. Activation and use of background and relevant schemata. The teacher either “hooks into” or provides students with pertinent background knowledge and relevant schemata necessary for understanding a text. Background knowledge and schemata are then woven into the discussion that follows.
3. Direct teaching. When necessary, the teacher provides direct teaching of a skill or concept.
4. Promotion of more complex language and expression. The teacher elicits more extended student contributions by using a variety of elicitation techniques—invitations to expand (e.g., “Tell me more about that”), questions (e.g., “What do you mean?”), restatements (e.g., “In other words,”), and pauses.
5. Elicitation of bases for statements or positions. The teacher promotes students’ use of text, pictures, and reasoning to support an argument or position. Without overwhelming students, the teacher probes for the bases of students’ statements, for example. “How do you know?” “What makes you think that?” “Show us where it says ___.”

CONVERSATIONAL ELEMENTS

6. Fewer “known-answer” questions. Much of the discussion centers on questions and answers for which there might be more than one correct answer.
 7. Responsivity to student contributions. In addition to having an initial plan and maintaining the focus and coherence of the discussion, the teacher is also responsive to students’ statements and the opportunities they provide.
 8. Connected discourse. The discussion is characterized by multiple, interactive, connected turns; succeeding utterances build on and extend previous ones.
 9. A challenging but nonthreatening atmosphere. The teacher creates a “zone of proximal development,” where a challenging atmosphere is balanced by a positive affective climate. The teacher is more collaborator than evaluator and creates an atmosphere that challenges students and allows them to negotiate and construct the meaning of the text.
 10. General participation, including self-selected turns. The teacher encourages general participation among students. The teacher does not hold exclusive right to determine who talks, and students are encouraged to volunteer or otherwise influence the selection of speaking turns.
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Successfully addressed, the 10 elements combine to produce what might appear as an excellent discussion conducted by a teacher and a group of students.

“Instructional conversation” is, first, interesting and engaging. It is about an idea or a concept that has meaning and relevance for students. It has a focus that, while it might shift as the discussion evolves, remains discernible throughout. There is a high level of participation, without undue domination by any one individual, particularly the teacher ... Teachers and students are responsive to what others say, so that each statement or contribution builds upon, challenges, or extends previous

ones. Topics are picked up, developed, elaborated.... Strategically, the teacher (or discussion leader) questions, prods, challenges, coaxes—or keeps quiet. He or she clarifies and instructs when necessary, but does so efficiently, without wasting time or words. The teacher assures that the discussion proceeds at an appropriate pace—neither too fast to prohibit the development of ideas, nor too slowly to maintain interest and momentum. The teacher knows when to bear down and draw out a student's ideas and when to ease up, allowing thought and reflection to take over. Perhaps most important, the teacher manages to keep everyone engaged in a substantive and extended conversation, weaving individual participants' comments into a larger tapestry of meaning. (Goldenberg, 1991, pp. 3–4)

In the following section, we provide short examples to illustrate the differences between IC and recitation (additional IC excerpts are introduced later in the chapter). In the IC example, the teacher's questions are open-ended, calling for interpretations of the story; students' contributions are longer, and their turns are often prompted and followed by those of other students. In the recitation example, the teacher's questions are less open-ended and concern the facts of the story; student responses tend to be shorter, and their turns are uniformly prompted and followed by the teacher's. The IC example is identifiable as a segment taken from a larger discussion in which the events of the story are under analysis and debate. The recitation is a series of questions across which the events in the story are being reviewed and rehearsed. Each has a place in the curriculum, but IC and recitation are clearly different forms of interaction that produce very different kinds of talk about text.

Instructional Conversation Recitation

- Tchr: What should Rob have decided?
 Karla: Oh, he should have told his friend not to do that.
 Rosa: But he said that he wanted to go into the barbershop. He wanted to go and he [Soup] said no I'll cut your hair free. And he goes, FREE.
 Karla: No that didn't happen.
 Tchr: So he-
 Char: It said he said, IF I had a barbershop I would cut your hair free.
 Tchr: Now was that a good friend?
 Tchr: What was the problem in the story?
 Maria: The haircut.
 Tchr: The haircut. Okay. Albert.
 Al: They wasted their money on candy.
 Tchr: Wasted money?
 Ricky: Rob wanted a haircut, but he wanted candy more.
 Tchr: Good. Was Soup involved?
 Ricky: Soup tricked him.
 Tchr: Oh. Soup was tricky.
 Marta: Yeah, he told 'em, I'll cut you hair for free.
 Tchr: Okay. And then what happens?

Instructional Conversation in Previous Studies

As part of our efforts to define and implement IC, our research team has conducted several studies to formally advance the idea and practice. In a series of sociolinguistic analyses, we found that ICs differ from more common forms of classroom lessons. For example, in comparison to directed lessons, during ICs teachers talk significantly less, students talk significantly more, and the actual content of lessons is more likely to be mutually shaped and defined by student and teacher understandings (Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1994). Over time (one school year), upper elementary school students' participation in ICs improves: They learn to follow up on each other's comments and maintain topics for longer stretches of conversation (Patthey-Chavez & Goldenberg, 1992). ICs can have a broader effect on the classroom environment, contributing to a greater sense of community and scholarship among students and teacher (Patthey-Chavez, Clare, & Gallimore, 1995). We also know that ICs help both ELLs and non-ELLs arrive at higher levels of story comprehension and thematic understanding than they attain when reading stories and completing study exercises on their own (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999). Moreover, we know that IC can be implemented in other content areas and with older students, for example, middle school mathematics classes (Dalton & Sison, 1995), and successfully adapted to special education settings (Echevarria, 1995; Echevarria & McDonough, 1995).

Given sufficient time and assistance to learn about and implement IC, teachers continue to use it several years after training and assistance ends; they report that IC allows them to more successfully address higher level thinking and comprehension goals than previous approaches they had used (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1996). In fact, in the seminal project in which we successfully tested the effects of the OLA program, which includes several components (literature units, literature logs, writing-as-a-process, comprehension strategies, pleasure reading, and dictation), teachers rated IC as *the* most important component for promoting students' literacy development (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1997). We also know that it takes at least a year of fairly intensive effort and assistance to be able to implement ICs effectively (at least as defined by the elements listed in Table 9.1). In our most effective training settings, teachers conduct ICs on a regular basis, videotape their lessons, and then in weekly meetings led by a teacher or researcher with substantial IC experience, they view, analyze, and discuss each other's lessons (Saunders et al., 1992).

Study Objective

Despite its strong theoretical basis, the prominence teachers afford IC, and the evidence suggesting that ICs engender deeper story understandings than students achieve on their own, we know nothing about the effects of IC in contrast to other modes of literature instruction. Discussions tend to be more effective than lectures for college students (Gall & Gall, 1990). Middle school students score higher on measures of literature achievement and evidence higher levels of engagement in English classes where discussions are more rather than less frequent (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). To the best of our knowledge, however, there is virtually no research about the effects of discussions—or ICs—in the lower grades or in comparison to other teaching methods commonly used at the elementary level, such as recitation (Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969). Previous research on “higher order ques-

tions” serves as a reminder of the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of proposed teaching procedures, no matter how logical it might appear that these procedures should prove beneficial to students. Gage (1978) has noted that research of the early 1970s failed to demonstrate any benefits of higher order questions, that is, questions asking for critical thinking and problem solving. Indeed, the reverse seemed to be the case—lower order questions stressing factual recall were often associated with higher levels of student achievement. Although ICs involve far more than asking “higher order questions,” the results of this research remind us that we can never take for granted the effectiveness of particular procedures or approaches. The study reported in this chapter addresses four questions:

1. Does IC develop students’ understandings of complex concepts?
2. Does IC support literal comprehension of stories?
3. Can English language learners transitioning from Spanish to English instruction successfully participate in ICs conducted in English about English texts?
4. What do teachers do within ICs that might contribute to students’ understandings of complex concepts and support their literal comprehension of stories?

First, a good IC (or series of them) focuses on a substantive theme(s) relevant to the story. Substantive themes are usually complex and multifaceted concepts, such as friendship, sacrifice, justice, commitment, or legacy. We have assumed that students come away from successful ICs with a better understanding of the theme/concept, as well as the story itself, because a good IC should challenge and assist students to articulate, reflect on, and expand their understandings of concepts being discussed. In this study, we wanted to formally test that assumption (question 1).

Second, in comparison to other kinds of literature discussions (e.g., like those recommended in basal readers), when they conduct ICs, teachers spend much less time explicitly reviewing the literal details of the story (sequence of events, information about the characters, descriptions of settings). More time is devoted to analysis and interpretation of story content and the potential meanings of the story and theme. We have assumed that given a well-chosen story (generally appropriate readability level but good thematic potential), students need only minimal explicit review and clarification of literal details: A good IC allows students to solidify their understanding of literal details through the process of analyzing and interpreting story content. This is the second assumption we wanted to test (question 2).

Third, when ELLs in transitional bilingual programs demonstrate sufficient first language (L1) literacy skills and second language (L2) oral skills, they usually begin a 6- to 18-month program of transitional language arts, wherein formal English reading and writing are introduced. Transition is the one phase in bilingual programs in which L2 students are least likely to receive higher level curricula and most likely to receive large amounts of lower level skill instruction (Berman et al., 1992). We have assumed that experienced IC teachers can make it possible for transition students to participate successfully in ICs—promoting high levels of participation, drawing out more elaborated language, articulating and clarifying issues,

and ultimately helping students develop deeper understandings of the story and theme. This is the third assumption we wanted to test (question 3).

Fourth, a good IC should bring forth interaction that reveals both a high degree of verbal participation on the part of the students and also responsiveness and instructional purposefulness on the part of the teacher. We have assumed that experienced IC teachers successfully negotiate a dual role as conversation facilitator and instructor, promoting productive and spontaneous conversation but shaping and directing that conversation toward instructional ends. This is the fourth assumption we wanted to test (question 4).

METHODS

Setting and Population

The student body at the urban K–5 elementary school where this study was conducted is 93% Hispanic and 88% limited English-proficient; 80% of students qualify for the federal free meal program; an additional 15% qualify for reduced-price meals. A large majority of parents, both at this particular school and around the district (which is located in the metropolitan Los Angeles area), work in skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled occupations and have received an average 6 to 7 years of formal schooling (Gallimore, Reese, Balzano, Benson, & Goldenberg, 1991; Goldenberg, 1989a).

At the time of the study, 75% of the children at the school were below grade level in mathematics and reading. Based on state tests, students' achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics placed the school at the 15th percentile among California schools. The school's achievement level was not atypical, given its socioeconomic characteristics. Although scores were in the lower percentile ranges statewide, in comparison to schools with similar socioeconomic characteristics, the school's scores were in the middle percentile rankings—30th for writing, 40th for math, and 58th for reading. (See Goldenberg, 2004, and Goldenberg & Sullivan, 1994, for results of the larger, long-term project to improve achievement at the school.)

Classroom Context

The study was conducted in the fourth-grade classroom of one of our project teachers, Mrs. Fiske, a veteran instructor in her first year as a participant in the IC project. Of the 31 students in the class, 27 were in their first year of transition from Spanish to English instruction; 4 students were native English speakers. All or most of the 27 students qualified to transition at the end of third or the beginning of fourth grade because they tested on or close to grade level in Spanish reading (3.2, end of book tests for the Spanish reading series) and had demonstrated the ability to generally converse in English (Bilingual Syntax Measure, Level 4 or speech emergence). Of the four native English speakers, one was Anglo, another was Hispanic, and two were African American. Two were very proficient readers, and two were substantially below grade level. The class provided a unique research opportunity: Mrs. Fiske was a willing and helpful collaborator, her ICs were becoming highly successful, and we were interested in examining the effects of IC specifically on transition students. (All students, with the exception of a special educa-

tion student and three students absent for a major portion of the study, are included in the analysis; $N = 27$.)

The study was conducted near the end of the school year, as the class was completing a month-long unit on *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952). Throughout the unit, the teacher and students had discussed a variety of themes, the most prominent of which was the concept of friendship. The teacher had observed that students, perhaps not unlike many 9- and 10-year-olds, generally expressed absolute notions of friendship—for example, friends *never* fight, friends *always* get along, friends *always* share. On the basis of her observations, Mrs. Fiske decided to pursue in her ICs a more differentiated and complex conception of friendship—for example, that friendship can be problematic, friends don't always like each other, sometimes they disagree, friendship often requires tolerance and patience. The study was thus built around the instructional goal of helping students develop a more subtle, complex, and differentiated view of "friendship."

Together with the authors, the teacher developed an adjunct lesson (interjected into the larger *Charlotte's Web* unit) on a short story that seemed particularly suited to pursuing this differentiated concept of friendship. The story, "Quarter for a Haircut" (Peck, 1989), is about two friends, Soup and Rob. Soup convinces Rob to let him cut his hair so they can use the haircut money to buy bubble gum. Soup's haircut is terrible, and Rob must then face an angry mother, who had given him a quarter for the expressed purpose of going to the barber's.

Half the students participated in an IC lesson; the other half served as the control group and participated in a "recitation" lesson in which the teacher reviewed with the students the literal details of the story (a more conventional "basal-like" literature lesson). So as not to deprive the students in the control group, the same instructional goal was pursued in subsequent lessons as part of the *Charlotte's Web* unit.

Procedures

Students with fall test scores on the Spanish Assessment of Basic Skills (CTB/McGraw Hill, 1987) were matched by quartile, then randomly assigned either to an IC or control group. In the case of missing test scores ($n = 11$), students were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. To keep the instructional groups small, students were divided into four groups of seven or eight each—2 IC subgroups and two control subgroups. Based on the teacher's judgments of students' proficiency and achievement in English reading and speaking across the year, within each condition, we made the two subgroups heterogeneous and comparable (i.e., roughly the same composition of high, medium, and low).

Four days prior to the experiment, the teacher asked the entire class to write an essay about friendship in response to the following prompt: *Explain what friendship is. Pick a friend of yours, describe that person, and tell why that person is your friend.* Students were given as much time as they needed, and all finished within 40 minutes. Such a writing assignment was not uncommon in the classroom, as students often completed "drafts" or "quickwrites" as a way of initiating a coming lesson in reading, science, or social studies.

Papers were collected and analyzed by the teacher and the authors as a "pre-test" to determine if there was any evidence of a more differentiated concept

of friendship. The vast majority of papers confirmed what the students had maintained in previous discussions: Friends never fight, friends always get along, and that is why they are friends. Only three students demonstrated any understanding of more complex aspects of friendship.

Before beginning the small-group lessons, the teacher spent 10 minutes with the entire class introducing the short story, providing background she felt would facilitate their reading of the story (e.g., about the anthology from which the story was taken, about the time period—when haircuts cost a quarter at the local barber-shop, and about the setting—a small rural town). She also read aloud the first two pages of the 11-page story (1,590 words, 3.2 grade level). Students then spent 15 minutes reading the rest of the story independently and silently. When all students had finished reading the story, the teacher began her small-group lessons. Children who were not involved in the lesson went to another room with the instructional aide to review other material.

The order of the lessons was counterbalanced across conditions:

- Group 1: Instructional conversation
- Group 2: Control
- Group 3: Control
- Group 4: Instructional conversation

To verify that the two groups of lessons provided a suitable contrast between IC and non-IC, the four lessons were videotaped, then scored using a rating scale developed by Rueda, Goldenberg, and Gallimore (1991). Scores revealed a very large difference—experimental lessons demonstrated all or virtually all IC elements, whereas the control lessons demonstrated very few (see Rueda et al., 1991, for details regarding scale development, reliability, and validity).

Lesson Content

Prior to the experiment, the teacher and the authors developed a lesson plan for each of the two conditions. The plan for the IC was consistent with what the teacher had been doing for the whole year: (a) Establish the important factual details of the story, capitalizing on opportunities to initiate discussion on the theme of friendship; (b) focus on friendship and try to build a more differentiated conceptualization of friendship; then (c) relate the conceptualization back to the text.

The plan for the control group lesson was based on what the teacher did in previous years when teaching a literature lesson from the basal text. The control lessons contained more elements of what has been referred to as “recitation” instruction, where the primary focus is to make certain that the students have understood the literal details of the story: (a) Pose a series of factual questions about the setting, characters, and events in the story; (b) plot the sequence of events in the story; (c) share teacher and student experiences related to the story; (d) discuss an inference question (e.g., what will happen to the two boys); and (e) ask students about their favorite part(s) of the story. (Descriptions and transcript excerpts for IC and control lessons are provided in the results section.)

Post-Lesson Data

After all groups participated in their lessons, the entire class convened in the classroom to complete two assignments: an essay and a set of 10 comprehension questions. The prompt for the essay was identical to the one administered 4 days prior. As with the initial essay, all students completed their essays within 40 minutes. After the essays had been collected, students completed a 10-question, short-answer comprehension test. Nine of the questions addressed the literal details of the story (e.g., how one boy gets the other to spend his quarter on something else). The final question asked the students to make an inference: Would the two boys remain friends? Why? The administration of the essay and comprehension test was videotaped to provide a record of all procedures.

Analysis of the Lessons

Videotaped lessons were transcribed, read, and the segments within each lesson were identified (e.g., reviewing factual details, sequencing, charting words to define friendship, discussing whether Soup was a good friend). Then for each lesson, the number of teacher and student turns and utterances was tabulated. A turn is the occurrence of someone speaking. An utterance is a unit of meaning within the turn. An utterance can be as short as a word (e.g., Uh huh or What?) and as long as an independent clause (e.g., He wanted to get a haircut). A turn can have any number of utterances. Next, each turn was coded for length—for the nature and number of utterances within the turn: A turn with one utterance less than an independent clause in length was coded as 0 (e.g., Yes., What?, From the store.); a turn with an utterance one independent clause in length was coded as 1 (e.g., “Oh, he should have told his friend not to do that.”); a turn with two independent clauses was designated with 2 (e.g., “Rob wanted a haircut, but he wanted candy more.”); a turn with three was assigned a 3; and a turn with four or more independent clauses received a 4. The utterance data allow us to quantify the proportion of student versus teacher talk in a lesson (i.e., who produces most of the talk in the lesson?). The turn-length data allow us to quantify the level of elaboration in student versus teacher talk during the lesson (i.e., how much are the parties allowed to elaborate when they talk in the lesson?).

Analysis of Tests and Essays

Both the pre- and post-essays were entered on a word processor. To eliminate the influence of handwriting, spelling, and punctuation on the independent coding of the essays, simple misspellings and omissions of end-marks were corrected. The content was unchanged. Comprehension tests were not modified in any way.

Two blind raters coded the essays and the comprehension test. For the essays, the raters assigned a 1 to the texts that included any language concerning the difficulty or problematic aspects of friendships—for example, sometimes friends don't get along; they have to talk things out when there are problems; friendship sometimes requires tolerance, patience, and so on. (Henceforth we refer to such language as “the tracer” [Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989]² because it provides a trace

in the students' essays of the differentiated conceptualization in which we were interested.) Raters assigned a 0 to texts containing no such language.

For the comprehension tests, a key of possible acceptable answers was developed by the second author. Raters scored each answer on a 3-point scale: 0, incorrect—inconsistent with the story; .5, partially correct—consistent with the story but not a complete answer; 1, correct, consistent with story and a complete answer. Raters also coded the last question on the comprehension test (Will they still be friends? Why?) for any evidence of the “tracer” in the students' justifications. Interrater reliability (percent agreement) for the essays was 94%; for the total comprehension, 94%; and for the last question on the comprehension test, 92%.

In addition, descriptive statistics were also generated for the essays: total number of words, number of T-units, and average T-unit length (an estimation of syntactical maturity; Hunt, 1977). These statistics were used to check the comparability of the different groups with regard to their writing development.

Data Analysis

A *t* test was performed on each of the descriptive statistics to assess comparability of the four groups. We collapsed the subgroups for each condition and performed chi-squares for the essay data. A 2×3 Analysis of Variance (IC vs. Control; High, Medium, Low proficiency and achievement in English reading during the year) was conducted on the scores from the comprehension test. Due to absences, not all of the 27 students included in the study completed all assignments—two students did not write pre-essays; three students did not complete the comprehension test.

RESULTS

First, we report results on the comparability of the IC and control groups. Next, we report results specific to our four research questions: (1) Does IC develop students' understanding of complex concepts? (2) Does IC support literal comprehension? (3) Can transition students successfully participate in ICs in English? and (4) What do teachers do within ICs that might contribute to students' understandings of complex concepts and support their literal comprehension of stories?

Were the Instructional Conversation and Control Groups Comparable?

On fall standardized Spanish-language tests, students in the two groups who had taken the test were nearly identical: Mean scale score = 631 for both groups, *SD* = 29 ($n = 9$) and 21 ($n = 8$) for experimental and control groups, respectively ($p = .95$, 2-tailed *t* test). The median national percentile for all students who took the test was 46.

With respect to students' writing competence, as evidenced by their written performance for the experiment, the two groups continued to be equivalent. As Table 9.2 shows, no significant differences were found between the two groups for any of the descriptive statistics tested. Students in both groups generated more writing in their post-lesson essays than in their pre-lesson essays. However, the two groups were virtually identical in terms of the quantity and general syntactic maturity of their writing at both occasions.

TABLE 9.2
Length and Syntactical Maturity of Pre-and Post-Lesson Student Essays

	<i>IC Mean/SD</i> (<i>pre-lesson n = 12</i>)	<i>Control Mean/SD</i> (<i>pre-lesson n = 13</i>)	<i>t*</i>
<i>Pre-lesson essays</i>			
Total words	49.3 (14.3)	58.9 (27.2)	-1.2
No. of T-units	6.2 (1.5)	7.8 (3.2)	-1.6
T-unit length	7.8 (.95)	7.7 (1.7)	.22
<i>Post-lesson essays</i>			
Total words	79.5 (33.1)	83.1 (24.6)	-.32
No. of T-units	10.3 (4.6)	10.7 (3.6)	-.26
T-unit length	8.0 (1.6)	8.0 (1.5)	.11

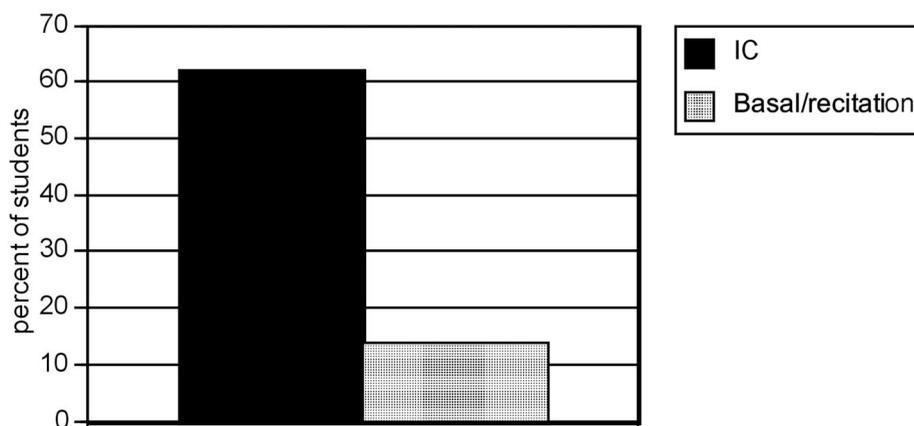
*All *t* tests (1-tailed) not significant at .05.

Does Instructional Conversation Develop Students' Understandings of Complex Concepts?

Yes. The "tracer" (evidence of a more differentiated view of friendship) was evident in the post lesson writings (essays and question 10 responses) for a majority of the IC students but in very few of the post-lesson writings of the control students.

Essays

As Figure 9.1 shows, the students in the IC lessons were more than 4 times as likely (62% vs. 14%) to mention more subtle, problematic, or differentiated aspects of friendship, for example, that friendship is not always perfect or that friends



*Language indicating a more differentiated view of friendship — friendship not always perfect; friends sometimes have problems; they have to work at solving problems.

Figure 9.1. Presence of Tracer* in Student Essays Following Lesson.

sometimes have problems they have to work at solving.³ The difference between the two groups is statistically significant, $p = .01$ ($\chi^2 = 6.45$; $df = 1$).

Pre- and post-essays from three students⁴ provide an illustration of the data and the differences between the two treatment conditions (underscored portions were coded as “tracer”).

Karla: Before IC Lesson	Karla: After IC Lesson
To me my example of a friend is loyal, a companion, nice and some love for each other. To me my friends are best friends. Their names are ... Marta, Nellie and Michelle. They are fun loyal and very good companions. They are there when I am happy or when I am sad. Thanks to them for being my friends.	My friends are Marta and Nellie. Actually they are my best friends. To me my friends are colleagues, affectionate. They are my best friends. And we play together and we walk, talk and have great times together. When we fight we try to work things over and we do what we have to do to keep our friendship together. They feel like sisters.

Karla’s pre IC essay reveals no language concerning the problematic nature of friendships. She lists a set of positive attributes, names her friends, applies those attributes to her friends, characterizes her friends’ loyalty and stability, and closes with a statement of appreciation. She notes that her friends—best friends—“are there when I am happy or when I am sad.” Thus, she recognizes that friends tolerate changes in mood, and perhaps as other students suggested, they help you when you have problems—when you’re troubled. In contrast, the essay she wrote after her participation in the IC lesson reveals a more differentiated conception of friendship because she acknowledges that conflicts enter into friendship: “When we fight ...” She also describes the actions she and her friends take to resolve conflicts and preserve the friendship: “try to work things over.” Both Karla’s pre- and post-essays provide a tribute to her friends. The post-essay, however, does so on new grounds: They are best friends—like sisters—because they overcome conflicts.

Luis—another student from the IC condition—also showed an increasingly differentiated conception of friendship in his post-essay as compared to his pre essay:

Luis: Before IC Lesso	Luis: After IC Lesson
I am going to tell you how I met my friends. My first friend was Michael. I met Michael in Mrs. Tiara’s class. Then they move me to Mrs Fiskes class and Michael too and my first friend here was Gilbert and then I met Freddy then Hector so then the whole class. So now I have good friends.	Friends is something that you could play with like you have to never fight or have problems. I am going to tell you a story but real one. When I was in 1st or 2nd grade I met a friend. So we played and when we got in a fight I showed kindness and I always trust him and sometimes I got mad but I forgave him and we spent time together and I would help him. But one day we got in a fight and since that day we always fight and he was one of my best friend.

In his pre-essay, Luis names his friends and describes how he met them. In fact, he seems to characterize everyone as his friend: “... then I met Freddy then Hector so then the whole class. So now I have good friends.” In the opening line of his

post-essay, Luis says that friends “*never* fight.” But then he provides an account of a friendship that did indeed involve conflict: “when we got in a fight . . . sometimes I got mad.” Like Karla, Luis lists the actions he took as a friend to deal with the conflict: “I showed kindness . . . always trust[ed] him . . . but I forgave him.” The contradiction between the opening line and the account suggests that Luis is grappling with the concept of friendship: “Friends never fight,” but in fact, he had a friend with whom he *did* fight. It is not clear whether Luis still considers this person a friend: “He *was* one of my best friend[s].” In fact, he may be trying to suggest that in some instances, conflicts cannot be resolved, and some friendships end. Though he makes a different point than Karla, his post-essay indicates that he was able to apply this more differentiated view of friendship (friendships can be problematic) to his own experiences.

With the exception of two students, the pre- and post-essays from the students in the control group contained no evidence of a change in conceptualization. Erika’s essays are representative. Erika’s pre-essay provides two positive attributes—loving and caring. She also lists categories for those who are capable of having friends—youngsters, grown-ups, and really everybody—though she adds and then repeats at the end, “If you have a friend you are lucky.” She also names two friends and says they will play together after school. In her post-essay, Erika adds more detail about her friends, but, there is no evidence of a more differentiated view of friendship.

Erika: Before Control Lesson

A new friend is a loving caring person who cares for you a lot. Youngsters have many friends. If you have a friend you are lucky to have that person. Grownups have friends too! So every body has a friend. You can be a friend by caring. Michelle is my friend. So is Yvonne. We are going to play at her house after school. So if you have a friend you are lucky!

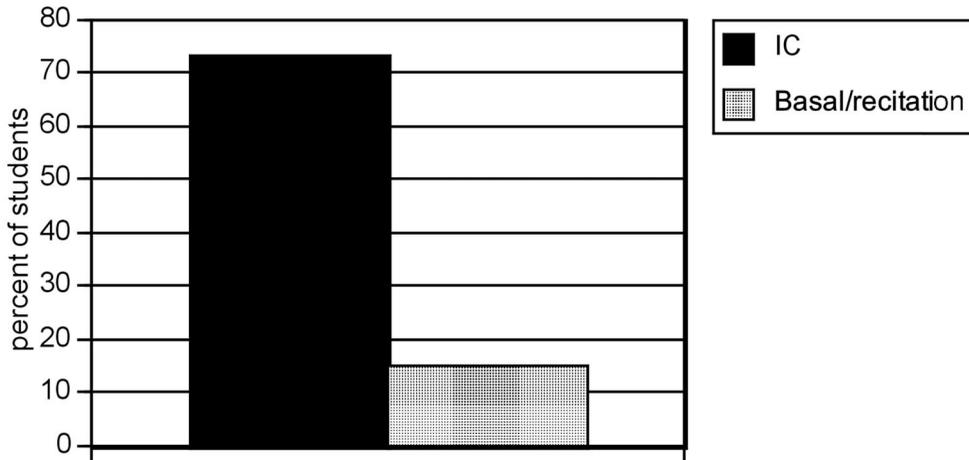
Erika: After Control Lesson

A friend is a loveable caring friend that helps you and cares for you. My first friend is Yvonne Saldivar. She is a friend by playing with me and caring. My second friend is Angelica Aguirre because she plays at my house. And my final friend is Michelle Bailey because she makes me laugh and she cares. Actually every body is my friend. But if you have a friend you are lucky!!!!
If you care for someone you are a special person because you are a best friend to that person!

Question 10 From the Comprehension Test

The results from the essays are corroborated by the students’ responses to the inference question on the comprehension test: “Do you think Rob and Soup will remain friends? Why?”

As indicated in Figure 9.2, what the students chose to include as their substantiation varied by condition. Seventy-three percent (73%, 8/11) of the students in the IC condition⁵ made some reference to actions the characters would take to resolve their conflict and repair their friendship (e.g., talk it out, they will forgive each other). Only 15% (2/13) of the students in the control group made similar references ($\chi^2 = 8.061$, $df = 1$; $p < .005$). Responses from four students from each condition illustrate the differences between the IC and control groups.



*Language indicating a more differentiated view of friendship — friendship not always perfect; friends sometimes have problems; they have to work at solving problems.

Figure 9.2. Presence of Tracer* in Question 10 of Comprehension Test Following Lesson.

IC	Control
—Yes, because they will talk it over and they will be friends again	—I think they will be friends because there just kids
—I think Rob and Soup will still be friends because I think Rob will forgive him	—Yes, they will be friends because they're good friends
—Yes, because Soup tried to help him near the end	—I think they're still friends because it was an accident
—Yes, because they could forgive each other	—Yes, because they're still kids

In Sum

As gauged by the post-lesson writings (essays and question 10), the instructional conversation helped a majority of students further develop their understandings of friendship. We can reasonably attribute the pre-to-post changes to the IC lesson—as opposed to the story, itself—because there was no similar pattern of change for students in the control group who read and reviewed with the teacher the same story. If the story itself and reviewing the literal details of the story could have produced these conceptual changes, then we would have found the tracer in the post-lesson writings of a larger number of control students.

Does Instructional Conversation Support Literal Comprehension of Stories?

Yes. IC students scored as well or better than students in the control group on the 10-item literal comprehension test (see Table 9.3). We compared comprehension test results for the two groups and across the three levels of achievement in English

TABLE 9.3
Comprehension Test Results

	<i>Relative standing in terms of progress in English proficiency and achievement</i>			<i>Combined</i>	
	High n = 4, 4	Medium n = 2, 4	Low n = 5, 5		
Instructional Conversation	Mean	9.12**	9.25*	6.30	7.86
	SD	0.63	0.35	0.27	1.55
Control/Recitation	Mean	7.25	7.38	7.60	7.42
	SD	0.50	0.95	2.68	1.64

**Difference significant at .05; * difference significant at .1.

reading and speaking (IC vs. Control; High, Medium, Low). The 2×3 analysis of variance on scores from the comprehension test revealed a significant interaction $F(2, 18) = 3.84, p < .05$ (main effects for group and achievement level were not significant). Because of the presence of the interaction, analyses of simple effects were conducted. This revealed a significant difference between groups for high achievers, $F(1,6) = 21.77, p < .01$ (means and SDs are: IC: 9.12, .63; Control: 7.25, .50). Middle achieving students in the IC condition also outscored controls, but the difference was not significant (IC: 9.25, .35; Control: 7.38, .95; $p < .1$). Lower achieving students in the control condition performed slightly better than lower achieving IC students, but this difference was also not statistically significant (IC: 6.30, .27; Control: 7.60, 2.68; $p > .3$).

Can “Transition” Students Successfully Participate in Instructional Conversations Conducted in English About English Texts?

Yes. Results presented thus far indicate that transition students can successfully participate in ICs in English about English texts. In fact, whether students were identified by the teacher as high, medium, or low in terms of their relative progress and achievement in English across the year had no bearing on students' participation in the IC lesson or any of the measures reported, except for comprehension (see Table 9.4). The more verbal participants (above the median number of student utterances) were just as likely to come from the lower group (2 of 5) as the middle and high groups (2 of 4, and 2 of 4). The tracer was detected in the essays of at least 50% of the students at each achievement level (low: 3 of 5; middle: 2 of 4; high: 3 of 4), and the same held true for detecting the tracer in students' responses to comprehension question 10 (low: 4 of 5; middle, 2 of 2; high: 2 of 4). The one exception to this pattern, however, was the comprehension test, where both the high and middle students scored significantly better than lower achieving students in the IC condition (low: 6.30; middle: 9.25; high: 9.12; Scheffe post-hocs, $p < .05$ for each comparison). We address this matter in the conclusion.

TABLE 9.4
Participation and Post-Lesson Results for IC Students of Different Levels of English Proficiency and Achievement

<i>Measures</i>	<i>Relative standing in terms of progress in English proficiency and achievement</i>		
	<i>High n = 4</i>	<i>Medium n = 4</i>	<i>Low n = 5</i>
Comprehension test	Mean 9.12	9.25*	6.30
	SD 0.63	0.35	0.27
Tracer detected in post-lesson essay	3 of 4	2 of 4	3 of 5
Tracer detected in comprehension question 10	2 of 4	2 of 2*	4 of 5
Above median** participation in the IC lesson	2 of 4	2 of 4	2 of 5

*n = 2. **Median participation indexed by median number of utterances produced by students in the IC lesson.

What Do Teachers Do Within Instructional Conversations That Might Contribute to Students' Understandings of Complex Concepts and Support Their Literal Comprehension of Stories?

Table 9.5 combines two forms of information about the IC and control group lessons: the focus of the various segments in the lessons and descriptive statistics about student and teacher talk in the lessons. (Data in Table 9.5 are based on the first IC lesson and the first control group lesson, which are representative of what transpired in each condition.) We focus on the broad differences between the IC and control lessons and then examine the features of the IC that might have made it successful. How was time and talk spent in each lesson? In the control group, the majority of time and talk was spent reviewing and rehearsing the literal details of the story (segments 1 and 2 accounting for a combined 67% of all utterances in the lesson). In the IC, the vast majority of talk (89% of all utterances in the lesson) was evenly split between review and discussion of the concept of friendship (segments 2, 3, 4, and 8 = 44%) and then applying that concept to the story (segments 5, 6, and 7 = 45%). Only 11% of the IC was devoted to explicitly reviewing the literal details of the story (segment 1).

Based on this information, then, we can formulate the following synthesis of results: According to the comprehension test results, students in the IC condition understood the literal details as well or better than students who explicitly reviewed and rehearsed then substantially more. Moreover, the large proportion of talk devoted to the concept of friendship and its relationship to the story helped at least 63% of the students in the IC condition arrive at an understanding of friendship they likely would not have developed on their own just as a result of reading the story. What was it about the IC lesson that made this possible?

The answer has to do with instruction, conversation, and the potential that comes in the successful combination of the two. As we would expect, students had the opportunity to do a lot of talking in the IC (see Table 9.5): They produced 55% of all utterances in the IC lesson; their turns at talk were, on average, almost as long as the teacher's, 1.5 and 1.9, respectively; and they produced a fairly substantial

TABLE 9.5
Focus of the Talk and Descriptive Statistics for an IC and Control Lesson

<i>Focus of Lesson Segments</i>	<i>Initiating Speaker</i>	<i>Percentage of lesson utterances</i>	<i>Percentage of segment utterances</i>		<i>Mean utterances per turn</i>		<i>Percentage of lengthier turns*</i>	
			<i>%T</i>	<i>%S</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>%T</i>	<i>%S</i>
<i>INSTRUCTIONAL CONVERSATION</i>								
1—Reviewing literal details of story	Teacher	11	42	58	1.6	1.4	45	55
2—What do we know about friendship? charting	Teacher	10	71	29	3.3	1.1	100	0
3—Debating—Do friends sometimes fight?	Student	23	39	61	1.9	2.1	58	42
4—Adding to friendship chart	Teacher	8	53	47	1.5	1.0	100	0
5—Is Soup a good friend?	Teacher	20	37	63	1.6	1.8	57	43
6—Should Rob have trusted Soup?	Student	18	45	55	2.0	1.3	56	44
7—What will happen to Rob and Soup?	Teacher	7	42	58	1.7	1.8	50	50
8—Wrap: What do we know about friendship?	Teacher	3	56	44	1.5	1.0	100	0
Lesson means			45	55	1.9	1.5	61	39
<i>CONTROL: RECITATION</i>								
1—Reviewing literal details of story	Teacher	27	56	44	2.0	1.3	63	33
2—Sequencing events in the story	Teacher	40	72	28	3.4	1.1	94	6
3—Sharing experiences related to story	Teacher	23	74	26	11.0	3.8	67	33
4—What will happen to Rob and Soup?	Teacher	5	65	35	1.8	1.0	100	0
5—What was your favorite part of the story?	Teacher	5	70	30	2.8	1.2	80	20
Lesson means			68	32	3.3	1.3	78	22

Note. Data are based on the first IC and Control lessons and are comparable to data for the second lesson for each condition. The IC lasted 20 minutes, included 330 total speaking turns and 550 total utterances; Control: 18 minutes, 217 turns, 484 utterances.

*A "lengthier" turn is a turn with two or more independent clauses; for the IC, 25% of the turns in the lesson (84/330) had two or more independent clauses; Control: 30% (65/217).

proportion, 39%, of the lengthier turns in the lesson (more elaborated turns at least two independent clauses in length). In comparison, students in the control lessons produced only 32% of all utterances; their turns were much shorter than the teachers, 1.3 and 3.3, respectively; and they produced just 22% of the lengthier turns in the lesson.

But it is also evident in the lesson data (Table 9.5) that the talk and its distribution between students and teacher in the IC varied across the lesson segments. Across segments 1–5, for example, the percentage of student utterances fluctuated considerably (58, 29, 61, 47, and 63), as did the average length of student turns (1.4, 1.1, 2.1, 1.0, and 1.8) and the percentage of lengthier turns produced by students (55, 0, 42, 0, and 43). In the IC, the teacher was carefully utilizing talk differently at different points in the lesson: in certain segments prompting and driving for single words and phrases to define the concept of friendship, and in others promoting and allowing for more elaborated responses so students could articulate, substantiate, and develop their ideas of friendship and interpretations of the story. Over the course of the lesson, she was using talk as a means to consecutive instructional ends, as opposed to treating talk and necessarily more student talk as an end in itself. We can illustrate this process with a few transcript excerpts from the same IC lesson described quantitatively in Table 9.5. (Note: Double slashes indicate the onset of overlap; uppercase means a language spoken with emphasis; equal signs indicate turns produced without hesitation or interruption; numbers represent the consecutive number each turn was given in the lesson; referents for ambiguous words are provided in brackets to facilitate reading.)

Excerpts From One of the Instruction Conversation Lessons

The teacher began the IC with an invitation for students to summarize or gist the story (segment 1), allowing students to challenge each other in order to build an accurate account of the story's plot, but also using their talk to gauge students' grasp of the literal details. For example,

- 1 Tchr: Okay, somebody, tell me what this story is all about that we just read. Rosa,
- 2 Rosa: mm, it's about a haircut, Um Rob wants a haircut and his mother sent him to a town, and he had just only a quarter for the haircut, //for the haircut.
- 3 Tchr: Okay, did he want a haircut you said?
- 4 Ss: Yeah.
- 5 Tchr: He wants a haircut? Everybody agree with that? He wants a haircut.
- 6 Karla: No, because he wanted to buy some candy,
- 7 Tchr: He wants to buy some candy. Anybody else add to what she told us about? Good ideas. What else happened in the story?

Within a few minutes, the teacher determined that students had a reasonable grasp of the story's facts, so she began activating the friendship schema she had been working on with the class in previous lessons:

- 42 Tchr: Let's go back and think about friendship, and we'll- maybe we can get some new ideas about friendship from this um, story. What are some of the THINGS from *Charlotte's Web* and the other stories that we've talked about? Ideas about friendship, hm?
- 43 Luis: Help each other.
- 44 Tchr: Helping, okay and why did you pick helping to go in there this morning.
- 45 Vic: Because um Soup helped umm, Rob to- to cut his hair.

In this part of the lesson (segment 2: What do we know about friendship?), the teacher was drawing out and clustering (or word webbing) on a chart single words and phrases students associated with the idea of friendship. The discourse moved swiftly with the teacher prompting and students providing short responses (students produced 29% of utterances, with 1.1 utterances per turn and 0% of the lengthier turns in the segment). But she was also looking for a hook, an opportunity to begin working on the theme (friendship can be problematic). The opportunity came as one student nominated the word "patience" for the cluster and another immediately linked the idea of patience to the story (see turns 65 and 66, Lidia and Karla).

- 61 Ger: Kindness
- 62 Tchr: Kindness. ((writes on chart))
- 63 Lidia: Patient.
- 64 Karla: Happiness, happiness,
- 65 Lidia: //Patience.
- 66 Karla: Yeap, patience because, he [Rob] didn't get mad when //they cut the hair.
- 67 Char: Yeah.
- 68 Tchr: Who didn't get mad when they cut the hair?
- 69 Karla: Rob
- 70 Tchr: Rob didn't get mad. So you think he fits in here [the friendship cluster]?
- 71 Ss: Yes.
- 72 Tchr: He was patient, but how patient should you be with a friend?

The teacher took advantage of the opening with a gentle challenge, "how patient should you be with a friend" (turn 72). Her challenge invites students to begin exploring a less rosy and more differentiated concept of friendship. In fact, students took up the invitation and the IC advanced to segment 3 (Debating: Do friends sometimes fight?), the longest segment in the lesson (23%), and a segment with substantial student talk (61% of utterances, 2.1 utterances per turn, 42% of lengthier turns). It started with one girl's declaration that perhaps Rob (the haircut victim) should have displayed some anger. (She explained that, according to her mother, an aunt would be much happier if she allowed herself to get mad sometimes.) This provided the teacher with the opportunity to bring the theme (friendship can be problematic) explicitly into the discussion.

- 88 Tchr: Oh. Well, do we sometimes //get mad at our friends?
 89 Karla: You have to forgive them, too, but-
 90 Tchr: Do we sometimes get mad at our friends?
 91 Char: Yes
 92 Karla: Yes, o'course.
 93 Tchr: When- Why d'you say "course," like of course? What happens when you get mad at your friends.
 94 Karla: They get mad at you,
 95 Tchr: Oh, you get mad back at each other
 ((laughter))

As the discussion progressed, the concept of what might occur within a friendship expanded. On the teacher's urging, students explained that friends do get mad at each other, sometimes they don't share, sometimes friends have problems, and in some cases they even fight. The introduction of the word "fighting," however, brought about a difference of opinion among the students (118–121) and a series of elaborated examples (Lidia, turn 124).

- 117 Tchr: And I even heard a word bigger than problems, fighting. Can friends fight?
 118 Vic: Yes.
 119 Char: No
 120 Ss: YES!
 121 Luis: //Yes. So?
 122 Tchr: Okay someone that said yes. Tell me how friends can fight.
 123 Karla: //My friend my friend one day, we were out of order and uh-
 124 Lidia: Like, umm, yesterday! I was playing with my sister, and I told her, let me see that for a second, and she said "no you always get it," and we started fighting! And then we went with my mom and then, we [both] said she doesn't wanna give me that, she doesn't wanna give me this, and //I started crying=
 125 Char: That's not a true friend.

Charisse (turn 125) adds a wrinkle: the distinction between casual and true friends. Like the teacher was doing earlier, she is challenging narrow definitions of friendship and advancing the discussion toward greater differentiation (*true* friends). In fact, this led to an articulation of the kinds of things friends do to preserve friendships, like talking things out (see turns 134–135).

- 131 Tchr: They all said that true friends can fight, but you say no. Tell me more about it.
 132 Char: If, true friends fight, then that's not true friends! It just, it just doesn't work out. It's not true friends.
 133 Tchr: So, if you are a true friend you would never have a fight. But how would true friends solve problems?
 134 Ger: //Talking.
 135 Char: By talking, not fighting.

- 136 Tchr: By talking not fighting. //Aha,
 137 Rosa: Ms. Fiske, so many times that um, like friends when, when they talk to you, you make friends again

At this point, the teacher challenged the students to weigh the views expressed in the discussion in concrete terms: Should "fighting" be added to the cluster (recall thus far the cluster was filled with terms like helping each other, playing together, sharing, happiness, and patience). Like her earlier challenge, this one prompted substantiation, elaborated turns in defense of a position.

- 138 Tchr: Okay, so you're saying you can have a friend that can count it cool even with a problem, maybe even fighting each other. Should I put fighting up here?
 139 Karla: I say yes, because, my friend, she always plays with us. And, we were playing and she gets mad because she wants to be this, or she wants to be that, and they don't let her. So then I told her, uhm, you don't- if you don't want to be that you don't have to. And she screamed and said, "Yes, I wanna be that. But you can change if you WANT to," she said, "I can change if I want to and you be something [else]. You are gonna have to um, do that!" So then okay cause we were both doing the same thing and then, she, she started, winning the others. My friends and I started fighting with her and, she said that she wasn't gonna be her friend again, and then she was her friend again! She was talking to her later.
 140 Tchr: Okay. So should I put fighting up here?
 141 Ss: Yeah.

Shortly thereafter, the IC advanced to segment 4 (adding to the friendship chart), with the teacher probing and students supplying single words and phrases: fighting, not sharing, problems, tolerate, and talking it over. Like segment 2, the first pass at the cluster about friendship, in segment 4 the teacher plays a more prominent role (percentage of student utterances reduces to 47%, their average turn length drops to 1.0 utterances, and they produce 0% of the lengthier turns in the segment). In fact, at one point the teacher takes the opportunity to introduce a word of her own for the friendship cluster:

- 161 Tchr: You know something, sometimes I have a fight with my friend, but we make up, and sometimes she makes me really ANGRY, but I have to do something. Maybe you know this word. ((writes on chart))
 162 Ss: Tolerate
 163 Tchr: Tolerate. What does tolerate mean?
 164 Char: Deal //with it
 165 Ger: Like deal with it.
 166 Tchr: Deal with it. Put up with it. What happened in the story that somewhat-
 167 Luis: He had to,

- 168 Ger: Have patience!
 169 Tchr: Have patience. That's- that's a good word here patience
 ((writes)) and put up with.

With a more developed and differentiating cluster of terms to define friendship completed, the teacher then returned to the story to discuss the trials of Rob and Soup as a case of friendship. The major issue was whether or not Soup—having persuaded Rob to spend the haircut money on gum and then butchering Rob's hair—was a good friend (segment 5: Is Soup a good friend?). Like segment 3, this fifth segment involved substantial student talk (63% of the segments utterances, 1.8 utterances per turn, and 43% of the lengthier turns). In segment 3, students' turns became more elaborated because they were developing their views of friendship and, in some cases, citing personal experiences to substantiate their points. In segment 5, their turns became more elaborated because they were developing interpretations of events in the story and sometimes citing the text to substantiate their claims. For example,

- 237 Tchr: So what do you say about this Soup. Is he a good friend or isn't he?
 238 Ss: //No
 239 Lidia: No. Ms. Fiske. I,
 240 Luis: No, no.
 241 Tchr: He's not a good friend. Okay Lidia tell us.
 242 Lidia: Right here it said that if he had a barber shop, but he didn't. So he told I cut my cousin's hair once for free, it says. And then, the words just repeated all over his head or something like that. And then, uh, he said, "Will you cut MY hair for free?" Rob said, "Will you cut my hair for free?"
 243 Tchr: So you say that Rob had something to do in- in that too, right?
 244 Luis: Yeah.
 245 Tchr: Rob should take a little responsibility //for what happened?
 246 Luis: But his mom said go straight to the barber shop to cut his hair.
 247 Char: Does he do that with (inaudible)?

Using the text as her source, Lidia (turn 242) advances an idea that had been playing itself out over several turns preceding this excerpt: Rob asked Soup to cut his hair. In other words, he went along with mischief when he could or should have, "Got a haircut like his mother told him," as Charisse said earlier. This line of analysis led to a discussion of whether or not Soup should have trusted Rob (segment 6), which was another opportunity for students to search, examine, and ultimately reference the text to support their interpretations. For example,

- 273 Vic: Three-THIRTY-one.
 274 Tchr: What happens at- starts happening on 331?
 275 Rosa: Ms. Fiske, I know, Ms. Fiske //he was scared [when Soup was cutting his hair].

- 276 Char: Hey Soup. //Hey Soup. ((role playing Rob in fearful voice))
 277 Tchr: He was a little scared. Why was he scared?
 278 Rosa: Cause he- because Soup said that he made a mistake on his hair.
 279 T & Ss: //Wouw!
 280 Rosa: And he make um holes, and then he then he, Soup say, //“Winter’s coming=
 281 Karla: That’s no big problem.
 282 Rosa: =and he [Rob] say it’s still //August=
 283 Ger: August
 284 Rosa: =it’s hot”.
 285 Tchr: So he- He got a little bit worried? He wasn’t sure he trusted him, huh.

Here students were developing the idea that Rob quickly realized he had mistakenly trusted Soup as soon as Soup started cutting his hair. Shortly thereafter, the discussion focused on the end of the story to test one student’s claim that if Soup were really a good, trustworthy friend, he would be there for Rob when he had to face his mother.

- 293 Tchr: But, what you were talking about, Karla, and you said that they [Soup and Rob] have to face it. Where do you think uh, Soup was when he had to face the mother?
 294 Ger: OOOh. He was FAR from there. He is, uh, if-
 295 Tchr: Would a good friend //be far from there?
 296 Ss: //No!
 297 Karla: I don’t think so.
 298 Tchr: Where would a good //friend be?
 299 Vic: //He would go.
 300 Luis: In his house.
 301 Tchr: With him?
 302 Luis: No, in ROB’s house.
 303 Rosa: He didn’t want to be in trouble. In the last page, he like, he said that the gum sticks on the head, and then what about if you stick [it] back.
 304 Tchr: Well that’s what happens.
 305 Char: It says, ((reads)) “Under the hands of my mother, the hair and the pink awful did come off when my head was held under the pump.”

Although this chapter does not allow for an analysis of the entire IC lesson (and the slight but interesting differences that were evident between the first and second IC lessons), these short excerpts help illuminate the results of the study. Students spent a good deal of time actually studying the concept of friendship, starting with the teacher drawing out students’ initial terms to define friendship (segment 2), expanding into a robust debate about the potential problematic aspects of friendship (segment 3), and then converging on new terms to flesh out a more differentiated concept of friendship. Students also spent a good deal of time studying the

story as a interesting case of friendship, developing interpretations of the characters and using the text itself to confirm or revise their interpretation (segments 5 and 6). As a result, all of the students grasped the more differentiated concept of friendship well enough to introduce it in their post-lesson essays or in question 10 of the comprehension test, and all of the students displayed at least a modest (for most, a very thorough) understanding of the story's literal details on the post-lesson comprehension test.

Excerpts From One of the Control/Recitation Lessons

By design, the majority of talk in the control lessons sustained a review or recitation of the story's literal details. For example, in the following excerpt, the teacher is trying to establish a description of the story's setting.

- 32 Tchr: Where are they at? Where did the story happen?
 33 Mich: At main street.
 34 Jov: Noo
 35 Alb: In the ba- in the candy shop!
 36 Maria: //In the town.
 37 Tchr: Main street, okay. Where do you find main street?
 38 Maria: In town!
 39 Tchr: In a little town,
 40 Jov: Right here! ((reads)) On a little dirt road.
 41 Tchr: Okay. Okay he's telling us that they,=
 42 Ricky: =near the mountains.
 43 Tchr: Okay they're down a dusty dirt road, so it's kind of out in the country!
 44 Ricky: Yeah.
 45 Tchr: Okay, so they get on the main street of the little town.

In the next excerpt, the teacher is helping students sequence the events in the story.

- 67 Tchr: Yeah. Well let's look at the sequence of this story. What happened first.
 68 Maria: He had to get a haircut,
 69 Tchr: Okay, get a haircut. Then what happened?
 70 Jov: They went to buy candy,
 71 Tchr: Okay, they bought //candy
 72 Marta: They didn't- They didn't cut the hair to buy candy.
 73 Tchr: Okay, did they just walk directly to the candy store?
 74 Ss: No.
 75 Tchr: How did it happen?
 76 Ricky: They went to the town.
 77 Tchr: They went to town. Okay, then what happened?
 78 Mitch: They stopped at the barber shop,
 79 Tchr: Did they go to the barber shop?
 80 Marta: Yeah to get- after, after they went to the candy shop.
 81 Ricky: They went to the barber shop to get scissors.
 82 Tchr: Did they ever go inside the barber shop?

83 Ss: No.

On some occasions, the talk in the control lessons expanded somewhat as the review of literal details prompted more substantive interpretations of the story's events. For example, the following excerpt is taken from the sequencing exercise (segment 2), when the teacher asked students which event is most important for the rest of the story.

- 121 Ricky: Ms. Fiske, right here! It says—um, the word is free, the main word is free.
 122 Tchr: How's free an important word?=
 123 Ricky: =the secret word is free.
 124 Tchr: So he thinks he's gonna get something free. Who's gonna get something free.
 125 Ss: Rob.
 126 Ricky: Rob! //he gets the haircut free,
 127 Tchr: Rob, //So if Rob gets something free, then they have the quarter to spend! Okay. So maybe a part of that is when they make that decision! What was that- the decision?
 128 Maria: The decision was, to, to go the barber shop and, waste all the money or,=
 129 Tchr: =to the barber shop?
 130 Maria: uh or, go to the candy store.
 131 Tchr: Okay well maybe the- maybe the important point is when they make that decision,
 132 Ricky: Ms. Fiske it says right here. ((reads)) It says "Yes, he said. Someday, I'll have my own barbershop. Honest, I already gave my cousin a haircut. You did? [said] Soup? For free! That was the magic word. free, it rang"=
 133 Tchr: =How did free become such a magical word there Ricky?
 134 Ricky: Cause he didn't have to waste the quarters=
 135 Tchr: Aha! //so if it's free!
 136 Ricky: =For the haircut.
 137 Tchr: Then we can make a decision to go and get?
 138 Jov: Gum ((faint))
 139 Ricky: //The candy.
 140 Tchr: Gum! Yeah.

Although this series of exchanges helps establish perhaps the critical juncture in the story, because the lesson has no guiding theme (like the IC), the teacher uses Ricky's analysis only to clarify the events in the story (with the free haircut, they could go and get gum). In an excerpt presented earlier from the IC, Lidia (turn 247) used the exact same portion of the text as evidence that Rob shared some responsibility for the mischief that transpired during the discussion of whether Soup was a good friend. This contrast helps illustrate the fundamental difference between the control/recitation and IC lessons. In the control lessons, the talk focused almost exclusively on the facts and details of the text itself; in the IC, the talk focused predominantly on the text in relationship to a larger theme, the concept of friendship.

Do the Conceptual Effects of Instructional Conversation Endure Over Time?

Did the students hold onto this differentiated concepts of friendship? The study design made no a priori provision for assessing the durability of the IC effects. Our primary goal was to address the four main research questions. In conducting our analysis, however, we uncovered two sources of evidence that suggest that for many of the students, the conceptualization endured for at least a few weeks. In the 5 weeks that followed the experiment (the last 5 weeks of the school year), two writing assignments related to the friendship unit were completed.

First, students were given the opportunity to revise and edit the essays they wrote after the experiment. Of the IC students who originally included language about the problematic nature of friendship, 63% (5/8) went on to elaborate on that point in their revision of the essay. Thus, more than a week after they originally composed that content, many of the IC students found it still important enough to warrant further articulation and clarification.

Second, as a culminating activity for the friendship unit, all students in the class developed an original short story that was supposed to *show* what they thought was most important about friendship. Twenty-eight students completed the short story assignment, of which 64% focused on one of the two themes that emerged from the series of IC lessons in the friendship unit. Half of those (32%) exemplified the theme, "Friends help each other in times of need," and the other half (32%) illustrated the theme, "Friendship can sometimes be problematic."⁶ As such, for at least two thirds of the class the themes from the IC lessons were understood well enough and deemed important enough such that students could produce a work of fiction around them. Moreover, 5 weeks after the lessons from the experiment, a third of the class was still working with the theme featured in the IC condition.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Instructional Conversation promotes higher level understandings of significant concepts without sacrificing literal comprehension. In the lessons used for this study, identifying details about characters, plot, setting, and main ideas—commonly the focus of standard textbook-driven literature instruction—were successfully embedded in discussions where higher levels of thinking about themes, concepts, and the related experiences of the students emerged. These higher level discussions, then, produced more sophisticated and differentiated understandings of a complex concept, in this case, friendship.

ICs provide a means for accomplishing some of the important, but difficult, goals educators have long strived for and that have recently begun to receive renewed attention—engaging students in meaningful, complex, and challenging interactions around important and relevant ideas and concepts. These goals appear to be particularly important and clearly appropriate for English language learners. Our data suggest that such students can perform successfully, given opportunities to engage with teacher and peers in linguistically and conceptually rich interactions.

There are some caveats, however, and our results are limited in four respects. First, they speak only to short-term effects. At this point, we do not know if the differentiated concept of friendship remained durable for these students beyond the 5 weeks our data address.

Second, we also do not know why the effects never surfaced at all for a small number of students. It is conceivable that some students in the IC condition were simply unable to capture in writing cognitions they might have experienced. Oral interviews would have provided a way to test this hypothesis. It is also possible that unlike a majority of their peers, some students might not have been influenced by their participation in the IC.

Third, we are not absolutely sure how to interpret the differences across English achievement levels on the comprehension test. Without a comprehension measure taken immediately after reading and prior to the lesson, we do not know the exact impact on literal comprehension of the lessons. It seems, however, that high and middle achieving students benefitted from the IC (scoring significantly higher than controls) more than lower achieving students (scoring about the same or slightly lower than controls). Perhaps the less proficient students had more difficulty using interpretative discussions of the story to firm up their understanding of literal details, and they may have needed a slightly longer explicit review of the story at the beginning of the IC.

Fourth, we have not demonstrated that IC is the only mode of teaching through which complex concepts like friendship might be addressed. As Gall and Gall (1990) have pointed out, one of the challenges we face is to compare the effects of ICs (or discussions) *in relation* to other viable teaching modes, such as a lecture or a directed lesson. The lack of effect in the control group simply demonstrates the obvious: Instruction that does not focus on concepts is unlikely to yield conceptual change. What we can say, however, is that in comparison to a more typical "basal/recitation" lesson, children not only understood the story as well or better (at a literal level), but in addition, a significant majority of them were able to articulate a more sophisticated understanding of an important concept.

PAGE NOTES

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2. Our thanks to Genevieve Patthey-Chavez for suggesting the idea of a "tracer."
3. Three students in the control condition, but none of the students in the experimental condition, wrote pre-essays containing evidence of the tracer. Interestingly, the tracer did not appear in the post-essays of two of the three control students.
4. All names used in the following are pseudonyms.
5. If we consider the presence of the tracer in *either* the essays *or* comprehension question 10, 100% of the IC students gave evidence of the tracer, whereas only 38% of the control students did.
6. Of the remaining essays, 11% showed friends in the midst of fantastical adventures; 7% were romance sagas; and 18% had no controlling theme.

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