
A VYGOTSKIAN PERSPECTIVE ON
LITERACY ACQUISITION: TALK AND ACTION
IN THE CHILD'S CONSTRUCTION
OF LITERATE AWARENESS

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THIS STUDY ANALYZED THE VARIOUS TYPES OF TALKS AND ACTIONS used by one teacher and two children across reading, drawing, and writing events. Three major constructs emerged from a preponderance of the data which indicated that talk was used to acknowledge, to assist, and to communicate specific information about literacy. The constructs served as an organizational framework for an in-depth analysis of the types of teacher-child discourse used in regulating the children's participation in literacy events. The findings from this study indicated that talk and action worked together within the social and cultural fabric of the literacy events to shape the children's construction of literate awareness.

Within a sociocultural framework, literacy is viewed as a complex interactive and interpretative process whose development is determined by its cultural and social factors (Bruner, 1967; Luria, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). Through social interaction and the use of culturally determined tools and symbols, basic literacy processes are transformed into higher intellectual functions (Vygotsky, 1978, 1989). Each intellectual function must appear two times: first, on a social, external plane between two people, and next, on a personal, internal plane within the child. The connection between external and internal activity is conceptualized by Vygotsky (1978) as inter and intrapsychological functioning.

Vygotskian theory emphasizes social interaction as a tool for transmitting specific knowledge for learning how to construct problem-solving activities. This concept maintains that children move from other-regulatory (external) to self-regulatory (internal) behaviors through interactions with individuals in their environment. The child's ability to organize and monitor his or her own thinking occurs as a result of demonstrations during social exchanges with others. Mediated learning experiences with more literate individuals demonstrate the language needed to guide the child toward regulating his or her own thinking (Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1993; Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1993; Rogoff, 1990; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). Social interaction represents the vehicle that transports the child to a higher intellectual plateau.

Using Vygotskian theory, Donaldson (1978) established the link between the growth of consciousness and the growth of the intellect, "If the intellectual powers are to develop, the child must gain a measure of control over his own thinking and he cannot control while he remains unaware of it" (p. 129). Consciousness of an action is constructed as the child actively participates with an adult during meaning-making dialogues. The more literate person represents the consciousness of the child, thus enabling the child to experience the behavior vicariously (Bruner, 1986), but coming to control the behavior as self-awareness leads to internalization. As the child develops control of an action, the adult's language is regulated according to the child's increased understanding for performing the action. Thus, the child's transition from the interpsychological plane (the teacher-child social encounter) to the intrapsychological plane (within the child) occurs as the child internalizes the external means (the teacher's speech) into an internal model (inner speech) for guiding his or her performance on particular literacy tasks.

Wertsch (1984) described how the child's potential for accomplishing an action is regulated according to three important constructs: situation definition, intersubjectivity, and semiotic mediation. If the child is working on the interpsychological plane, the child's definition of the situation may differ from that of the adult's definition. Intersubjectivity occurs when both participants negotiate meanings in order to achieve a mutual definition for accomplishing the task. Negotiation of an intersubjective

situation definition transpires as the adult provides linguistic support to accommodate the child's understanding for the activity. Wertsch (1984) suggested that "these shifts reflect the adults' flexibility in using speech to create a new level of intersubjectivity based on the feedback that they receive about the child's intrapsychological situation definition" (p. 7).

There has been a proliferation of research based on Vygotsky's theory of cognitive functioning (Campione, Brown, Ferrara, & Bryant, 1984; Clay & Cazden, 1990; Cole & Griffin, 1984; Englert, 1992; Hedegaard, 1990; Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992; Moll, 1990; Newman & Roskos, 1992; Rogoff & Gardner, 1984). The compatibility of these research studies supports the concept of assisted performance in the child's zone of proximal development. It is within this zone that the tools and techniques of society are practiced during social interaction with more experienced others. Through the mediation of a supportive adult, the child becomes aware of the significance of his or her own learning capabilities, and comes eventually, through internalization, to perform cognitive self-regulatory functions which originally were accomplished only in collaboration with an adult (Brown, 1982; Wertsch, 1985).

Reading Recovery Program

One program that emphasizes the importance of responsive talk for facilitating cognitive change in at-risk readers is the Reading Recovery program (Clay, 1993a). Reading Recovery is a one-to-one early intervention program designed for those children who are experiencing the greatest difficulty in their first-grade classrooms. The program emphasizes accelerated learning through demonstrations and active participation in strategy-based reading and writing events. As the child becomes a more competent reader and writer, the control of a behavior shifts from teacher-regulated to child-regulated. Utilizing Vygotsky's theory of social interaction during literacy events, teacher demonstrations of literacy behaviors become child-internalized functions.

Roaming Around the Known

The first two weeks of the Reading Recovery program consist of an in-depth observational period, during which time the teacher provides the child with many opportunities to explore literacy. Clay (1993a) described it as a time when the teacher leaves behind his or her preconceived notions about the child and follows the child as he or she engages in acts of literacy. The teacher serves as a mediator of literacy for the child, providing the appropriate support that, in turn, enables the child to make discoveries about his or her own learning. In a risk-free, supportive setting the child engages in various literacy events that promote fluent and flexible use of the child's existing knowledge. At the end of the 10-day period, the child is more secure with the knowledge he or she possesses and is more able to generalize this knowledge for constructing new literate activity. Teacher observations and flexible conversations represent fundamental tools for the successful construction of intersubjective literacy events.

Rogoff's (1990) concept of children as *apprentices in thinking* relates well to the learning context of *roaming around the known*. Theoretically, she uses a Vygotskian framework to describe the guided participation of adults with children during

collaborative events. Rogoff viewed the social interaction between adult and child as providing bridges between known skills and information needed to solve new problems. From this point of view, children develop consciousness of a particular behavior during interactive literacy events with more competent individuals. Roaming around the known represents a context where a child's awareness of a literacy behavior is developed during interactive, supportive exchanges with adults. Within this framework, a child's understanding of a literate activity provides a bridge for extending the child's learning to a higher level.

By focusing attention on the social and communicative structure of interactive literacy events, this study explored the influence of talk and action in a child's acquisition of literacy. The following question guided this exploration: "What types of teacher-child talk occur during literacy events that shape the child's construction of literate awareness for particular concepts of literacy?"

Methodology

The setting for this study was a small rural elementary school in the Southeast. Eighty percent of the student population qualified for the federally funded free lunch program. The participants in this study were one Reading Recovery teacher, Jane, and two of her Reading Recovery students, George and Allen. The students were recommended by their first-grade teachers as experiencing difficulty in reading in their classrooms. The results of Clay's (1993a) observation survey of reading and writing tasks indicated both children were in need of reading intervention.

Data were collected on George and Allen during the ten-day period of each child's Roaming Around the Known sessions, which occurred in September for George and February for Allen. A variety of sources were used in data collection which allowed for the triangulation of data (Sevigny, 1981) across literacy events. Sources included 20 audio tapes, 20 video tapes, 40 pages of teacher observation notes, 25 student-written stories, 210 pages of researcher notes, and more than 400 pages of transcribed teacher-child interactions.

As the data were searched, four literacy contexts were identified. The first—and largest—context was the literacy event. Ten literacy events were coded which included (a) reading a familiar book, (b) listening to a story read aloud, (c) participating in the introduction to a new book, (d) sharing the reading of a new book, (e) discussing a book after the reading, (f) writing words, (g) generating a story for writing, (h) writing a story, (i) drawing pictures for a student-generated story, and (j) reading a student-written story.

The second literacy context used in data analysis was the literacy episode. Literacy episodes were descriptive segments of sustained talk with a recognizable focus (e.g., the construction of a word) within the context of a literacy event (e.g., writing a story). The identification of literacy episodes enabled a more intensive examination of teacher-child talk within an event. The following example illustrates the descriptive quality of a literacy episode, which focuses on the collaborative writing of a phrase in George's book.

Jane and George are collaborating on the writing of a story about the zoo. The pattern of the book is based on a two-word language phrase which is similar to a pattern in a book recently read by George. Each page begins with the word *A* and is followed by an animal name. George selects a picture of a kangaroo for

his book and writes the first word *A*. Then, he says *K* for the first sound in *Kangaroo*. Jane responds, "Yes, it has a *K* in it. Go ahead and put a *K*." As George writes the *K*, he says, "I knew it." Jane confirms George's knowledge as she comments, "You knew that, didn't you? Very good. That's a good *K*."

The third literacy context was the literacy conversation of the teacher and child during a literacy episode. Conversations were identified as teacher-child discourse extracted from the episode. The following transcript provides an example of a literacy conversation. In comparison to the previous example of a literacy episode, the conversation includes only the teacher-child dialogue for attending to a particular literacy concept.

George: *K*.

Jane: Yeah, it has a *K* in it. Go ahead and put a *K*.

George: I knew it.

Jane: You knew that, didn't you? Very good. That's a good *K*.

The fourth type of literacy context used in data analysis was the literacy statement, which was coded at the idea unit of analysis. Within the context of a conversation, particular statements were extracted that indicated literacy knowledge for a specific concept. The identification of these statements served as a tool for counting the number of times a child displayed specific knowledge for a particular literate concept.

Development of Categories and Constructs

Transcripts from audiotaped sessions provided a means for developing categories and searching for linkages between teacher-child talk during various literacy events and the children's literacy development. Initial transcribing sessions were concerned with accurate recording of teacher-child conversations and the development of a system for recording linguistic conventions. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy of recording against videotaped interactions.

Data analysis began at the end of September when George completed his ten *Roaming Around the Known* sessions. As audiotapes were transcribed, observer comments were spontaneously recorded. Following each transcribing session, data were searched for interesting patterns of teacher-child talk. As linguistic patterns of literate awareness emerged, data were scrutinized for linkages among concepts, which resulted in the collapse and refinement of specific categories of talk. An early category (Construct 1) emerged that indicated the teacher and child used talk for acknowledging the child's awareness of particular literate concepts. Within the organizational framework of this construct, the data were further analyzed. Qualitative and quantitative measures of analysis included the following: (a) descriptive episodes and conversations that illustrated the child's awareness of literacy and (b) frequency counts for categorical statements that indicated the child's knowledge of specific information about literacy.

As the data were further searched, an additional pattern of talk emerged that indicated the teacher and child used various conversational devices for assisting the child's literacy accomplishments. Based on a Vygotskian theory of assisted performance in literacy acquisition, linguistic patterns that indicated a type of assistance were integrated under the second major construct in this study. The emergence of Construct 2 served as an organizational tool for exploring the child's literate awareness from the viewpoint of assisted activity during literacy events. Data were analyzed according to

two categories of assistance: (a) descriptive data from multiple readings of a single book were analyzed and words were counted to determine if a shift occurred from teacher-regulated assistance to child-regulated assistance; and (b) descriptive data were analyzed to characterize strategies used by the teacher and child to negotiate responsibilities during reading, writing, and drawing events.

By February when Allen began his sessions, data analysis was influenced by the emergence of Constructs 1 and 2. Data were revisited, refined, and parameters set to describe committed categories. In the process, data were searched to determine if committed patterns of acknowledgment and assistance (Constructs 1 and 2) remained constant with both children. Categories that represented a preponderance of the data were examined within the organizational framework of the two major constructs.

During data analysis, a third pattern of talk emerged that indicated a primary emphasis of teacher talk with both children focused attention on communicating specific information about particular concepts of literacy. Literacy statements were counted to determine frequencies of occurrence for types of teacher talk used in addressing particular literacy concepts. Categories of talk that indicated a preponderance of teacher talk for communicating specific information about literacy were integrated under Construct 3.

In summary, three theoretical constructs emerged from the examination of the data. The first construct served as a tool for identifying the types of teacher-child talk used for acknowledging the child's current level of awareness for a particular literacy concept. The second construct served as a tool for identifying the types of talk used for assisting the child during literacy events. The third construct served as a tool for identifying the types of talk for communicating specific knowledge about literacy concepts (Table 1 displays the constructs and their related categories). The theoretical constructs provided a flexible framework for answering the research question guiding this study: What types of teacher-child talk occur during literacy events that shape the child's construction of literate awareness for particular concepts of literacy?

Results and Discussion

Construct 1: Teacher-Child Talk for Acknowledging the Child's Awareness of Literacy

An important premise of *roaming around the known* is that the teacher stays with what the child knows, therefore providing the child with multiple opportunities to become fluent and flexible with this knowledge. Based on this assumption and based on the preponderance of the data, three types of talk were identified that provided evidence of the child's current level of performance on a particular writing task.

The first type of talk that described the child's literate awareness was classified as child talk. Child talk included any descriptive statement by the child that indicated the child was monitoring his own cognitive processes. Child talk was qualified according to the child's explicit language for describing his successful performance on specific literacy tasks (e.g., "I can write *dog*" was followed by the action of writing the word *dog*).

Table 1

Theoretical Constructs for Describing Types of Teacher-Child Talk

Construct 1: Talk for acknowledging literate awareness	Construct 2: Talk for assisting literate performance	Construct 3: Talk for communicating literacy concepts
Child talk for self-initiating and successfully accomplishing the performance of a specific literate action	Participatory Talk for regulating degrees of support for participating in reading events	Teacher Talk for communicating specific information about reading and writing literacy
Teacher Feedback Talk for acknowledging child's performance of a specific literate action	Teacher-Regulated	Teacher talk for explicitly describing her personal literate performance of a specific literate action
	Key words Unison reading Completion reading Independent reading	Teacher talk for explicitly describing the child's personal literate performance of a specific literate action
Teacher Feedforward Talk for activating child's preexisting knowledge for performing a specific literate action	Child-Regulated	Negotiating Talk for regulating talk about concepts of book, talk about child as reader, and talk expressing enjoyment
	Negotiating Talk for regulating degrees of responsibility for participating in drawing, writing, and reading events	
	Teacher inviting participating Child seeking assistance Teacher providing help as needed	

Next, the child's awareness of concepts was identified according to teacher feedback talk. This type of teacher talk included any teacher statement that provided descriptive feedback of the child's self-initiated literate activity (both verbal and nonverbal) such as, the child writes the letter *t* in the word *cat*, and the teacher responds, "You heard the *t*, didn't you?"

Third, the child's literacy awareness was identified according to teacher *feedforward* talk. The term *feedforward* was borrowed from Bruner (1974) and Clay (1991) who use it to describe anticipatory devices that signal "the shape of the act yet to occur" (Clay, 1991, p. 137). In this study, the notion of *feedforward* activity was adapted to describe the types of language used by the teacher for awakening the children's knowledge of previously exhibited information to be used in a new literate activity. The descriptive nature of *feedforward* talk is illustrated:

The teacher is aware the child knows how to write the word *I* from prior observations. Based on this knowledge, she uses talk to activate the child's awareness of what he or she knows about writing the word. She hands the child the marker and says, "You can write *I* can't you?" Table 2 provides examples of the three types of talk for acknowledging and describing the child's literate awareness for particular writing concepts.

Results from this study indicated that the most frequent uses of talk for acknowledging the children's literate awareness were manifested in the teacher's *feedforward* and *feedback* talk during writing events. The amount of teacher *feedforward* talk (151 statements, 45 percent of total talk) was almost identical to the amount of teacher *feedback* talk (145 statements, 43 percent of total talk). These numbers suggest that Jane used *feedforward* and *feedback* talk for reinforcing the children's knowledge for particular concepts of literacy. In comparing the three types of talk, the

teacher's talk for responding to the child's demonstrations of literacy (with 88 percent of total statements classified as feedback and feedforward talk) appeared to be of greater importance than the child's ability to verbalize his own knowledge for specific literate information (with only 12 percent of total statements classified as Child Talk).

Table 2
Three Types of Talk for Acknowledging the Child's Literate Awareness in Writing

Child Talk/Action Teacher Feedback	Child Action/ Teacher Feedback	Teacher Feedforward Child Action
"I can spell <i>eggs</i> ." Writes <i>eggs</i>	Writes <i>can</i>	"You can write <i>of</i> ." Writes <i>of</i>
"You can spell <i>eggs</i> !"	"You can write <i>can</i> ."	

Child Talk. Child talk (40 statements) represented a vehicle for the child's self-initiated expressions of personal knowledge. The children's articulation of specific knowledge about literacy concepts provided the teacher with overt evidence of their current levels of understanding for these concepts. Their ability to verbalize this knowledge created a personal foundation for strengthening self-awareness. The following example illustrates the relationship between child talk, performance of the action, and the development of literate awareness.

Child Talk. "I know how to write *go*."

Performance of the Action. The child writes the word *go*.

Development of Literate Awareness. Talk and action focus the child's attention on the process of constructing the word *go*.

From a Vygotskian perspective, the child develops consciousness of an action during socially interactive exchanges with a more knowledgeable person. In the previous example, the child's development of literate awareness for writing the word *go* was shaped by the social structure of the story writing event. Prior to the development of literate awareness, the adult serves as the child's consciousness for the action, thus enabling the child to experience the activity via the language of the adult (Bruner, 1986). As the child's experiences accumulate, the child develops control over specific aspects of his knowledge and uses this information for self-regulating his personal literate performances (Camperell, 1981; Clay & Cazden, 1990; Diaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990; Rogoff & Gardner, 1984). Clay (1991) described this form of cognitive control as a type of *inner control* which develops gradually and is associated with learning activity.

In this study, child talk represented a personalized tool for enabling the child to regulate his literate activity. The language itself focused attention on the literate action, thus strengthening the child's awareness level and promoting self-regulatory learning. Utilizing the theories of Vygotsky (1978), Blazer (1986), Dahl (1993), and Luria (1982) concluded that young children employ talk as an organizing device for self-directing their written language performances. In support of these findings, the current study

illustrates how George and Allen employed talk as a tool for articulating their awareness of particular actions, thus exercising a more conscious—or deliberate control—for directing the performance of the activity. Furthermore, during the teacher-child construction of the literacy action, the child's self-expressions of knowledge represented a regulatory device for guiding the actions of the teacher. A typical example from a writing event illustrates this notion:

Jane: (writes the first word *The*) [The next word of the story is *dog*.]

Allen: I can write *dog*! I want to write *dog*.

Jane: (hands Allen the marker)

Allen: (correctly writes the word *dog*)

Teacher feedback talk. According to Clay (1991), feedback actions serve as a control mechanism for “keeping reading and writing productions on track” (p. 326). In this study, feedback talk (145 statements, 43 percent of total talk) was qualified by the teacher's ability to use language as an informative tool for describing the children's demonstrations of literate activity. Through verbalizing the performance of the action, teacher feedback talk served to enhance the children's awareness levels for the particular concept. The following examples illustrate the descriptive nature of teacher feedback talk for articulating the children's awareness of specific literate actions during writing events:

Child Action

stresses *i* sound

adds period

writes *wool*

Teacher Feedback Talk

“You know the *i*, don't you?”

“You remembered to put your period.”

“You can spell *wool*, can't you?”

Results from writing events indicated that the most common type of teacher feedback talk occurred around letter-word and letter-sound correspondences (119 statements, 82 percent of total). The following examples illustrate the descriptive nature of teacher feedback talk for articulating the children's awareness of specific literate actions during writing events:

George writes a capital letter for the first word in his story. Jane responds, “Ohhh, that's a nice capital G!”

Allen articulates the word slowly as he writes it in his story. Jane says, “I like the way you're saying the word as you write it.”

Allen gives an accurate letter-sound correspondence. Jane responds, “Yes, it is an *r*. You have a good ear, don't you?”

Findings indicated that the teacher's descriptive verbalizations of the children's appropriate literacy performances provided powerful feedback information for assisting the children's reading and writing literacy. These findings complement work by Gallimore and Tharp (1990) who argued that appropriate types of feedback talk are accompanied by a standard of comparison, which provides the child with a model for assisting his or her own learning. In the current study, the teacher's feedback talk highlighted the children's appropriate uses for particular literacy concepts. Therefore, the children were provided with personal models of desirable literate behaviors for directing their future literate activities.

Teacher feedforward talk. Clay (1991) and Bruner (1978) described feedforward activity as a type of mechanism (like anticipation or prediction) that promotes the efficient use of information processing behaviors during reading and writing. Findings from this study indicated that feedforward talk (151 statements, 45 percent of total talk) was characterized by two important factors: (a) the teacher's ability to interpret

the child's present level of awareness based on the child's demonstration of literate activity for a particular concept (e.g., Jane observed that George had previously written the word *on*); and (b) the teacher's use of language as a mediating tool for enabling the child to apply previously used knowledge to a new learning situation (e.g., Jane activated George's previously exhibited knowledge for writing the word *on* with her statement, "You can write that word *on*, can't you?").

Additional support for the power of feedforward talk is illustrated in the following episode from a writing event:

Jane and Allen are writing a story with the word *give* in it. Based on her knowledge of Allen's ability to write his last name, Jane supports him in using this knowledge with her comment of "Give and Gibson begin alike, don't they?" Allen responds, "G." Later in the story writing event, Jane reactivates this knowledge as she says, "You know how to start *give*, don't you?" Then, she hands the marker to Allen, who writes the first letter *g*.

In this example, Jane used language to build an anticipatory context for Allen's successful transfer of the *g* sound (a known concept from his name) to a new learning situation. These findings suggest that the teacher can use feedforward talk to create opportunities for promoting fluent and flexible uses of the children's existing knowledge, thus strengthening their awareness levels for particular concepts of literacy.

Additional Results

Under Construct 1, an important factor involving the types of talk used for acknowledging the children's literacy awareness was the teacher's ability to respond contingent to the children's demonstrations of knowledge. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) described this process as *contingency responsiveness* and *leading from behind*. In support of Clay's (1991, 1993a) work, the teacher's ability to build literacy conversations *around the known* promotes fluent and flexible learning with known concepts. Chang-Wells and Wells (1993) described the constructive process of building literacy as "a transaction in which what is already known is brought to bear on new information creating new meaning and enhancing understanding and control" (p. 58).

For instance, in the case of child talk (during which time the child's self-initiated response provides the evidence of knowledge), the teacher's role for enhancing self-awareness of this knowledge is represented in his or her ability to turn the task over to the child. Feedback and feedforward talk provide overt examples of how the teacher's responding patterns mirrored the child's demonstrations of knowledge, thus facilitating within the child a more conscious and deliberate control of known concepts.

An example of George's ability to recognize and express his literacy understandings occurred in Session 4. During the writing of a book about zoo animals, George selected a picture of a bear and immediately isolated the sound for *b*. Jane responded with explicit feedback, "That's good that you knew it started with *b*." The following conversation illustrates the child's ability to articulate his knowledge for linking first letter concepts and the teacher's responsive language for reinforcing this knowledge:

George: You know how I know?

Jane: How did you know?

George: It's in *book*.

Jane: Oh, okay! It's the same as *book*, isn't it? *Bear* and *book*.

Data from reading events provided evidence of Jane's feedback talk for praising and describing the children's attempts to perform appropriate literate actions. Although general praise (e.g., "Good job.") was often used to acknowledge the children's level of literacy performance, these statements were not included in data analysis. Results indicated that the primary use of feedback talk during reading events focused on the following behaviors: (a) one-to-one correspondence of spoken to written language (50 statements), (b) searching the pictures to support meaning for the story (13 statements), (c) rereading a line to confirm meaning for the story (14 statements), and (d) reading the story in a fluent and expressive manner (seven statements).

Data revealed that the most commonly occurring pattern of teacher feedback talk during reading events centered around the children's attempts to match spoken language to the language of the text (59 percent of total feedback during reading). In her session notes, Jane noted that George possessed a general awareness of print concepts but lacked the ability to accomplish one-to-one matching independently. Transcripts indicated that Jane used feedback statements (e.g., "I like the way you're pointing to your words.") to reinforce George's tentative attempts to match word-by-word reading. This praise was often followed by Jane's incidental pointing to the words as she and George read the next page together. The following example from Allen's sessions revealed that Jane utilized similar language for responding to Allen's pointing behaviors:

Allen is reading a familiar story about five little ducks. On some pages, he reads the story so quickly that he does not attend to the print. However, when he turns to the page with the repeated pattern of "Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, quack.", he slows his finger down and carefully matches his finger to all five words. Jane responds, "Ohhh, you're keeping up with it, aren't you?"

Detailed observations of children's reading and writing behaviors provide evidence that children may appear to control an action at one point in their development and at another point may experience confusion with the same action (Clay, 1991). The instability of early learning is characterized by fluctuating behaviors. As new learning is introduced, old learning may appear to temporarily regress (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Research by Ninio and Bruner (1978), Rogoff (1990), and Snow (1977) indicated that adults structure their language interactions to accommodate young children's displays of knowledge. Each of these studies has relevance for the current study.

As the data were searched for signs of the children's awareness levels, the insecurity of early knowledge about print became evident. Simultaneously, the importance of responsive talk was further emphasized. During interactive writing events, evidence of child talk, teacher feedback, and teacher feedforward talk was observed. For example, in response to George's demonstrations of literate knowledge, Jane used feedback and feedforward talk to guide George in using his knowledge in varied ways so as to promote fluency and flexibility. The following episode from Session 1 illustrates this process. It is based on the writing of a story about eating M & M candies.

Page 1 of the story: The teacher guides the storyline to say "I ate an M & M." However, George changes the sentence to "We ate a M & M." He says, "I know how to write *we*." Jane responds, "Write *we*." George writes the word *we* independently and correctly. The story writing continues in a shared manner. Jane writes words that George cannot write, and George independently and correctly writes the two *Ms*.

Page 2 of the story: The teacher's talk is based on her observations of George's accomplishments on page 1. She says, "You can write *we*, can't you?" Instead, George writes an *M* for the first letter of *we*." Jane responds with a verbal demonstration, "That's a good try, but you know what? We need to turn it upside down. Turn it this way." George correctly makes the *w*, and the writing continues. Jane writes the words that George is unable to write and George independently and correctly writes the two *Ms*. Jane responds, "You can write *M*! Getting good at this, aren't you?"

Page 3 of the story: The teacher's interaction is based on George's performances on pages 1 and 2. She is unsure of his ability to successfully write *we*. She decides to offer him the opportunity. She asks, "Do you want to write *we*?" George takes the marker and independently and correctly writes *we*. Jane responds, "Good job. I like the way you're making *we*." The writing continues. Jane writes the words George is unable to write, and George independently and correctly writes the two *Ms*.

This episode is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is important to recognize that George self-initiated the writing of both the word *we* and the two *Ms* at the beginning of his story. However, the similarities of the two letter forms in one sentence temporarily disrupted George's ability to successfully complete the actions. Jane's interaction with George could be viewed as a feedforward type of talk for reactivating George's preexisting knowledge about the known form for *M*. From this viewpoint, the literacy situation was designed to provide George with opportunities to become fluent and flexible with his known concepts. Although new learning was not introduced, old learning was strengthened through the talk that supported the process.

Bruner (1974) described how the child's ability to successfully perform an action is facilitated by the reciprocal functions of feedback, feedforward, and knowledge of results. These theoretical concepts apply to the types of teacher talk used in this study for providing the children with feedback and feedforward information for shaping the children's literate awareness for particular concepts. These findings indicate the intricate nature of the three types of talk working together within a social context to promote within the child an inner control over known concepts. The following example illustrates how the total learning picture of a single episode is shaped by the three uses of talk for acknowledging literacy awareness:

Teacher Feedforward for Activating Child's Existing Knowledge

Teacher: "You can write *M*."

Child Talk for Expressing Knowledge of Letter Form

Child: "In monkey."

Teacher Feedback for Providing Explicit Information of Child's Knowledge

Teacher: "*M* begins like monkey."

Construct 2: Teacher-Child Talk for Assisting the Child's Literacy

As the data were further searched, a pattern emerged that indicated teacher-child talk was used to enable the child to actively engage in literacy events that were beyond his independent level of functioning. Two language structures for assisting the child's literacy activities were identified: (a) teacher-child talk for regulating participation in reading events, and (b) teacher-child talk for negotiating meaning

during literacy events. The results from this construct will be presented according to each category of assistance.

Participatory talk for assisting literacy. Under Construct 2, the first type of talk focused on describing the various language structures used for assisting the children's participation levels during reading events. Multiple readings of a single book created a context for examining the influence of conversational dialogues on the children's developing awareness of reading literacy. Four major categories of participatory talk emerged that represented a shifting continuum of teacher-child reading control. These categorical findings are contrasted to participatory techniques identified by Doake (1981, 1985) in his examination of preschool parent reading interactions. In contrast to Doake's study (where books were read to the children), books in the current study were carefully selected by the teacher to provide the children with opportunities to develop fluent and flexible control of the reading process.

On a reading continuum, the first category of teacher-child participatory talk was coded according to the highest degree of teacher assistance. The teacher was the primary reader, with the child participating by articulating key words from the story immediately after hearing the teacher read the story. As the child's experiences with the language pattern accumulated, the child's level of participation in the reading event increased. At this point on the reading continuum, the teacher and child shared the reading of the text in unison. Analysis of the transcripts revealed that sometimes the teacher led the reading event; at other times, the child led the reading event. On a scale of high-to-low levels of teacher assistance, independent reading by the child represented the highest degree of child-regulated activity. Analysis of several readings of the same story indicated that a naturally occurring shift of reading control emerged as the children became more familiar with the story. The children's reading activity was analyzed in two ways: (a) descriptive analysis of teacher-child interactions during multiple reading events (see Table 3 for one example), and (b) the number of words read with and without teacher assistance (Table 4).

Table 3 describes the conversational scaffolding surrounding George's attempts to participate in the introduction and reading of a new book across two days. Analysis of the first day's reading revealed that George used several techniques for assisting his reading activity, for example: (a) he repeated the words of the title *My Book* (Maris, 1983) with his voice slightly trailing behind Jane's reading; (b) he attempted to repeat Jane's reading of the author's last name with a mumbled response; and (c) following Jane's talk about the dedication page, he touched the words *For Margaret*, and confidently read them as *my cat*.

In contrast, the next day's reading of the same story provides an interesting example of George's developing control for regulating the reading activity. Three noteworthy incidents occurred to indicate George's higher level of participation. First, George initiated the reading of the author's name. Second, George monitored the reading event to remind Jane that the dedication page had been overlooked. Third, George pointed to the words *For Margaret* and read them accurately.

In support of research on repeated readings (Askew, 1991, 1993; Beaver, 1982; Clay, 1991; Martinez & Roser, 1985), findings from the present study provided further evidence that multiple readings of the same story may increase the child's ability to predict his way through print by promoting anticipation for the most likely word choices, thus facilitating the child's more active participation in the actual reading of the story. As the children developed a sense of meaning for the story through multiple

readings, they also began to notice the visual features of the printed language. Talk was not limited to story discussion, but also included conversational references to visual details of print (e.g., After George read the words *My light* without looking at them, Jane asked, “Where does it say *My light*?”) and conversational references to appropriate reading behaviors (e.g., Jane said, “I like the way you’re pointing to your words.”). Within the familiar context of a supportive book, talk served as a tool for promoting the child’s awareness of particular literacy concepts.

Table 3
Examples of Teacher-Child Talk

Day 1: Example of Teacher-Child Talk During George’s Book Introduction to New Book	
Teacher Talk/Reading	Child Talk/Reading
<p>Look at this book. It’s called <i>MY BOOK</i>. And it’s by Ron Maris. He’s the one who wrote the book. Let’s look at this book. (Points to title and reads) [<i>MY BOOK</i>]. By Ron Ma[r]is]</p> <p>And you know what? Sometimes, when people write a book, they dedicate it to a person. This is . . . (Points and reads) <i>for Margaret</i>. Maybe Margaret is his little girl.</p> <p>(comes in on George’s talk and points to the words as she reads) [<i>for</i>] Margaret.</p>	<p>[<i>MY BOOK</i>] (slightly behind the teacher’s voice) [Ma[r]is (in a mumbled voice)</p> <p>I’ve heard this. (Points to the words “for Margaret” and says), “My [<i>caf</i>].”</p>
Day 2: Example of Teacher-Child Talk During Book Reading	
<p>Do you remember this book? The one we read yesterday? [<i>MY BOO</i>] K</p> <p>(enters reading during child’s mumbled response to author’s last name. [<i>By Ron</i>] Maris (validates child’s attempt) Well, you even know the author! (joins in reading). [<i>MY Book by Ron Ma</i>]ris. (turns page, reads) [<i>My gate</i>]</p> <p>Did we forget that other page?</p>	<p>M[<i>Y BOOK</i>] by Ron [<i>mumbles author’s last name</i>]</p> <p>(Initiates rereading) <i>MY BOOK by Ron Maris</i> [<i>My gate</i>]</p> <p>(turns back to dedication page) Ohh! We forgot to do something!</p> <p>(Points to the words and reads) <i>For Margaret</i>.</p>

**Overlapping voices are indicated by []

From a Vygotskian perspective, findings from this study complement research on teacher-child interactions that illustrate an increase in the child’s cognitive control, which is evidenced by the transition from teacher-regulated to child-regulated literate activity (Au & Kawakami, 1984; Bruster, 1991; Clay & Cazden, 1990; Englert, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). Vygotsky (1978) claimed that learning first appears during social and meaningful encounters with people and then appears within the learner. This process of moving from other-regulated learning to self-regulated learning is defined by the tools and signs of the learner’s culture.

Table 4***Developing Control of Reading Activity According to Number of Words Read With and Without Teacher Assistance***

Child/ Session	Teacher Reader (w/o Child)	Unison Readers (teacher-child)	Child Reader (w/o teacher)
George* (1st reading)	00	12	05
George (4th reading)	02	00	15
Allen** (1st reading)	41	44	15
Allen (2nd reading)	06	44	50

* Text Level 1 with 17 words

** Text Level 7 with 100 words

In the current study, the teacher and the children used language to assist the children's literacy performances during text reading experiences. Clay (1991) described the role of a familiar story as a tool for facilitating the child's move from the interpsychological plane (the teacher-child interactive sharing of the task) to the intrapsychological plane (the child's self-regulated independent reading of the story). "The child is using a different kind of support from the interactive sharing of the task with the teacher. Now the support is coming from his own prior reading. That familiarity is supporting his move toward further independence as a reader" (p. 184).

Negotiating talk for assisting literacy. "The mutual understanding that is achieved between people in communication has been termed *intersubjectivity*, emphasizing that understanding happens between people; it cannot be attributed to one person or the other in communication" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 67). In this study, a critical aspect of the child's cognitive growth resided in the abilities of the teacher and child to communicate a mutual understanding for constructing the literacy event. A breakdown in communication created barriers to the successful completion of this goal. Talk about literacy served as a conversational forum for exposing misunderstandings to social change, hence establishing groundwork for the mutual construction of meaningful dialogues (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

Under Construct 2, the second category for assisting the children's literacy was classified as negotiating talk during drawing, writing, and reading events. The teacher and child used negotiating patterns for checking, clarifying, and extending meanings during various literacy conversations. The responsibility for constructing meaning was a shared experience, with the teacher (as the more knowledgeable participant) guiding the event to accommodate the child's demonstrations of literacy knowledge. The problem-solving collaboration between the teacher and child (i.e., the negotiation of meaning) was characterized as a transaction or a transformation of knowledge, which was cued by the teacher's observations and assessments of the child's displays of awareness for particular concepts of literacy.

Across various literacy events, a similarity existed between types of language used to regulate degrees of support and to negotiate responsibility. Examples of Jane's talk

for inviting the children's participation in events include "Can you draw a great big hamburger?" (drawing); "You want to write the *r*?" (writing); and "Which book would you like to read?" (reading). Examples of the children's talk for seeking help in accomplishing the activity are "I can't draw the bun." (drawing); "I don't know how to write *fries*." (writing); and "I'll read it with you." (reading). In the following example, teacher-child language was used to negotiate the writing event. Of particular interest is the level of support that Jane provided to George in order that he could hear and contribute the *m* sound.

George: I can't write *am*.

Jane: I'll write the *a*. Can you hear something at the end? am-m-m-m.

George: m!

Jane: You can write the *m*. Good listening!

Talk during drawing. In this study, drawing was used as a complementary support system for story writing. Research on the interrelationships of drawing, writing, and conversations about written language (Barrs, 1988; Dyson 1985, 1989; Gearhart & Newman, 1980; Hubbard, 1989; Zalusky, 1985) is supported by data from the current study, which focused attention on the social negotiation of literacy as a vehicle for the joint construction of the drawing and writing event. Teacher-child conversations surrounding the drawing action contained descriptive language for negotiating responsibilities for the mutual construction of a meaningful picture. Simultaneously, the descriptive quality of the language served to enhance the children's awareness of the drawing action, thus representing a supportive system for organizing and creating a written story (Table 5).

In the following example, the importance of talk as a bridge for constructing literacy activity during drawing events is further illustrated. The example illustrates how Jane and George used talk as a tool for negotiating responsibilities for the drawing of a monster under the bed.

Jane: Now, you want to draw a monster under your bed? . . . Do you want to draw the bed?

George: You draw the bed.

Jane: I'll draw your bed. Here's the headboard. Here's the footboard. Here's your bed. What color is your monster going to be?

George: I think a monster is green.

Jane: A monster is green. Let's put him green . . . (Hands George the monster.)

George: (draws the monster).

In analyzing the conversations, the negotiating function of teacher-child language was embedded throughout the talk. When comparing the teacher's language for negotiating responsibilities during the *monster event* to the *hamburger event*, an observable degree of conversational similarity occurred. In both sessions, teacher-child language was used for the following purposes: (a) the teacher's use of language for inviting the child to draw, (b) the child's use of language for negotiating help for drawing, and (c) the teacher's use of language for describing her drawing actions and increasing the child's ability to contribute to the drawing task.

The findings on teacher-child conversations in this study support Teale's (1986) assertion that the critical factor in literacy development may be the language and social interaction embedded within the social structure of the literacy event. From this point of view, the talk itself accompanying the performance of the literacy action serves as a tool for promoting cognitive change in the child. Again, the emphasis on using teacher

observations of the child's levels of awareness as a measuring instrument for regulating teacher talk appears to be an important contributor to the child's literacy development.

Table 5
Examples of Talk for Negotiating Responsibilities During Drawing Events

Purpose of Talk	Teacher Talk/Action	Child Talk/Action
T invites participation	Can you draw a great big hamburger?	
C seeks help		I can't.
T increases support	Well, do you want me to help you?	
C attempts action		I'll try.
T confirms response	You'll try to.	
C seeks help		I can't draw the bun.
T performs task and describes drawing actions	Okay, well, let's see. That looks like a good top bun. And then there's a bottom bun. . . right here.	
T invites participation	And then there's some things in between. What goes in between?	
C predicts		Lettuce.
T confirms	Lettuce. All right!	
T increases support	You want to put some green for lettuce?	
C accomplishes task		Uh huh.

T = Teacher
C = Child

Talk during writing. As with drawing, talk was employed as a tool for negotiating and regulating teacher-child responsibilities for constructing the writing event. Language and action served as complementary functions, with the goal of mediating a meaningful activity. As the child gained competency in the literacy act, the degree of teacher assistance was adjusted to accommodate the child's demonstrations of understanding. The following example typifies the shifting continuum of teacher-child negotiating talk in accordance with the child's increasing control for the writing event.

Allen and Jane are completing the writing of a story based on eating M & M candies. Jane asks, "Now what are we going to call this book?" Allen turns to a blank page at the end of the book and remarks, "Hey, we got one more!" Jane responds, "Oh, yeah, we need to put something on that last page." Then, Jane attempts to link Allen's story to a similar story entitled *The Chocolate Cake* (Melser, 1990), which has a repeated pattern of *mmmm* on each page. She asks, "What do we say when something tastes really good? Do we say *mmmm*?" In response,

Allen expands on Jane's intentions and relates the last page of his story to the last page of the comparison story. He says, "We can write, 'It's all gone'."

This example illustrates how successful negotiation for the story's ending was regulated by Allen's demonstrations of knowledge for constructing an appropriate ending for the story. Throughout the episode, the balance of control shifted between the teacher and child. The first evidence of negotiation occurred when Allen directed the teacher's attention to the extra page in the book (e.g., "... we got one more!"). The second incident was particularly noteworthy because it illustrated Allen's ability to utilize the teacher's language as a tool for establishing a personal link to the story in creating his story ending (e.g., "... It's all gone."). In this episode, conversational talk about literacy served as a communicative link for promoting higher-level literate activity in the child.

From this perspective, intersubjectivity (i.e., mutual or intentional communication) is represented through negotiating patterns of teacher-child talk, during which the ultimate goal is the consensus of meaning for an event (Chang-Wells & Wells, 1993, Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1984). During reading, writing, and drawing events, negotiating talk was used to facilitate a shared definition (Wertsch, 1984) for the constructive situation. Thus, an important factor in successful negotiation is the teacher's ability to monitor the child's literacy actions and to adjust degrees of linguistic support contingent to the child's level of understanding.

An example that illustrates this point occurred during a writing event, when the teacher's use of the label *little* to represent a lower case letter form (e.g., Jane invited George to "Make a little *d* on *Dog*.") sent a confusing message to George, who wrote a small capital letter *D*. This example signifies the importance of a mutual language for communicating teacher-child intentions for the successful construction of literate activity. Furthermore, in this example, successful negotiation for writing the correct letter form was accompanied by the teacher's verbal description of her personal action (e.g., As Jane wrote the letter form, she said, "That's a lower case *d*—or a little *d*."). Two important concepts are represented: (a) the notion of intersubjectivity (Chang-Wells & Wells, 1993, Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1984), and (b) the concept of adjustable scaffolds (Bruner, 1986; Cazden, 1988).

Once again, the data in this study point to the use of language and action as informative tools for promoting the child's cognitive awareness of particular literacy concepts. Furthermore, results indicated that the negotiating function of these tools represented a vehicle for enhancing the child's known concepts, while concurrently drawing attention to new, unfamiliar concepts. An additional example from the writing event supports this assumption. As Jane said the word *Burger* slowly, Allen responded to the *r* sound. Following Jane's praise ("There is an *r* in it."), she used language and action to negotiate the writing for the preceding letters ("Let's put something else first."). Both participants shared responsibility for the mutual construction of the word, with the teacher directing the meaning-making encounter based on the child's display of literate awareness for the word-constructing process.

Talk During Reading. In examining teacher-child negotiating conversations during reading events, a similarity occurred between the language of reading and the language used for constructing drawing and writing awareness. The data revealed that teacher-child talk was used to mediate degrees of participation according to the children's levels of understanding. Conversations for co-accomplishing various types of literate activity were noted across time and children.

The following transcript (Table 6) represents a typical example of the negotiating functions of language and action for assisting the children's active performance in reading events. During Jane's introduction to a new book, *Spot Goes to the Park* (Hill, 1991), George participated by using the pictures to make valid predictions about the story line. For instance, his oral interpretation (I get my ball) represented a close approximation of the text language (I'm getting my ball). As the transcript depicts, Jane and George negotiated oral and textual responses, with the goal of constructing a mutual understanding for the new story. Furthermore, the transcript reveals that George displayed an ability to regulate Jane's actions for acquiring personal information about a word from the text (see lines 12-13). The brackets and underlined sections indicate overlapping utterances during text reading.

Table 6
Example of Negotiating Functions of Language and Action for Assisting George During Reading Event

Lines	Oral response	Text response
1 George:	I get my ball.	
2 Jane:	That's what he's saying,	
3 Jane:		I'm getting my ball.
4 Jane:		Wait [for us, Spot]. What's the [hurry]?
5 George:		[for us, Spot]. [hurry]?
6 Jane:	A turtle would say that, wouldn't he? A turtle is always moving so slow,	
7 Jane:	he would say, "What's the hurry?"	
8 Jane:		Hello, [Spot]. Don't chase [the pigeons].
9 George:		[Spot]. [the pigeons].
10 George:	I only have fun.	
11 Jane:	He says,	
12 Jane:		I only want to play.
13 George:	What does that word say? (Points to <i>play</i>)	
14 Jane:		play
15 Jane:	He just wanted to play, didn't he? Look at this!! It says:	
16 Jane:		Ooops, where did that [ball go]?
17 George:		[ball go]

Findings from this example indicated that George utilized talk as a personal tool for regulating his levels of performance during the reading event. Based on earlier findings from participatory structures (analyzed at the beginning of *Cofstruct 2* on assisted learning), George employed techniques such as echoing key words and unison reading to promote his own literate activity in the reading event.

Analysis of language structures across various literacy events revealed that Jane and the children used language to negotiate responsibilities for performing a particular literate action. Again, teacher talk focused on increasing accessibility for the child's successful participation in the event. Particularly interesting was the similarity of talk across reading, drawing, and writing events. For example, Jane's descriptive elaboration on the turtle's movements during the reading event ("A turtle is always moving so slow, he would say, 'What's the hurry?'") closely resembled the talk used during drawing events to elaborate on Jane's descriptive actions for creating a hamburger bun ("That looks like a good top bun. And there's the bottom bun. And there's some things in between."). This same type of descriptive language was also observed during

actual writing events to describe Jane's movements for letter formation ("I'm going to make a *d*. It goes this way.")

At the same time, the children used talk for an additional purpose, which was to seek information for constructing their own learning. For example, during the reading event, George employed talk to seek knowledge about print, such as "What does that word say?" During the drawing event, George used talk to seek Jane's help for producing a bed, "You draw the bed." During the writing event, Allen used talk to gain information on how to write words, such as "I don't know how to write *jacket*."

The similarities between teacher-child conversations across reading, writing, and drawing events place a noteworthy emphasis on the importance of talk itself as a tool for shaping the child's construction of literate awareness. These findings suggest that the types of language used for constructing and negotiating literacy understandings share common characteristics, which are founded in—and guided by—a need to communicate specific literacy meanings.

Construct 3: Teacher-Child Talk for Communicating Knowledge About Literacy

The literacy development of young children reflects their experiences with more mature members of their society who already practice specific areas of knowledge (Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1993; Luria, 1982; Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1993; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Wood, 1980, 1988). In order to communicate particular information, adults say things to children in a way that they hope children understand. (Ninio & Bruner, 1978). Interactive conversations provide a natural environment for directing the learner's attention to specific elements of reading and writing literacy (Clay & Cazden, 1990; Holdaway, 1979; Lyons, Pinnell, & DeFord, 1993).

From this point of view, the child's literacy development is determined by the talk about literacy that surrounds the construction of the literate activity. During collaborative situations, Jane employed talk to awaken and shape the children's cognitive processes. These findings suggest that the teacher's emphases on particular aspects of literacy may have contributed to the children's awareness of—and understandings for—particular literacy concepts.

Under Construct 3, a preponderance of the data indicated that Jane's talk focused on communicating information about concepts of printed language (e.g., concept of punctuation ["And I'm going to put a period at the end."]; concept of letter ["That's a nice *b*."]; concept of spacing ["I have to squeeze it in here because there's not much room."]; concept of word ["That's a long word, isn't it?"]; and concept of sound ["I like the way you're listening to that *t* sound!"]). She utilized two language tools for transmitting these sources of information: (a) teacher talk for describing her personal literate performance of a particular literate action (e.g., "And I'm going to put a period at the end." [60 statements]) and (b) teacher talk for explicitly describing the child's personal literate performance of a particular literate action (e.g., "I like the way you're spacing. It makes it easier to read, doesn't it?" [145 statements]).

Results indicated a high occurrence of talk centered around the following topics: (a) talk about concepts of book (e.g., "This is the author's name. That means he wrote it." [48 statements]); (b) talk about the child as a reader and writer (e.g., "You're getting a lot of books that you've written." [92 statements]); and (c) talk for expressing enjoyment of the story (e.g., "I like the beat to that story, don't you?" [76 statements]).

As the data were analyzed across events in time, a pattern of teacher-communicated information emerged that indicated the children paid attention to and remembered what the teacher emphasized during reading and writing events. It is important to note that the transmission of particular information was embedded within the social and collaborative structure of a natural event. The following process illustrates the use of teacher talk for shaping the child's literate awareness for specific concepts of literacy: (a) the teacher communicated specific information for directing the child's attention to a particular literate action, (b) the child utilized teacher-communicated information for assisting his personal performance of the action, (c) the teacher provided specific feedback for highlighting the child's self-initiated use of the action, (d) the use of language and action represented a tool for promoting the child's literate awareness of the particular concept, and (e) the social and cultural structure of the event facilitated the natural communication of knowledge for constructing literate awareness. In support of Vygotskian theory, findings from the current study indicated that the child's literacy development was guided from the interpsychological plane (the teacher-child social encounter) to the intrapsychological plane (the child's cognitive awareness) through the performances of language and action.

To illustrate the process, a typical example from the present study depicts how teacher-communicated information for analyzing sounds in words served to channel the child's attention to the process of slowly articulating the sounds while writing the word. Within the natural literacy context of the story-writing event, the teacher employed language as a tool for promoting Allen's phonological awareness. To illustrate this point, when Allen initiated the use of a previously demonstrated teacher action (that of elongating the sounds within the word), Jane communicated immediate and explicit feedback, "I like the way you're saying the word as you're writing it." As the session progressed and Allen initiated the behavior on a new word, Jane used language to emphasize the child's literate action, "Does it help you to say the word as you write it?" In examining writing events across time, Allen continued to practice the action of slow articulation for analyzing letter-sound information.

Qualitative studies of adult-child interactions in natural literacy settings provide rich descriptions of conversational dialogues about written language (Bissex, 1980; Doake, 1985; Dyson, 1989; Fox, 1983; King, 1989; Lyons, Pinnell, & DeFord, 1993; Martinez & Roser, 1985; Newman & Roskos, 1992). Findings from these studies may be generalized to the current study, which indicates that a literacy-rich setting represents a natural medium for teacher-communicated knowledge about literacy. Rogoff (1990) described how the child's attention can be "channeled by adults' highlighting of events during social interaction" (p. 158). This notion is supported by data from the present study which indicate that within the social structure of a meaningful literacy event, the teacher's talk about specific aspects of literacy served to *channel* the children's attention to noting similar aspects of literacy.

A final example is given to illustrate how teacher-communicated information not only arouses the child's attention for noting particular aspects of literacy, but may also create a bridge for the child's construction of higher level literate awareness. As the data were searched, it became evident that the teacher and child often conversed about the title, author, and illustrator of books. Findings from this study suggest that teacher-child conversations about concepts of books may have enhanced the children's ability to notice new features of the printed language. This assumption is supported with evidence from a reading event with George and Jane, which indicates that George's

attention to print expanded beyond the typical conversations of title, author, and illustrator to embrace new features of the printed language. Although the teacher had never discussed the publishing company or the symbol that represented the company's name, George inquired about these functions of print.

George pulls over a familiar book to read. He opens the book to the inside cover page, points to a group of words, and asks, "What is this?" Jane responds, "That just tells who published it. Modern Curriculum Press published it." George asks, "Who published it?" Jane points to the words and reads them slowly, "Modern Curriculum Press. That's the name of the company." Then George points to a symbol on the page and asks, "What is that?" Jane answers, "That's just their little picture that represents the company. You're noticing everything, aren't you?" With this comment, George ends the conversation as he says, "Let's hear about it."

Vygotsky (1981, 1989) argued that a child's cognitive development stems from a conscious or deliberate understanding of literacy concepts. Clay (1991) described how children develop an *inner control* of literacy concepts which serves as a foundation for constructing new literate activity. In this study, the teacher's ability to use talk as a tool for cultivating the children's awareness of a particular literacy function served as an underlying framework for promoting conscious control of the literate action. Simultaneously, the children's ability to use talk for expressing personal understandings of literacy served as a mediating tool for fostering deliberate, conscious control over the action itself. From a Vygotskian viewpoint, the findings from this study support the theory of talk as a social tool for promoting young children's construction of literate awareness.

Conclusions and Implications

Although teacher-child talk was described under three separate constructs, the process of literacy development is not so easily depicted. The recursive and generative nature of language in shaping a child's literate awareness is epitomized in the many uses of talk for acknowledging, assisting, and communicating literacy. Woven within the social fabric of each individual construct were the traces of additional constructs. The findings from this study suggest that the teacher's ability to observe the children's levels of understanding, as evidenced by their ability to use language and action to express literate awareness of particular concepts, played an important regulatory role in the types of language used. From a Vygotskian perspective, the children's literacy awareness was shaped by the social structure of the event, which was simultaneously shaped by the degrees of linguistic support needed to communicate a mutual understanding for the construction of purposeful, meaningful literate activity. This point of view emphasizes the intricate nature of talk and action working together within the structure of the literacy event to promote within the child an inner control over particular literate activity.

Based on the findings from this study, four major conclusions can be drawn. First, teachers and children employ talk for acknowledging, assisting, and communicating about literacy. Furthermore, these types of talk do *not* work independently of each other, but rather harmonize together to shape the child's construction of literate awareness for particular concepts. Second, the teacher provides degrees of linguistic support which are contingent on the child's demonstrations of literate understandings for particular concepts of literacy. Third, children utilize teacher talk about literacy for

guiding and regulating their personal constructions of literate activity. Fourth, language and action serve as complementary tools for shaping children's literacy constructions for particular concepts of literacy.

The results of this study indicate the importance of constructive conversations for promoting young children's literacy awareness. Although the present study is confined to individual literacy contexts, the implications for talk as an informative literacy tool also apply to group educational settings. Classroom settings that value and encourage talk for learning should be studied to determine the influence of the talk itself on the children's cognitive development. To add to the literature on classroom interactions (Au & Kawakami, 1984; Mehan, 1969; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992), studies should be conducted that examine the types of talk used in various educational settings, such as collaborative peer groups, sharing time, basal reading groups, literature discussion groups, and large group instruction.

An additional implication from this study indicates the need for further research on the role of talk as an instrument for promoting the literacy development of at-risk readers. Clay (1991) advocated a literacy environment for at-risk readers that emphasizes an interactive social context for promoting successful reading and writing experiences. Although a limitation of the present study was the small sample of children, the in-depth analyses of conversational patterns indicate the importance of talk in the learning processes of two at-risk readers. Additional research is needed to examine the functions of oral language as an informative tool for enabling at-risk readers to develop critical understandings of literacy concepts.

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