

General Classroom Discourse Culture Across Teachers

In these four classrooms, virtually all instruction was whole group. In this context, teachers consistently paid attention to words, creating environments where students were hearing and constructing definitions of words, being asked to make personal and conceptual connections within and between words, and with attention to the morphological and syntactic characteristics of words. These classrooms were characterized by teacher talk that included IRE that was fast-paced where teachers posed critical questions for evaluation; as well as open-ended questions that required students to co-construct meaning around text, particularly with respect to how key vocabulary informed meaning-making. Teachers in these classrooms frequently asked students to share their thoughts, particularly about word meanings through the promotion of student talk in paired activities. Finally, students in these classrooms frequently asked for definitions without being prompted, suggesting a linguistic environment that was open to lexical exploration.

Delgado

Classroom discourse style: IRE (Fast-paced, critical questions); students asked for definitions without being prompted.

Example 1: TEACHER: [VIDEO/RECORDING] What does that mean, he knuckled him behind the ear?

BOY: Like [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

TEACHER: He kind of punched him, right? Good job. [VIDEO/RECORDING] Do you know what a shepherd is? Raise your hand if you know what a shepherd is? You don't know?

BOY: I forget.

TEACHER: You forget? Do you know, Robert, what a shepherd is? What is it? STUDENT: It's a person who takes care of the sheep at night.

Example 2: Students ask for definitions without being prompted (e.g. resin)

Context of the example: same as above

TEACHER: Precious oils and fragrant resins.

BOY: What's resins?

BOY: Raisins?

STUDENT: Oil.

Jean

Classroom discourse style: Promoted student talk by frequently asking students about what they thought. Engaged students in discussion about their experiences. Drew attention to words that came up in their conversation.

Example 1: Engages students in discussion about their experiences and draws attention to words that come up in their conversation (e.g. literally – figuratively)

Context of the example: As an introduction to the text “The Fear Place” by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, the teacher engages students in a discussion about different fears that people have.

TEACHER: Oh, he literally kills the spider. [OVERLAPPING VOICES] I thought you meant figuratively kill a fear, not literally kill it. And that's OK. Literally means actually doing it. Figuratively, you know what figuratively means?

CHILD: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

CHILD: Yeah, it's kind of like not being like in a way.

TEACHER: Yeah, go ahead. In a way, yeah, Sue.

CHILD: Kind of like in your mind, like you [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

TEACHER: Good, to kill it from your mind, get rid of it. Yeah.

CHILD: Figuratively [NOISE OBSCURES] kind of means like [NOISE OBSCURES] in a sense but not [NOISE OBSCURES] doing the literal version, but more like just doing it say, like in your mind. Figuratively, like I'm figuratively killing that person as in I'm [UNINTELLIGIBLE] but I'm not actually killing.

TEACHER: OK, in a sense. I like how you said in a sense you're doing it.

Example: 2 Promotes student talk by frequently asking students about what they think.

Context of the example: Students were taking turns to read “The Fear Place”, by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, aloud. The teacher stopped to discuss vocabulary.

Teacher: Okay, so there's a lot of information. There's words like hogbacks and a tongue of aspen. Why—do you think it's necessary to know exactly what a hogback is? Rocky hogback slabbed with quartz. I don't know exactly what a hogback is, but I can kinda infer, and also just by the context clues, what do you think the hogback might be? Over the rocky hogback slabbed with quartz and sprinkled with muscovite. What do you think it is? Hannah?

Student: It's a [inaudible 00:25:02].

Teacher: You think it has something to do with the actual ledge with the rock? It's slabbed and it has quartz and muscovite in it, so it has different minerals in it. Yes?

Student: I thought muscovite was dinosaur poop.

Teacher: Was what?

Student: I thought muscovite was fossilized dinosaur poop.

Teacher: Well, it's fossilized something.

Student: It's at the Museum of Science.

Teacher: It's fossilized something. I don't know if it's necessarily dinosaur poop, but it's fossilized something.

Medina

Discourse style: Promoted student talk by frequently asking students to share in pairs, and to build on each other's ideas. Drew attention to words that came up in those conversations.

Teacher: I think that was a good--can we just piggyback because it--remember what we said? Together, one idea ignites somebody else's brain and as time goes by, we get a really good definition. Could you say that out loud again in a nice, clear voice? Respect for Kolya right now. Thank you.

Teacher: Go find somebody whose hand isn't up and go to their seat or walk over to their seat and tell them what you think explore means.

Stabler

Discourse style: Promoted student talk by asking open-ended questions that prompted students to talk about what they were thinking, explain themselves, and establish connections. Students took an active role in constructing meaning of words, particularly through responses to specific and open-ended questions.

TEACHER: Right. So what I'd like you to do is, I'd like you to turn to the first chapter. And what I want to do is point out a few vocabulary words. And then I'm going to have you read it. OK? Read a couple of pages. Now, the first vocabulary word I'm going to point out is this word here, meadow. Meadow. And the definition of a meadow is actually right next to the hyphen. OK? A busy world of insects and tiny animals working in the ground. Have you ever seen a meadow?

TEACHER: Do you know what a fire escape is? Have you seen it on the side of buildings?

CHILD: Yeah.

TEACHER: They look like they zigzag down, and they're black. It's so people, it's a fire escape, so if you at the top floor of a building, you can get down the outside safely. You can get out in case of an emergency. And so they're saying the fire escape. So look at the picture. Why would they call that zebra?

TEACHER: Real estate, people who buy and sell houses, help others buy and sell a house. And insurance?

CHILD: Oh, insurance is like when you [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

TEACHER: And what do you get in return for giving your money?

CHILD: You get with your, like, you get car insurance. You get medical insurance.

TEACHER: Right. If something happens, then you get covered for large sums of money that you might not have.

CHILD: Bills, for example, and say they were driving a car, and you got in an accident. He would get those [UNINTELLIGIBLE] right?

TEACHER: Right, if he pays his insurance. If he pays a small fee every month. OK?

Instructional themes for each oral language proficiency dimension

DEFINITIONS

DEFINE

Example 1

Context of the example: Review of words presented in previous “Stump the teacher” game.

TEACHER: What is a silhouette, Robert? Robbie.

STUDENT: A profile or a picture that has details --

TEACHER: It's an outline, right? A silhouette?

STUDENT: [UNINTELLIGIBLE PHRASE] that thing that Mrs. Williams was doing.

TEACHER: Mrs. Williams did it when we had our colonial craft day.

Example 2

Context of the example: Vocabulary review before they reading “The Fear Place”.

TEACHER: Focus. A couple meanings for bonus here. Almost done with these. Focus.

[UNINTELLIGIBLE] we're almost done.

CHILD: Just look at it and don't [UNINTELLIGIBLE] look at something or think about something

[UNINTELLIGIBLE].

TEACHER: Good, so pay attention to it, put all of your attention [OVERLAPPING VOICES]. I was going to say focus on it, but I guess I can't use the word focus. Focus has another meaning though. Caitlin?

CHILD: Well, I don't know [UNINTELLIGIBLE] but [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

TEACHER: Oh, thank you. That's a good word. Concentrate. Couldn't find that word. We can focus a camera if you have a camera that doesn't automatically focus. You focus it to make things?

CHILD: Clearer.

TEACHER: Clearer, right. So when you're focusing on something, you're clearly paying attention to it.

Example 3

Context of the example: Vocabulary review before reading.

Teacher:Chores, chores. What does that mean, to do chores? What exactly does that mean, chores?

[Inaudible 24:38]

Student:It means [inaudible 25:31]. It means that you do a job.

Teacher:All right, to do something, some sort of a job,

Example 4

Context of the example: Vocabulary review in preparation for reading.

TEACHER 2: Number. [OVERLAPPING VOICES] number is not in there, but numerous, you kind of [OVERLAPPING VOICES] number. It starts the same way. So what do you think numerous means? What do you think numerous means?

STUDENT: [OVERLAPPING VOICES] Numeros.

TEACHER 2: Right, and then that's numbers in Spanish. So what do you think numerous means? Carlos? What do you think numerous means? What do you see in the picture?

STUDENT: [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

TEACHER 2: Yeah. Numerous means it's a lot There's a numerous amount of teachers in the room today. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

REVOICE

Example 1

Context of the example: Writing lesson on open response about Caddy Woodlawn's character traits.

T: OK, so hold that thought for a minute. So look at the very first sentence in the third paragraph. It says it was more of a task

than she had supposed. What does that mean? Put it in your language. It was more of a task than she had supposed. Mark?

M: It was more of something to do than she thought it was.

T: Very good. It was more of something to do than she thought it was. Does that show that she's adventurous? Thumbs up, thumbs down.

COLLABORATE

Example 1

Context of the example: Vocabulary review before reading.

Student: A job that you usually do regularly.

24:00-26:59

9.43-46Teacher:I think that was a good--can we just piggyback because it--remember what we said? Together, one idea ignites somebody else's brain and as time goes by, we get a really good definition. Could you say that out loud again in a nice, clear voice? Respect for Kolya right now. Thank you.

Student:A job that you usually do regularly.

Teacher:A job that you usually do regularly. So a chore is something that, even if you like it, anything, like, that you have to do regularly usually becomes what? A chore. It becomes boring. It's like, uh, even if I love it, like, I don't always want to do

Example 2

Context of the example: Teacher is reading a few pages of a story aloud, and interrupts reading to discuss vocabulary.

Teacher: All right, I want you to look at this word. This was just in your reading right now. What is this word? I'm waiting. I'm waiting for Simon to be--and Bobby--to be in control and Rex to be looking up here. What is this word?

Student: Invigorated?

Teacher: Invigorated. Tell the person next to you what do you think invigorated means.

[Cross talk]

Teacher: Finish up your work. All right, looking this way now, thanks. I'm going to read the sentence again.

Example 3

Context of the example: Vocabulary review before open response writing lesson.

Teacher: Good. What does explore mean--explore? If you don't know, you have your dictionaries and should have those out. If you don't know, you have your dictionary out looking it up.

Other people whose hands are up. Other people whose hand are up. Only if his hand was up. Only if your hand was up. Did you have your hand up, Israel?

Student: No [inaudible 54:17].

Teacher: Go find somebody whose hand isn't up and go to their seat or walk over to their seat and tell them what you think explore means.

CONNECT

Example 1

Context of the example: Students were taking turns to read "The Fear Place", by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, aloud. The teacher stopped to discuss vocabulary.

Teacher: Okay, so there's a couple words there that may be new. What is stamina? He had the strength and stamina. Good, Sandy, what's stamina?

Student: Energy.

Teacher: Okay, it has to do with energy, yeah. A little bit more than that. Anthony?

Student: Balance.

Teacher: Could have to do with balance. A.J.?

Student: How long he can go on without getting undone or just keep going.

Teacher: Good. It has to do with fatigue. So it's the power that you have to resist that exhaustion, to just stop.

Student: Endurance.

Teacher: Endurance, yes. We think about athletes as having this stamina—runners, swimmers. I watch my nephew who swims on a swim team and I don't know where he gets the stamina. He does relay and he's the third leg, is that what they call it, which usually is the one that has to pull up the end. I don't where the stamina comes from, but this, we think of runners, too. Right when your body things [thinks?-cjm] I have to stop, your stamina keeps you going, and you have to build that up.

Example 2

Context of the example: Vocabulary review before they reading “The Fear Place”.

TEACHER: ... Weakness. Opposite of strength, yeah.

CHILD: It's like Achilles' heel. Yeah, it's something that can cause you pain and discomfort [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. It's something that like instead of you being [UNINTELLIGIBLE] somebody's got to get you [UNINTELLIGIBLE] hand, but instead, they can hit you in like the chest and that hurt more.

TEACHER: Good. So we have different weaknesses, figurative and literal weaknesses. When you said Achilles' heel, does anyone know where your Achilles' tendon is? No, it's [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

CHILD: [UNINTELLIGIBLE] here.

CHILD: Sure.

TEACHER: Yes, you can't see my --

CHILD: I love that movie.

TEACHER: Everybody touch the back of your heel.

CHILD: It's so cool.

TEACHER: And flex your foot and point it. Yeah. That's a really, really important tendon, and it's really, really strong. And that's a weakness. If that gets hurt or damaged or cut, as gross as that sounds, it's a really, really hard recovery process. [OVERLAPPING VOICES] yesterday's. It's like anatomy. So Max, you started saying it's like your Achilles' heel. What does that mean? Where have you heard that? What does it mean? Go ahead.

CHILD: Well, it was a Greek myth a long time ago. [OVERLAPPING VOICES] That Achilles' mom dipped him in the river Styx so that he'd become invincible to all like enemies. And she held him by his [OVERLAPPING VOICES]. So that was his weakness. Like that was where his lifeline to actual Earth was. So if they like cut there, he would die, or because he'd be completely immersed in the river of Styx.

TEACHER: Good. Good example. When we hear about Achilles' heel in different stories, in movies you may hear a character say, he is my Achilles' heel. He's always my, maybe it's someone on his team. He's the Achilles' heel. He's always the one who causes the problems.

Example 3

Context of the example: Vocabulary review before open response writing lesson.

Teacher: ...I read James's essay last Friday, and James's essay showed me that he is a true life explorer and he has recently taken a voyage. Where did you journey from, James? Can you stand, honey? What state did you come from?

Student:[Inaudible 1:07:48]

Teacher: Well, before you came to Massachusetts, which has only been a short--like, a week or so--where did you come from before that?

Student: Tennessee.

Teacher: Tennessee. So James came from Tennessee. He took a voyage up to Massachusetts. And he recently was an explorer in Massachusetts. Tell them what you explored on the snow day with dad. Talk to them, honey. They're looking at you.

Student: We went to Paul Revere Beach.

Teacher: And how did you get there?

Student: By train.

Teacher: Train. And tell them, in your exploration of Revere Beach, tell me one thing you saw on the beach and one thing you saw in the tunnel.

Student: I saw [inaudible, background noise] and the waves were kind of made of ice. Well, the waves were unfrozen but the tide was lower down because you could walk on the waves that were frozen on top of the sand.

Student:Cool!

IDENTIFY

Example

TEACHER: Well, sometimes these things aren't cued up. Just give us a minute. Did anybody write any words that they needed to clarify on their post it note?

STUDENT: Yeah.

TEACHER: Raise your hand if you have a word you want to [reveal?]. [OVERLAPPING VOICES] This is kind of made up word. The word you have is?

BOY: [UNINTELLIGIBLE PHRASE]

TEACHER: [UNINTELLIGIBLE PHRASE] It's like a cartoon word, like a super hero word.

[OVERLAPPING VOICES] It's something really exciting happened.

STUDENT: Something good? [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

TEACHER: And as I recall in the book, they related something that happened in the book to something like a Marvel comics? Didn't they mention Marvel comics?

BOY: Yeah.

TEACHER: And when that book was set, you kids still like to read they call them graphic novels now, but remember the graphic novels? And we read the adventure books? So kind of like that. But shazam would be like a super hero word. Anybody else have a word they want me to clarify?

STUDENT: No.

DEPTH GAMES

Stump the Teacher: Students present a word from the dictionary and the teacher has to define it. If she does not provide an accurate definition, she is stumped. Procedure:

- A student selects a word from the dictionary and spells it.
- Then the teacher asks what kind of word they think it is.
- Then she says: "This is what Mrs. G thinks the word is..." and gives a definition. If she can, she expands the definition.
- She asks the student who presented the word to read the dictionary definition.
- Expands the definition connecting with a similar concept.
- She writes the words on the board
- The cycle ends with the teacher asking "Stump or no stump?"
- If she gets a word that she doesn't know, so she shows the students her process of analyzing it:
 - o Asks what part of speech it is
 - o Compares with words with similar morphology
 - o Analyzes the components of the word
 - o Thinks about what unknown word component reminds her of.
 - o Makes a guess using all this information.

Example

TEACHER: ... Go ahead sweetie.

STUDENT: I don't know how to say this.

TEACHER: [LAUGHTER] Well I can't look, spell it to Mrs. G.

STUDENT: S-y-l-o-g-r-a-p-h-y

STUDENT: That's Bobbie's.

TEACHER: Sylography, [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. I know that the part of speech for that word must be a what?

STUDENT: Noun.

TEACHER: What is it?

STUDENT: [OVERLAPPING VOICES] Adjective!

TEACHER: Sylography.

STUDENT: [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

TEACHER: Like photography, geography, what's it have to be?

STUDENT: [OVERLAPPING VOICES] Verb! Verb!

STUDENT: Noun!

TEACHER: It's a noun.

STUDENT: I said noun!

STUDENT: Shh. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

TEACHER: Put your hand down. Sylo-graphy. Now when I think of this word, -graphy is like the study of, OK? Like geography is the study of people and places, photography is the study of photos. So think sylography, it reminds me of a xylophone, so I'm going to say, and I'm not too sure, I'm going to say the study of sound and vibrations. And that's what I'm guessing, because I don't really know that word. So now, if you looked it up, you can follow along. Listen to Jacqueline, she's going to read. What is it?

STUDENT: The art of engraving on wood.

TEACHER: The art of engraving on wood!

STUDENT: [OVERLAPPING VOICES] Stumped!

TEACHER: She stumped me!

Word Splash: *Teacher's description of the game:*

You're going to find one word in those two pages or the two pages that you already read prior to that and we're going to make a word splash. Everyone's going to choose one word and we're going to put on the white board, erase what's on there now. We'll put on the white board ya'll are going to put on ya'll word and I am going to choose four people to come up. We'll have four words that we'll present to look at today. We'll leave those up and we'll look at those words again after we get back from vacation. I have a two-column chart we are going to do in acting out activities. The person who puts the word up is going to put the word up on the word splash. You're going to—if you don't know what that word means. It could be a word that you don't know what it means or it could be a word that you do know what it means you may not be certain of a part of speech or something and you'll look that up in the dictionary. You'll write your word and the definition on a two-column chart and then you're going to be the person who is going to direct someone else to figure out what that word is. I would like to use Aaron come up. I'm just going to do a quick model for you so you'll know what we're going to be doing. Say my word was humungous. You're going to see a bunch of words up here on that word splash and the word humungous would be one of them. I'm going to say to Aaron, Aaron I want you to pretend you are carrying a heavy boulder. Just show us what it would look like if you were carrying a heavy, heavy boulder. Do you know what a boulder is?

Detective Game: Students must determine whose perspective is being presented in a short text by using clues presented in the text.

Example

TEACHER: OK. We are going to kind of be detectives based on what we read. We looked at pictures. Now we're going to go, and we're going to read some text, and we're going to try to figure out the characters. ... What's the title, Miriam?

CHILD: Samantha's birthday.

TEACHER: Samantha's birthday. Can we take a guess, then, who might be in the story? What do you think, Ariana?

CHILD: Samantha?

TEACHER: Probably Samantha. OK, so here's what I want to explain a little bit of this, and then I'm going to let you read it. So there are three different paragraphs. Paragraph A, paragraph B, and paragraph C. All of these paragraphs are talking about the same event. However, it is from different points of view, or different perspective. So we need to be detectives. So what I'd like you to do right now, based on what we learned from the title, I'd like you to read paragraph A to yourself and think about who the speaker might be. Go ahead. [UNINTELLIGIBLE] what you're supposed to read. You're reading paragraph A. Raise your hand if you think you can figure out who is telling that. Who might that be? Who might it be, Blanca?

36:00-38:59 CHILD: Samantha?

TEACHER: It is most likely Samantha. Blanca, let me ask you this. Is that written in first person or third person? She said that this paragraph A was probably Samantha.

CHILD: First person?

TEACHER: How do you know it's first person? What kind of words there?

CHILD: I.

WORD RELATIONS

SEMANTICS

Example

Teacher: So how is sympathy different from empathy? Are they connected or are they not connected? (Medina)

TEACHER: Supper is a synonym for dinner. Right? So supper is dinnertime. (Stabler)

Teacher: So if you said she was determined, you could use the same proof from the text as she was adventurous or self-confident or she persevered. (Jean)

CONNECT

Example

TEACHER: And has anybody ever heard of putting a baby in a bureau drawer? You know what a bureau is? [OVERLAPPING VOICES] Put that down. It's not yours to put in your mouth. Put it down on the book. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

GIRL: But I see them. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

TEACHER: A bureau is like a set of drawers, a chest, where you keep your clothes. Sometimes this is called an animal trough. And they put the animals' food in and the animals eat their food out of that, an animal trough. OK? Somebody else asked a question? All right, a bureau drawer. Sometimes when people don't have a crib or when the baby first comes home, they take out a drawer out of the bureau, empty it out, put some blankets in it and they use that as a little bassinet, a little crib. And I know, when I was a young girl, our tenants in Cambridge, they used, that's what they did when they had their baby. They put the baby in a drawer. But you don't put the, you don't put the drawer back in the bureau. (Delgado)

TEACHER: Let's try and define it without using the word. What brings you comfort when you are not feeling well? You have a cold. What brings you comfort? You don't know. Or when you're scared. What brings you comfort? (Jean)

TEACHER: OK, in a sense. I like how you said in a sense you're doing it. Have you ever heard somebody saying you have a big mouth?

CHILDREN: Yeah. No.

TEACHER: What does that mean to you? People have said it to me, too. You have a big mouth. What does that mean? What does it mean to have a big mouth?

[UNINTELLIGIBLE]

CHILD: You talk a lot.

TEACHER: You talk a lot. You have a lot to say. That's figuratively, you have a big mouth. (Jean)

TEACHER: It's an outline, right? A silhouette?

STUDENT: [UNINTELLIGIBLE PHRASE] that thing that Mrs. Williams was doing.

TEACHER: Mrs. Williams did it when we had our colonial craft day. And the last one, Michael, what's a qualification? (Delgado)

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Example

TEACHER: A pencil on the ground, it's stationary, yeah, if it's flat ground, it's not moving. Stationary means just staying in one spot. What's the other meaning for stationery? Totally different. Caitlin.

CHILD: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

TEACHER: Paper, yep. Fancy stationery you can write little notes on, paper. But this stationary that we're going to be looking at is not moving. Reckless. Reckless. I just want to go through the words so you at least hear them. Reckless, yeah.

MORPHOSYNTAX

HIGHLIGHT

Example

Michael: Despicable.

Teacher: Despicable. And it comes from the base word-

Student: Despise. (Medina)

MODEL

Example

TEACHER: [LAUGHTER] Mice. A lot of people are afraid of mice. Little creepy crawly, not sure about them. OK. Keep these to yourselves for now. Keep them in mind as we start to read. OK. So I [UNINTELLIGIBLE] to give you a packet of a couple of papers. The only thing I want to look at now is the front. It's vocabulary words. You want to pass it around. [UNINTELLIGIBLE] We're going to work on a little bit as yet, yep. Put your names on it for me please. The words in the box on the right under vocabulary are the words that we're going to [NOISE OBSCURES] story. Some of them may be new to you, some of them may not. There should be just enough. Anybody have an extra? OK. The first one's monotony. A lot of you had the word monotonous for one of your words last week. What does monotony mean? Base word is monotone. Mono tone. What do you think [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. (Jean)

TEACHER: And her word was quintessence and I got quin, I kept thinking it was five, so I said the essence of being five. But it was the purest in essence of something. So that was at the stump. And the rest of you, I'm going to ask you, what does regurgitate mean? (Delgado- could also be used to illustrate the game)

DEPTH GAMES

Stump the Teacher (see description in Definitions section above)

Example

TEACHER: Put your hand down. Sylo-graphy. Now when I think of this word, -graphy is like the study of, OK? Like geography is the study of people and places, photography is the study of photos. So think sylography, it reminds me of a xylophone, so I'm going to say, and I'm not too sure, I'm going to say the study of sound and vibrations. And that's what I'm guessing, because I don't really know that word. So now, if you looked it up, you can follow along. Listen to Jacqueline, she's going to read. What is it?

TEACHER: I don't even want you to say it, I want her to learn it. Ratiocination. I see this root word, ratio. Laura.

STUDENT: [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

TEACHER: And ratio is like fractions, like parts of things. Soo. I don't really know what that word means, so I'm going to say --

STUDENT: [OVERLAPPING VOICES] Yeah!

TEACHER: Wait a minute, I'm going to try to figure it out! Ratiocination, I think it has something to do with numbers. Um. The order of fractional parts.