Reflections on the Relationship Between Language, Curriculum Content and Instruction[1]

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In a 'formative experiment' (following Newman *et al.*, 1989), twenty-seven 4th-grade students transitioning from Spanish to English read a short story (in English) about two mischievous friends and then participated in one of two video-taped lessons by the same teacher: (1) a theme-based discussion following a format called Instructional Conversation, or (2) a more conventional 'basal-like' reading comprehension lesson. The same content was thus approached via different instructional paths, allowing for an examination of the interaction between content and instructional mode in content-based language arts instruction. The students' understanding of the material was subsequently gauged by a short answer comprehension test and an essay on friendship. While students in both conditions achieved equivalent levels of literal comprehension (76%), essays of students who had discussed the reading demonstrated a more complex and differentiated conceptualisation of friendship. These results suggest that the quality of classroom talk can be traced into eventual student uptake of curricular content. For second-language learners, questions of classroom talk and curricular uptake are of extreme importance.

Introduction

Content-based language and literacy instruction holds out the promise of an integration between teaching aiming to develop student language and literacy skills and the kind of teaching favoured by recent constructivist curriculum initiatives, initiatives which seek to turn students into active *constructors* — rather than passive *recipients* — of knowledge (Resnick, 1987; Resnick & Klopfer, 1989; Shuell, 1986). The contemporary movement toward constructivist-based curricula has generated considerable interest among those attempting to meet the educational needs of young language-minority learners (see, e.g. California State Department of Education, 1987; Duran, 1995), and the additional promise of facilitated *second* language development through active student engagement with curriculum material has led to a number of programmatic initiatives. In reading and writing instruction, for example, instructors are increasingly turning to explorations of 'whole books' or other 'authentic reading' as a primary instructional strategy. These initiatives have, for the most part, concentrated on integrating language and content at the curricular level. While this is a crucial step, we will argue here that if we are to realise the promise of integrated content-based instruction, we must focus on instruction no less than on curriculum.

One reason for focusing on instruction is that the teaching experienced by many low-income and minority students tends to be excessively weighted toward lower level skills — and factually-oriented instruction, which tends to

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reinforce further a passive — and *silent* — role for students (see, e.g. Barrera, 1983; Goldenberg, 1989; Hiebert, 1983; Knapp & Shields, 1990). Persistent under-achievement by these students (e.g. Committee for Economic Development, 1987; De La Rosa & Maw, 1990; Haycock & Navarro, 1988) often fuels a perception that the solution lies in more, and more effective, explicit teaching of specific skills:

> Low SES-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. Across the school year, it will mean exposure to less material, but with emphasis on mastery of the material that is taught and on moving students through the curriculum as briskly as they are able to progress. (Brophy & Good, 1986: 365)

In turn, the emphasis on instructor 'control and structuring' shuts out more complex and sophisticated forms of learning. In fact, this is what a recent longitudinal study of Spanish-speaking language-minority children suggests. Whether they were in native-language or English-only programmes, children were

> ... limited in their opportunities to produce language and in their opportunities to produce more complex language. Direct observations reveal that teachers do most of the talking in classrooms, making about twice as many utterances as do students. . . . Of major concern is that in over half of the interactions that teachers have with students, students do not produce any language . . . Of equal concern is that when students do respond, typically they provide only simple information recall statements. This pattern of teacher/student interaction not only limits a student's opportunity to create and manipulate language freely, but also limits the student's ability to engage in more complex learning, (Ramirez *et al.*, 1991: 8)

There is, therefore, an urgent need to conceptualise and study instructional modes that provide students with a variety of learning opportunities. For language-minority students, it is particularly imperative to develop instructional strategies that will assist them in acquiring knowledge, skills, *and* a level of discursive fluency appropriate for active and engaged learning, both in their primary and in their second language.

We have been working to conceptualise, implement, and evaluate modes of teaching that assist the *discursive* as well as the curricular realisation of a constructivist, content-based language arts curriculum. These efforts have alerted us to the importance of the language practices undergirding instruction — typical teacher-student interaction patterns, deeply rooted in the everyday *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) of classroom life, are geared towards a transmission-based model of instruction. For a model based on teaching as assisted instruction (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) to emerge, integrating content — and skill-focused curricular materials may be a necessary step, but it is not a sufficient one.

This realisation has come to us in part as we have worked to conceptualise and bring about a mode of teacher-led discussion — the 'Instructional Conversation' (IC) — aimed at enhancing the language and literacy learning experiences of

language-minority children. Instructional Conversations are predicated on a joint and active exploration of key concepts and themes found in student readings. As ICs were conceptualised and put into practice, the extent to which discourse choices either opened up or closed down the scope and complexity of a discussion became clear. The success or failure of an instructional conversation hinged on an IC group's ability to generate and address what teachers often term 'thought questions' — of motivation, of characterisation and everyday morality, of the subtle layers of meaning which so often lie 'between the lines' of a reading, and which are so frequently missed by more conventional comprehension lessons. Moreover, an IC group's ability to arrive at and wrestle with such thought questions in turn opened up or closed down the scope and complexity of the material — the *content* — that formed the basis of each discussion.

We explored the complex relationship between form and function foregrounded by our IC-work with the help of a formative experiment, following a design pioneered by Newman *et al.* (1989). After having written a short composition expressing their views on friendship, twenty-seven 4th-grade students transitioning from Spanish to English read a short story in English about two mischievous friends. They then participated in one of two video-taped lessons. In one condition, the teacher conducted an Instructional Conversation; in the other, the same teacher conducted a more traditional 'basal-like' comprehension lesson. The interaction between either approach and story-content was then tracked in two subsequent student-products: a short answer comprehension test, and a second essay about friendship. While students in both conditions achieved equivalent levels of literal comprehension of the story, as evidenced in their test-responses, IC students were overwhelmingly more likely to draw on material from the discussion in their essays. In other words, they were overwhelmingly more likely to *make the connection* between the two instructional events.

Instructional Conversations and Second Language Learning

Content-based instruction, whether designed as a means to integrate literacy instruction into the content-areas, or as a means to provide meaningful second language instruction, raises some key questions about the relationship between language and cognition that have largely fallen between the interdisciplinary cracks of educational and linguistic research. With the exception of research on conferencing (e.g. Ferris *et al.*, 1989; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Goldstein & Conrad, 1990), spoken discourse analysis and written discourse analysis have proceeded on parallel tracks, while second language acquisition research has glossed over the ties between oral and written language acquisition altogether. Even research derived from content-based second language instruction efforts to date (e.g. Genessee, 1987) falls short in this respect. We are thus left with a theoretically promising educational initiative requiring empirical validation.

Over the past several years, we have worked in a language-minority school district to elaborate the concept of an instructional conversation, to specify operationally useful elements for practitioners, and to work with them to instantiate ICs in their classrooms. One result of this collaboration has been a

ten-element description, presented in Table 1, meant to help guide instructional implementation.

The essential motive of instructional conversations is to create an instructional event in classroom contexts that encourages discussion — and presumably

Table 1: Elements of the instructional conversation (adapted from Goldenberg, 1992/93)

(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 — e.g. 'how do you know?' 'what makes you think that?' 'show us where it says__'.

(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**. While 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 characterised by multiple, interactive, connected turns; succeeding utterances build upon and extend previous ones.

(9) **A Challenging, but Non-threatening, 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.

learning — within children's zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). Teaching in the zone of proximal development challenges as well as assists students to move beyond their current level of functioning and to make use of their 'ripening' competencies. In the instructional conversation, the onus is on assisting student input and reflection in both cognitive and conversational terms. In a reading lesson, for example (our efforts to date have been directed towards language arts), the teacher embeds an exploration of a preselected theme — the meaning of responsibility, or the multidimensional nature of friendship — into a discussion of a focal text. Open-ended questions are used to explore relationships between story-elements, and, crucially, between textual worlds and children's everyday reality. Disagreements between students, or between students and the teacher, form a springboard for extended discussions which challenge the children, often stretching their cognitive and their language-abilities.

The present study was designed as one effort at empirical validation, an effort, moreover, designed to fill some of the interdisciplinary gaps noted above. It is part of a series of analyses conducted to examine the processes, dynamics, and effects of instructional conversations on language-minority students' academic development (see, e.g. Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1995; Patthey-Chavez & Goldenberg, 1995; Patthey-Chavez & Clare, 1996; Saunders & Goldenberg, in press). The urgency of developing and evaluating appropriate instructional materials and strategies for the estimated 2.2 million limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in our schools (US Department of Education, 1991; some estimates, e.g. Crawford, 1989, go much higher) serves as a backdrop to this effort. We need to provide language minority children with more conceptually and linguistically rich learning opportunities, and this requires a better understanding of the links between instructional content, instructional discourse, and language minority student learning.

Methods

Formative experimental design

Following a design first elaborated by Newman *et al.* (1989), and later adapted for conferencing research by Ferris *et al.*, (1989), we chose to structure the study along the lines of a formative experiment. Formative studies examine the *process* by which a *known result* is achieved. The use of the term experiment is somewhat misleading in that a formative experiment seeks to understand and describe rather than control or equalise conditions. We focused on the ways in which a particular ideational structure — the many dimensions of friendship — either was or was not incorporated into an instructional stream bounded by two rounds of student essays about friendship. In other words, we *tracked* student notions of friendship across an initial draft of an essay on the subject, as these notions were challenged by a problematising reading in one case, and by that text in combination with a problematising discussion in the other, and finally into a second round of student essay writing. Both text and talk can be viewed as mediating activities that bridge any ensuing developmental gaps between drafts.

Furthermore, separating the two activities enables us to tie developmental changes to one or the other.

The study can be schematised along the following lines:

		Basal-type ('traditional') reading comprehension lesson	
First draft ==>	Problematising text ==>	or	==> Second draft
		Problematising ('IC') discussion of text	

Our guiding research questions were:

(1) What was the nature of the differences found between the 'traditional' and the problematising IC treatment of the focal, problematising text?
(2) What changes did we see in the students' first and second drafts? To what extent did these changes appear influenced by the spoken treatment of the problematising text?

The data collected during this cycle were the first drafts of student papers, field notes of the instructor's instructional goals and planning, video-tapes from the different lessons, and finally, both the subsequent drafts of student papers and a more traditional story comprehension test aimed at teasing out whether or not all students had an adequate understanding of the problematising text.

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 programme; 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 6–7 years of formal schooling.

Academically, 75% of the children at the school are below grade level in mathematics and reading. The most recent (1990) results of the California Assessment Program (CAP) show that students' achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics places the school at the 15th percentile among California schools, not an atypical pattern given the school's socio-economic characteristics. In comparison to schools with similar socio-economic characteristics, the school's scores are in the middle percentile rankings — 30th for writing, 40th for math, and 58th for reading (California State Dept. of Education, 1990).

Classroom context

The study was conducted in the 4th-grade classroom of a project teacher, a veteran instructor in her first year as a participant in the larger IC project. Of the 31 students in the class, 27 were in their first year of transition from Spanish to English instruction. With the exception of a special education student and three students absent for some portion of the study, all students participated in the study.

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 this unit, the teacher and students had discussed a variety of themes, the most prominent of which was friendship. The teacher had observed that students, perhaps not unlike most nine and ten-year-olds, generally maintained absolutist notions of friendship — for example, friends *never* fight, friends *always* get along, friends *always* share. On the basis of her observations, the teacher decided to pursue in her lessons a more differentiated and complex conception of friendship — that friends don't always like each other and sometimes disagree, that friendship often requires tolerance and patience. The study thus capitalised on the teacher's instructional goal.

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 such a 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.

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 traditional 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 — two IC and two traditional.

Four days prior to the formative 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; students often completed 'drafts' or 'quickwrites' as a way of initiating a coming lesson in reading, science, or social studies.

Papers were collected and analysed by the teacher and the authors as a 'pre-test' to assess the student's ideas about 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 ten minutes with the entire class introducing the short story, providing background she felt would facilitate their reading of it (e.g., about the anthology from which the story was taken, about the time period — when haircuts cost a quarter at the local barbershop, and about the setting — a small rural town). She also read aloud the first two pages of the 11-page story (1590 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:	Traditional
Group 3:	Traditional
Group 4:	Instructional conversation

To verify that the two groups of lessons provided a suitable contrast between ICs and traditional basal-type reading lessons, the video-taped lessons were scored using a specially developed rating scale. Scores revealed a very large difference — experimental lessons demonstrated all or virtually all IC elements, while the traditional lessons demonstrated very few.

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:

(1) Establish the important factual details of the story, capitalising on opportunities to initiate discussion on the theme of friendship;
(2) focus on friendship and try to build a more differentiated conceptualisation of friendship;
(3) relate the conceptualisation back to the text.

The plan for the traditional lesson was based upon what the teacher had done in previous years. The lesson 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 story:

(1) Pose a series of factual questions about the events and characters in the story;
(2) plot the sequence of events in the story;
(3) discuss why the students liked or did not like the story;
(4) close with an inference or extension question (e.g. What do you think will happen to the two characters?).

It became clear during planning discussions — as well as during later discussions about how to engineer different instructional events as a basis for comparison — that an instructional focus on theme tilted the lesson-format towards Instructional Conversations. We were thus alerted early in the study to connections between form and content that were difficult to unravel, even for the sake of a formative experiment.

Post lesson data

After all groups participated in their lessons, the entire class convened in the classroom to complete a ten-question, short-answer comprehension quiz and a second draft of their essays. The prompt for the essay was identical to the one administered four days prior. As with the initial essay, all students completed their essays within 40 minutes. 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 tests was also video-taped to provide a record of all procedures.

Analysis of tests and essays

Both the pre and post essays were entered on a word processor. In order 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 were told to assign 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. This served as our 'tracer' (Newman *et al.*, 1989; Ferris *et al.*, 1989) i.e. it provided a trace of the differentiated conceptualisation that could be inferred from 'Quarter for a haircut', and that had been introduced explicitly in IC-discussions. Raters assigned a 0 to texts containing no such language. Following the blind ratings, essays were examined for language that could be traced back to the lessons.

For the comprehension tests, a key of possible acceptable answers was developed by the third author. Raters scored each answer on a three-point scale: 0, incorrect — inconsistent with the story; 0.5, 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. Inter-rater reliability (per-cent agreement) for the essays was 94%; for the total comprehension, 94%; and for the last question on the comprehension test, 92%.

In a separate analysis, Saunders and Goldenberg (in press) examined a number of more quantitative indicators of lesson-differentiation. They generated a series of descriptive statistics for the essays: total number of words, number of T-units, and average T-unit length (an estimation of syntactical maturity, Hunt, 1977) and performed a t-test on each of the descriptive statistics to assess comparability of the four groups. Subgroups for each condition were collapsed and chi-squares were performed for the essay data.

On fall standardised Spanish-language tests, students in the two groups who had taken the test were nearly identical: Mean scale score = 631 for both groups, s.d.=29 (n=9) and 21 (n=8) for IC and traditional groups, respectively (p=0.95, 2-tailed t-test). Saunders and Goldenberg (in press) found that after the lessons, the two groups (IC vs. traditional) continued to be equivalent as evidenced by their written performance. Students in both groups generated more writing in their post-lesson essays than in their pre-lesson essays, and the two groups were virtually identical in terms of the quantity and general syntactic maturity of their writing. However, students in the IC groups demonstrated more complex

understandings of friendship and of the problematic events depicted in the story. They were more than four times as likely as students in the control groups (62% vs. 14%) to demonstrate the presence of the tracer in their post-lesson essays (e.g., mentioning that friends sometimes have problems). In addition, students in the IC condition were five times as likely (73% vs. 15%) to indicate they understood that the events in the story were problematic for the two boys' friendship and would probably require some actions to repair.

Results

Illustrations from the essays

Representative pre- and post-essays from five students provide an illustration of the differences emerging from the two approaches to the reading. Before their IC participation, Cecilia and Erika wrote the following:

> *My best friend is Vera because she plays and she likes to share. And her sister likes to play with us. And she gives me stuff. And she and her sister are nice. And she laughs a lot.* (Cecilia, Pre, IC1)

> Being nice to a friend *Having a friend is nice because you could share. I know that because I have a girlfriend. She is nice to me. I like that kind of friend. Some of the times feel lonely, but when some one tells you if you want to play, being a good friend becomes more important to some one.* (Erika, Pre, IC2)

Cecilia's pre IC essay contains no language concerning the problematic nature of friendships. She names a friend and lists the positive attributes of that friend. Erika's essay is similarly positive. She mentions two particular positive attributes, sharing and a friend's positive effect against loneliness, ideas mentioned and explored in an earlier IC discussion about *Charlotte's Web*, an unanticipated tracer effect pointing to an earlier IC.

The essays written after the IC lesson reveal more variegated descriptions of friendship. The bold print below indicates the language coded as the tracer.

> My Friend *My best friend is Vera. Because she allways brings me something. And she helps me a lot. And we play together and her sister too. And she allways goes with me. Or we explain things one to other. She all ways buys me things, and gives her money to her. She pays me back. She always caring about me.* ***Because one day, I wanted to fight and she said no.*** *She was nice and she is peace and careful.* (Cecilia, Post, IC1)

> *Hello I want to tell you about being a good friendship. I have fair friends. The first one likes to play with other kinds of girls that are good and they all share.* ***I am saying this because some friends are mean and they don't like to share some times.*** *They are different cause friends means friends sharing friends and best friend. I have good friends that share everything with me and that share their secrets with me like my friends.* (Erika, Post, IC2)

Cecilia's essay has a number of interesting features. Just like in her first, pre-IC draft, she continues to describe her best friend in the most positive terms, explaining how she is helpful and loyal. In contrast to that first description,

however, she adds two new aspects, the fact that her friend appears to be a peacemaker, one who has prevented an episode of fighting, and the fact that they lend each other money and have always been trustworthy in these transactions. The first new aspect is a clear instance of our tracer, and hence coded as such. The second is more ambiguous. We cannot help but notice a possible connection between Cecilia's essay and the money transaction in 'Quarter For A Haircut', where Rob ends up buying his friend chewing gum with a quarter he was meant to spend on his haircut. Vera's basic trustworthiness in financial transactions hence contrasts with Soup's lack of trustworthiness, and that lack of trustworthiness might have been the inspiration for that addition to Cecilia's essay.

Erika's additions fit our tracer better, and are less intriguing, but more typical of the kinds of changes that occurred in most of the essays written by the children after their IC-discussion. She holds on to her central idea of friends sharing, but adds that *some friends are mean and they don't like to share sometimes*, an idea that can be traced back into the IC lesson, where the issue of friends not sharing was discussed.

Luis is the final essay writer from the IC condition we shall present here, and his essays display similar processes as those written by Cecilia and Erika. In his pre essay, Luis names his friends and provides an account of his meeting each friend. He provides no description or explanation of the relationship he has with his friends. In fact, he seems to suggest that virtually everyone he has come in contact with in the class can be characterised as his friend:

> *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. Fiske's 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.* (Luis, Pre, IC1)

In his post essay, however, he provides an account of a more conflict-ridden friendship:

> *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.* (Luis, Post, IC1)

In the opening line of his post essay Luis says that friends *never fight*. He then contradicts himself with an account of a friendship riddled with conflict: *when we got in a fight ... sometimes I got mad.* In a manner reminiscent of Erika, Luis uses words and phrases that can be traced back to the actual lesson talk as he 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 suggests that Luis is grappling with new ideas about friendship. He in fact had a friend with whom he did fight. It is not absolutely clear whether or not Luis still considers this person a friend. As he says, *But one day we got in a fight and since that day we always fight and he was one of my best friend[s].* He may be suggesting that in some instances, conflicts cannot be resolved, and

friendships end, again an idea discussed during the lesson. Though he makes a different point than Erika, Luis' post essay provides evidence that he has been able to connect with and apply a more differentiated view of friendship (friendships can be problematic) to his own experiences.

Only two of the post essays from students in the traditional lesson contained any evidence of a change in conceptualisation. Essays written after the traditional lessons tended to be longer, to have more details, to contain various kinds of elaborations on themes sounded in the first, pre-lesson drafts. Yesena and Manuel's essays are representative:

> Friends in life *A good friend makes a good life because it does good in life. Every person should have a friend. A friend is a good partner. It is called friendship.* (Yesena, Pre, Traditional 1)

> *I have two friends only. They're nice and they play with me. They are good friends. They are not my friends, they are my best friends, and that's why I like them.* (Manuel, Pre, Traditional 2)

Yesena's pre essay provides an almost philosophical observation that *friend[s] make a good life*, and a resulting recommendation that everyone should have one. Manuel's views are similar, though he concedes that he *has only two friends*, something of a contrast with Luis above.

As the students tackle their revision, both students add considerable details about their friendships, but the view of friendship remains fundamentally positive. Yesena adds a list of categories for those who can be friends, relatives, peers, imaginary friends, and really everybody. The same mixture of philosophy and advice again emerges with *A friend is always at your side, and Every person should have a friend*. There is no evidence of a more differentiated view of friendship, no hint of trouble. Manuel similarly describes the benefits of friendship: Friends *are very nice*, they *play and run* and *go places* with him, they have shared a little adventure with him. Conflict does not emerge.

> *I have a friend. Her name is Marisol. She is my niece and friend. People that are related to you can be your friend. You can even have an imaginary friend. It doesn't matter how they look or if their voices sound different. A friend is always at your side. Marisol is a good friend to me. Every person should have a friend.* (Yesena, Post, Traditional 1)

> *I have only two friends. They are very nice. They play and run with me. Their names are Antonio and Ricardo. They are brothers. I like my friends. We are very good friends because they go to places with me. They even go camping with me. When we went camping we got a snake, but we let it go. We made that decision because it will die. We would not like it to die because it was little.* (Manuel, Post, Traditional 2)

Illustrations from comprehension test.

The last question on the comprehension test asked the students if the two characters in the story would remain friends and why. The majority of students in the IC condition introduced the differentiated concept of friendship in their

justification, noting primarily that the two friends could take measures to overcome the conflict they faced. For example,

Yes, because they'll talk about it
Yes, because Rob will forgive him
Yes, because Soup tried to help him [near the end]
Yes, because they could forgive each other

In contrast, only two students participating in traditional lessons provided such justifications. In fact, there was little evidence that these students perceived the events in the story as a potential conflict that might put the friendship in jeopardy. For example,

Yes, because they're just kids
Yes, because they're still kids
Yes, because they're good friends
Yes, because they stuck together

Tying text to talk: Illustrations from the different lessons.

A full understanding of our results requires illustrations from the contrasting IC and traditional lessons. These illustrations link the students' writings to the content of the lessons, and serve as further description of the differing experiences from which our young writers drew.

As indicated earlier, in the traditional lesson the teacher focused on the events or details of the story. A large portion of the lesson therefore addressed factual questions. Excerpt (1) provides a typical example of the tone and discursive pace that developed. (A modified version of the Jefferson notation was used for the transcription. See Appendix.)

(1) From Traditional Lesson 1:

88	Tchr	*what happened first.*
89	Std	*(he) had to get a haircut,*
90	Tchr	*okay, get a haircut, then what happened.*
91	Std	*they went to buy candy,*
92	Tchr	*okay, they bought [candy*
93	Std	*[they didn't, they didn't cut the hair to buy candy.*
94	Tchr	*okay, did they just, walk directly to the candy store?*
95	Std	*no*
96	Tchr	*how did it happen?*
97	Std	*they went to the town.*
98	Tchr	*they went to town, okay, then what happened.*[Traditional 1]

The classic tripartitate teacher-initiation, student-reply, and teacher follow-up structure (Cazden, 1988; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) dominates, and the effect on student-participation is clear even from this brief excerpt: The lesson is oriented towards getting facts and events straight, towards producing right answers. Explorations of more complex issues require a different lesson-orientation.

The traditional lessons did occasionally diverge from this kind of comprehension work, and more conceptual concerns did find their way into the lesson talk. However, within the overall lesson framing of producing right answers, these

more complex initiations simply *were not treated as a major instructional goal.* Excerpts (2) and (3) provide illustrations of how these issues were treated. In (2), student Reno sees a connection between the story being discussed and something that happened in his own life, the kind of connection ICs routinely encouraged. Even as he attempts to articulate his thought, though, his teacher cuts him off with that classic teacher-directive, 'let's go back to the question':[2]

(2) Averting an IC-like connection:

78	Tchr	*(you know) the story may, because it's from a book,* *it may have skipped some of the ending, (I mean)* *the book may really tell, more about what um, what happened when he got home,* *but what does the last paragraph on page 336 say. happened to him.*
79	Std	*[how come you're putting bubble gum on my head?*
80	L	*[the Pink Awful came off when he held his head under the pump.* ((read from text))
81	Tchr	*uh-hum, so did the gum come off of his hair?*
82	Stds	*[yes.]*
83	R	*[teacher one day when my friend was fighting and my cousin hit him,=*
84	Tchr	*=let's go back to the question, did the gum come off of his hair.*
85	L	*yes.* [Traditional 1]

In excerpt (3), student Jess suggests a lesson or a moral, and in this case the teacher not only hears him out, but invites others to do the same (Turn 52, *anybody else think of something else you can learn from this story?*). However, she does not capitalise on what students say and use it to lead into a deeper, broader discussion of the issues suggested by the story. This sets the stage for Dan to jump in with a competing moral (Turn 53), which he, in the ensuing turns, supports by telling about an instance from his childhood when he let a friend cut his hair, and, like the characters in the story, got into trouble.

(3) A incipient conceptual concern:

46	Tchr	*anyone. have another. part that they think the story starts changing and then. the action starts falling?*
47	J	*(think before you do).*
48	Tchr	*pardon me,*
49	J	*(think be. think before you do)*
50	Tchr	*oh, you're saying that we could learn something?* *think before you do something?*
51	JC	*[(yes)*
52	Tchr	*[that's a good idea!* *anybody else think of something else you can learn from this story?*
53	D	*don't trust a little kid).* [Traditional 2]

In excerpt (2), an opportunity for exploration is actively suppressed by the teacher, who sticks to her literal comprehension-question agenda. In excerpt (3), the lack of uptake is more subtle. In marked contrast to IC-lessons, neither moral is explored by the group, nor is either tied into a larger, jointly produced set of

conclusions about friendship, trust, or responsibility. Each is brought up, then dropped again.

The last excerpt from the traditional lessons exemplifies the practices of the teacher previous to her IC work. Students usually were not denied the opportunity to comment on the story, but the teacher did not take as her primary role assisting them to elaborate what they meant, tying it back to the text, and connecting it to a larger conceptualisation. She did not pick up on or expand on these often unanticipated student-offerings.

Brief excerpts from each of the IC lessons exemplify an alternative approach to reading comprehension. The actual content of each excerpt is also different, for, as would be expected, each IC lesson mediated a different exploration of friendship. To make a lesson conversational *and* instructional, the challenge is to work from the students' meanings towards a conceptualisation that all can share, understand, and use independently at subsequent times. In one of the lessons, a student put forth the idea that perhaps Rob (the haircut victim) should have displayed his anger with his friend, 'because he cut his hair wrong, awful, crooked' (Turn 103, not excerpted). That became an opportunity for delving into the focal issue, and the group spends approximately five minutes discussing whether friends sometimes disagree and fight. During that exploration, Vera does what Reno attempted to do: She connects the discussion to her own life. The teacher not only lets her articulate the connecting example fully, but asks a follow-up question whose answer meets with general group merriment and approval, and that brings the discussion back to the question of whether or not friends can fight:

(4) Exploring the focal issue:

128	W	*and I even heard (a word bigger than) problems, fighting, can friends fight?* ((...))
131	Ss	*YES!*
133	W	*[okay someone that said yes, tell me (how friends can fight)*
134	Ca	*[my friend my friend one day, we were out of order and uh.*
135	V	*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 said she doesn't wanna give me that, she doesn't wanna give me this, and [I started crying,*
136	Mel	*[that's not a true friend*
137	V	*and um, we got in problems because my mom spanked us.*
138	W	*okay but if that hadn't been your sister, would you still have been a friend?*
139	V	*nope.* ((laughter))

From this point, some students suggest friends can fight, while Melanie maintains that good friends have better ways of resolving their differences — 'by talking, not fighting' (Turn 146, not excerpted). This then becomes the over-arching conceptualisation from which the group discusses the story and the relationship between the two characters.

The other IC group arrived at a similar point — what happens when there is conflict between friends? — via a different route. As students are discussing why

Rob actually let Soup cut his hair, the topic of trust comes up. One student comments that sometimes friends don't always tell you the truth. Sometimes they may be joking with you, but other times they might actually lie. This becomes the opportunity through which to tackle the liabilities and requirements of friendship, and the teacher capitalises on it:

(5) Trust in friendship

153	W	*a friend can lie to you?*
154	H	*yeah sometimes,*
155	W	*sometimes,=*
156	H	*=if he's playing, or. if he's playing.*
157	W	*okay, sometimes, well. why would a friend LIE to you,*
158	H	*maybe he's playing! saying jokes.*
159	W	*okay, so he's just JOKING. is it okay to tell a lie when you're just joking?*
160-1	Ss	*yeah.*
162	W	*why is - how is that okay,*
163	N	*because it's just a joke!*
		((...))
173	H	*sometimes it becomes serious, (like.) I'm not your friend anymore.*
174	W	*oh! so when it becomes serious, what happens to the friendship?*
175	H	*it brokes up,*
176	N	*booommm.* ((imitates explosion))
177	W	*so, the friendship breaks up?*
178-9	Ss	yeah.
180	W	*okay, so that can mean a broken friendship,*
181-3	H	*in the end, in the last page, um, it was like he uh. Soup was ma:d!*
184	W	*ah, what do you think's gonna HAPPEN to this friendship,*
185	H	*(maybe it's gonna break)*

Of particular interest in this final excerpt is the fact that the move from text to student experiences is paralleled by a move *back to the text*, a move, moreover, made by a student (Harry in Turns 81–83 above). This return to the focal text points to a different kind of student engagement, a different kind of student comprehension, than the one exemplified by *he had to get a haircut*, (Turn 89, excerpt (1)) and other student answers to the teacher's questions in the traditional lessons.

The excerpts illustrate the process which can account for the systematic differences between groups that emerged in student essays and tests. In the IC lessons, the story was both a springboard and an anchor. The larger theme emerged out of discussions of the story's events. Moreover, students repeatedly returned to the story to substantiate, clarify, and check details relevant to the discussion of friendship. The lesson fostered formative ties between text and talk, as well as between the different strands of what could be considered an emergent, group-authored oral text about friendship. This text encompassed the fourth graders' very real concerns and reservations about friendships. The IC lesson enabled the teacher — and the students — to weave a dense net of relationships between the different sources of knowledge in their lives; written stories, stories from their experiences, morals and insights passed on from such larger societal

sources as the school curriculum or parents (a possible source of Harry's unexplored recommendation to *think before you do* in (2) above).

Not surprisingly, the engagement apparent in the jointly authored findings of each IC group is reflected in concomitant outcomes: a high level of story comprehension *and* a stretching of the students' conceptualisations of friendship in their subsequent treatment of it. The traditional lessons provided for the former, but not the latter. Thus, the essays of the traditional students lacked a conceptual anchor. As they did in their first essays, prior to the lessons, they wrote about their friends, but not about the concept of friendship. Without the explicit verbal scaffolding provided by the activity, they did not make the connection between the information presented by the story and their own views.

Tracing Later Effects

As a formative study, our analysis focused on the ties between activity, text(s) and talk that could account for the ontogenesis of two different student-views about friendship. The IC activity fostered a different relationship to the text — a different kind of reading, really — than the traditional one. The IC 'reading' encouraged the children to consider the ideas in their texts in light of their own experiences; it also helped organise these ideas, helped guide students towards conceptualisations of friendship that challenged their idyllic views. In contrast, the traditional lesson emphasised the literal details of the story; more thematic concerns were addressed only peripherally. These two different readings re-emerged in collected student texts; 'IC' students were far more likely to address the vagaries of friendship than their 'traditional' peers. Our tracer thus worked quite well in capturing the socio-semantic processes underlying two different developmental trajectories, and in so doing it brought to light the role of discourse choices in organising what is essentially the 'same' content into vastly different educational experiences.

In a subsequent whole-class discussion, no attempt was made to keep our two groups separate, and in subsequent class-activities around the topic the 'IC-reading' was clearly privileged. Thus our 'tracer' no longer functioned to distinguish between the two approaches to curriculum-content. The 'tracer' did, however, allow us to chart the developmental progress of student ideas from the IC group as two more 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% 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 larger friendship unit begun by *Charlotte's Web*, the students were asked to develop an original short story that would *show* what they thought was most important about friendship. Of the 28 stories we managed to collect, 64% focused on one of two themes prominent in the series of IC lessons in the larger friendship unit. These were 'friends help each other in times of need', a theme explored by 32% of the stories, and the other was

'friendship can sometimes be problematic', the theme broached by our formative IC lessons. For at least two-thirds of the class, then, two prominent IC themes were understood well enough and deemed important enough to generate a work of fiction around them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our formative experiment shows that putting content in content-based instruction requires a rethinking and quite possibly a reworking of *instructional processes* as well as of curricular materials. While this may seem obvious, the relative immutability of classroom discourse and the great difficulty faced by those trying to introduce variation into it testifies to the complexity and challenge of translating educational reform ideas into actual practice (Poole & Patthey-Chavez, 1994; Saunders *et al.*, 1992). It is our contention that as long as the roles, responsibilities, and expectations embedded in typical classroom talk — the medium of virtually all classroom instruction — remain unaddressed, even such an excellent and theoretically well-grounded reform project as content-based instruction is likely to falter.

Given the paramount importance of second language-acquisition to language minority students, an instructional mode that encourages meaning-based engagement holds great promise. In our formative experiment, the instructional conversation was found to promote more complex understandings of significant concepts without sacrificing literal comprehension. It assisted a joint construction of a co-authored discussion 'text' about the variegated nature of friendship, i.e., brought to life the problematising view introduced by 'Quarter for a Haircut'. Identifying details about characters, plot, setting, and main ideas — commonly the focus of standard textbook-driven comprehension lessons — were successfully embedded in more comprehensive discussions of themes, concepts, and the related experiences of the students. These discussions, in turn, could be linked to more sophisticated and differentiated understandings of a complex concept, friendship in this case, in addition to standard skill-level results (see Saunders & Goldenberg, in press).

ICs provide a means for accomplishing some of the important but difficult goals educators have long striven for — engaging students in meaningful, complex, and challenging interactions around important ideas and concepts. These goals are particularly important for language minority students, whose engagement with and communicative use of meaning in their second language is highly likely to further their second language acquisition. Our data suggest that such students can perform successfully, given opportunities to engage with teacher and peers in linguistically and conceptually rich interactions — opportunities which language minority students are otherwise rarely afforded in school (Ramirez *et al.*, 1991).

There are some caveats to consider. First, our results speak only to short-term developmental processes. At this point, we do not know the fate of the knowledge and ideas elaborated in our experiment beyond the five weeks captured by our data. Second, we 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 put into writing cognitions they might have experienced. Oral

interviews would have provided a way to test this hypothesis. Alternatively, it is possible that unlike a majority of their peers, some students might not have been influenced by their participation in the IC.

Third and most importantly, we have not demonstrated that IC is the only mode of teaching through which complex concepts like friendship might be addressed. We do not see this as a worthwhile claim, or even a wise one (see Patthey-Chavez & Goldenberg, 1995). We agree with Gall & Gall (1990) that one of the challenges we face is to compare the effects of discussions *in relation* to other viable teaching modes. A lecture or a directed lesson on problematic aspects of friendship could conceivably assist students in similar conceptual development. We chose to contrast IC with a conventional 'basal-type' lesson because the promise of small-group work is often that greater opportunity for student-input will promote greater engagement with content and greater student understanding. Our findings challenge that in a number of ways, and show that neither problematising content, nor small-group work *by itself* lead to these results. Our findings lead us to concur with Wollman-Bonilla (1994), who, in examining the longitudinal socio-discursive dynamics of 'more and less able readers', concludes that 'teachers may need to provide explicit guidance for students to engage in talk which will truly reflect the promise of informal discussion' (p. 254).

Finally, one of the most interesting outcomes of our study is the fact that, to a certain extent, our formative design confounds instructional approach (IC) with lesson content (problematic aspects of friendship). One type of lesson, the instructional conversation, seized on and expanded student-supplied and student-authored reflections about the focal story and generated important connections between instructional events. The other, our 'basal'-type lesson with its more test-like emphasis on literal story-comprehension, failed to do so. The eventual lack of effect in the second lesson is a predictable result of its emphasis. It demonstrates that student-engagement and a consequent student appropriation of jointly authored material brought out by our 'tracer' requires a kind of targeted nurturing. Our difficulty in finding instructional alternatives that would weave in the same elements and result in the same jointly authored material *without turning into instructional conversations* alerts us to a very important realisation: Fostering a constructivist stance, and through it learning in the zone of proximal development, requires a careful consideration of instruction itself. It requires changes in the tasks and talk of lessons, in their orientation toward and treatment of lesson content. It requires changes in the discursive and social organisation of the activity that become inseparable from its eventual socio-discursive realisation.

To achieve the goals set forth by constructivist curriculum initiatives, identifying, implementing, and evaluating modes of teaching congruent with constructivist curriculum content is a most formidable challenge. The fate of the New Math movement of the 1960's (Sarason, 1971) stands as a stark warning of what is likely to happen if the challenge is not met. Advocates of the New Math apparently assumed that once new books and a new curriculum were adopted, teachers would easily move into any entirely new style of teaching that featured meaning-based exchanges, fostering higher levels of mental development for students. In fact, nothing of the sort happened, and a visionary and radical

reformulation of teaching and learning foundered (Sarason, 1971; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The current wave of reform could suffer a similar fate if we do not take seriously the challenge of finding, developing, and validating instructional strategies that assist in the realisation of our ambitious constructivist goals.

Note

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2. The effect on Reno was quite marked and noticeable. Usually a lively child eager to participate in the lesson, he retreats into silence and is quiet for the rest of the lesson.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

A modified version of the Jefferson conventions were used for our transcript excerpts.

[	Overlapping utterances
=	Contiguous utterances
-	Self interruption, cut off
?	High rising intonation, questioning contour
,	Low rising intonation, continuation contour
;	Level intonation, completion contour
.	Falling intonation, closure contour
WORD	Increased volume
<u>word</u>	Stressed speech
wo:rd	Lengthened or stretched vowel
(word)	Transcriber doubt
( )	Unintelligible utterance
(1.2)	Timed pause (in tenth of a second)
(.)	Untimed paused (in quarter-seconds)
(( ))	Contextual information
. . .	Deleted word(s)
((...))	Deleted turn(s)