



**Abstract** Research in classrooms reveals that the institution of school is not an empty slate, but rather is characterized by peculiar patterns of interaction which tend to be short exchanges directed by the teacher. Language teachers who wish children to learn language by participating in extended meaningful conversation, then, must consciously resist institutionally defined 'teacher talk'. In this paper we examine a case of extended conversation in a dual-language kindergarten for clues as to how the teacher and children were able to negotiate alternative ways of engaging each other in a conversation. The purpose of the paper is to reveal both challenges and approaches for teachers to design real-life conversations in a traditional school where rigid 'teacher talk' dominates the classroom discourse.

**Key Words** classroom discourse, dialogue, dual language, intersubjectivity, teacher talk

Renée Hayes and Eugene Matusov  
*University of Delaware, USA*

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## Designing for Dialogue in Place of Teacher Talk and Student Silence

Conversation and dialogue are two words used habitually and often interchangeably in everyday English speech, and language-mediated interactions among people can easily be referred to as 'conversations' or even 'dialogues' in casual speech. Nevertheless, these terms can also be used to express more particularly delineated phenomena. Duranti (1997), for example, defines conversations as comprised not simply of strings of individual speech acts but rather of adjacency pairs, sequences of utterances made by different speakers, which form together shared interpretive frames, or intersubjectivity. Rommetveit (1998) stresses the implication of the whole person in this intersubjectivity, arguing that linguistic meaningfulness cannot be divorced from 'human interests and concerns' (p. 230). Similarly, Bakhtin describes dialogic interactions as only those involving fully living, unpredictable, 'unfinalized' people (Bakhtin & Emerson, 1999). Wittgenstein argues that words are not conveyors of thought, but actions themselves; words are themselves deeds (Wittgenstein, von Wright, & Nyman, 1984). Freire (1986) also depicts words as inherently purposeful, arguing that,

without action, words are reduced to inauthentic 'verbalism'. Nevertheless, 'conversation', when used by a teacher to describe a classroom goal, need not imply the full range of intersubjectivity, dialogicity and authenticity that Duranti, Rommetveit, Bakhtin, Wittgenstein and Freire might have wished. In fact, the institutionally defined goal of testing endemic to schools tends to foster teacher-child interactions that fail to meet the above criteria, converting conversation from an intersubjective activity to a means of testing knowledge acquisition (Mehan, 1979). Our own analysis of teacher-student conversations suggests that even when teachers explicitly plan to foster 'conversation' in the classroom, this conversation tends to become testing institutionally defined curriculum material, rather than doing activities related to the participants' 'interests and concerns'. In our view, the problem is not so much that the teachers may disagree with the definition of dialogue given in the literature, rather that they may use traditional pedagogical approaches to promote it. It seems to be impossible to use traditional institutional practices focused on decontextualized knowledge to promote a dialogue. Using an exceptional case, we will illustrate how teacher-child genuine intersubjectivity and dialogicity might be achieved.

Dual-language programs, where children from two different language backgrounds are expected to become bilingual together, rely heavily on the notion that teachers can create institutional contexts for the children to engage in real-life conversational interactions (Christian, 1994; Lambert, 1990). These real-life conversations are expected to enable children to learn another language as people learn language outside of school: as people have learned their native language or as people 'thrown' into a foreign language environment are 'forced' to communicate and understand the foreign language. Having enough children from each language background is expected to induce a language environment—through real-life conversations—in which a child learning this language can immerse him- or herself. In this sense, dual-language programs are designed in an attempt to create within the institutional context of formal schooling interactional contexts that approximate multilingual contexts existing outside of school.

However, research in classrooms reveals that the institution of school is not an empty slate, and in fact already has its own peculiar patterns of interaction (Cazden, 1988; Lemke, 1990; Mehan, 1979; Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996) which tend to be short exchanges directed by the teacher. This research suggests that the school institution does not promote real-life conversational patterns of communication. Teachers who wish children to learn language by participating in extended

meaningful conversation, then, must consciously resist institutionally defined 'teacher talk'. In this paper we examine a case of extended conversation in a dual-language kindergarten for clues as to how the teacher and children were able to negotiate alternative ways of engaging each other in a conversation. We specifically focus on designing real-life conversations in Spanish since there were many opportunities for children learning English to participate in naturally occurring real-life conversations in school and outside the school in the mid-Atlantic region of the US, where we conducted our study. The purpose of the paper is to reveal both challenges and approaches for teachers to the design of real-life conversations in a traditional school where rigid 'teacher talk' dominates the classroom discourse.

This study comes out of a year-long ethnography conducted in a dual-language Spanish-English kindergarten classroom. We focused on official Spanish Time, which took place in the morning. Dana,<sup>1</sup> the teacher, was a fluent bilingual, a native of Argentina who had moved to the US as a child and had several years of English as a Second Language (ESL) experience before beginning her first year in a dual-language classroom. It was clear that Dana supported the theoretical emphasis of dual-language pedagogy on conversation. She stressed to me<sup>2</sup> that fluency in a second language cannot be achieved in a classroom where the language is not practiced in 'natural' conversations, and explained that this is why most people who learn languages in a classroom setting cannot speak that language:

The difference between acquiring a language and learning a language . . . is that people learn textually to speak a second language, but they don't know how to apply that second language. Which is why people who have taken Spanish for 5, 7 years don't know how to hold a conversation in Spanish. (5/20/99)

Throughout the year I spent in Dana's class, I witnessed her struggling to converse with children and to inspire them to converse among themselves, while at the same time unconsciously engaging in exactly the sort of institutionally defined teacher talk that discouraged extended conversation. First we will examine the typical pattern of teacher talk in this classroom, and then a striking and encouraging exception.

### **Monologic Interactions: The Institutional Context of Teacher Talk, '¿Qué es esto?'**

Overall, we found that the teacher's attempts to elicit extended conversation with her students were unsuccessful, according to both her

evaluation and our own data analysis. Despite the teacher's explicit and passionate advocacy of the importance of fostering realistic extended conversation in the classroom, congruent with the dual-language philosophy, our analysis suggested that her interactions with children were usually more aligned with the institutionally defined triadic discourse frame and its variations described by Mehan (1979): the teacher's initiation (often a question testing for a known answer), a student's response, and the teacher follow-up with the teacher's evaluation of the student's response. The triadic discourse violates the main expectation of a real-life conversation that a person who asks a question does not know the answer and is genuinely interested in learning from the interlocutor's response. In contrast, in traditional school-based triadic discourse, the teacher usually knows the answer of the asked question in advance but is testing the student to see if she or he knows the answer too (Rogoff et al., 1996).

A transcript of Dana playing in the Housekeeping Center with children may shed some light on why her interactions with the children did not lead to her ultimate goal of extended conversation. In this segment, Dana sits with children around a low table which is set for a meal with plastic food, plates, cups and silverware. All of these children are English native-speakers, and this event takes place during official Spanish time (the morning). Here we see that Dana uses the classical triadic discourse described by Mehan (1979):

*Initiation* (known-answer question): Dana holds up a carrot. '¿Qué es esto?' (What's this?)

*Response*: Dorinda replies in English, questioningly, 'It's a carrot.'

*Evaluation*: Dana: 'Zanahoria' (carrot).

Dana continues with this object-naming, holding up a stalk of celery, and some children call out correctly, 'apio'. Then she holds up a cucumber, and a couple of children call out, correctly, 'pepino'.

As exemplified by the segment above, a common known-answer question was, for example, '¿Qué es esto?' (What is this?), generally accompanied by holding up the object in question and asking the children to name it in the target language. It is interesting that in her response Dorinda seemed unsure about her answer, perhaps because it was so obvious that it was a carrot. In real-life conversations, asking a known-answer question is inappropriate and can even be interpreted as a challenge, teasing or aggression (Rogoff et al., 1996). Similarly, Dorinda might not have been sure that the teacher was really asking about the carrot, since the teacher undoubtedly knew it was a carrot that she was holding. The teacher's question about the carrot that she

was holding was very strange from the point of view of a real-life interaction and thus this interaction could not be sustained since the teacher's questions were not social in nature.

Sometimes the teacher's known-answer questions were more social in nature, for example, '¿Qué más puedo comer para desayuno?' (What else can I eat for breakfast?), in which a delineated set of culturally appropriate answers are expected. These more social yet still known-answer questions could not be interactionally sustained either. It was clear from Dana's participation that she did in fact expect a particular set of correct answers pertaining not only to correct words but also, as indicated by these questions, to proper social procedures, which included which foods should be eaten at what time of day and in which combination. For example, she rejected the children's contributions and established that hamburgers were not appropriate breakfast food (11/17/99), and that eggs were not appropriate pizza toppings (1/22/99). In the following excerpt, for example, Dana asks what kind of topping she might want on her pizza, and rejects eggs as an inappropriate choice:

*Dana:* ¿Qué necesito para poner en la pizza? (What do I need to put on the pizza?)

Sandra places an egg on top of the pizza she is offering Dana

*Dana:* Ay, pero no sé. ¿Pizza de huevo? (Oh, but I don't know. Egg pizza?)

Sandra removes the egg and replaces it in the plastic food container. (1/22/99)

These exchanges illustrate that responses are evaluated against a rubric of possibilities as defined by the teacher even when the request is not explicitly defined as a testing question but seems to be part of an open-ended social dialogue. It is interesting to note that Sandra interprets Dana's implicit criticism, phrased as a question, as negative feedback and silently retracts her egg proposition. Testing-like evaluations imposed by the teacher seem to inhibit children's improvisations which are necessary for sustained social play (Sawyer, 1997). While some studies have shown children improvising their own more creative responses to this type of predictable teacher script in the classroom (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) or even parodying teacher script in their own free play (Fassler, 2003), we did not observe much creative Spanish-language conversation among the children. This may have been due to language constraints. Most of the children in the classroom either were not familiar with Spanish (in the case of English natives) or were reluctant to speak Spanish in the classroom, even among themselves (in the case of many Spanish natives). During

Spanish Time, Dana tended to strictly impose the Spanish-only rule, so that children's conversations among themselves in English were actively discouraged. Therefore, at least during official Spanish Time, most of the children's target-language conversations were initiated by the teacher. This placed a great deal of responsibility on Dana to design her teacher talk to initiate and sustain these conversations that she wanted the children to have in Spanish.

Nevertheless, most of the 'conversations' Dana had with children consisted of three or fewer conversational turns, two of which were her own. Our analysis suggested that Dana was forced to subsume her language-oriented goal of generating conversation to what she viewed as more institutionally pressing goals of keeping order in the classroom and making sure that children were prepared academically for the following year. Further, as far as we know, she never questioned the efficacy of her own attempts to initiate conversation with the students. We argue that Dana, as an experienced teacher, had assimilated so fully to the institutional norms for teacher talk that she found it difficult to problematize or even explicitly identify these norms even when her own goals as a language teacher called for a different strategy.

In our interviews throughout the year, Dana reflected on the children's language development and explained any pedagogical changes she made in response to her observations. She commented on the lack of conversation when children were alone: 'There was no conversation going on' (5/20/99), but never questioned the nature of her own conversations with children. Instead, she looked for deficits within the children or in their cultural backgrounds to explain why they were simply unable to converse. 'They come from depressed homes, where it's not a language-rich environment . . . there's not books there, there's not conversations. There's TV, there's shouting, there's violence, but there isn't language development, there isn't conversation' (5/20/99). In this fashion, failure emerged systematically in this classroom but was defined as an individual characteristic, reflecting a fundamental assumption of schooling that failure must be rooted within individuals rather than systems (McDermott, 1993). This deficit approach (Rogoff, 2003; Sautter, 1994) is also fundamentally based on the notion that learning (or failing to learn) depends on the transmission of specific skills, and is clearly illustrated by Dana's comment, 'How did you learn to converse? At school. Somebody taught you how to converse. Some people are inept speakers, they never learned how, nobody ever showed them' (5/20/99).

However, our interpretation of the children's 'failure' to converse did not in fact require any failure at all, but rather concerns the nature

of language as a purposeful and meaningful activity. For the children, the words that Dana wanted from them lacked social, situational and pragmatic meaning. Their activity of pretending to eat plastic food did not for the most part even require the naming of these plastic carrots and cucumbers in English, and even less the translation of these items into Spanish, as she demanded. Freire (1986), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, defined the word as having two dimensions, reflection and action. When the word loses one of these dimensions, it either becomes activism by losing the dimension of reflection or verbalism by losing the dimension of action. Dana's use of words led to verbalism. In this situation the word becomes inauthentic, unable to transform reality:

Dialogue is the encounter between men,<sup>3</sup> mediated by the world, in order to frame the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. (Freire, 1986, p. 69)

Ironically, the powerful agent in Freire's asymmetric dyad denies the less powerful the right to name, while Dana requires it of her students. However, the effect is, in a way, the same—silence. Dana's insistence on children's use of Spanish words did not apparently contribute to the children's better understanding or transforming the world, as Freire demanded from authentic education. We argue that the children wished to 'speak their world' of play in English, or simply through gesture or mutual engagement in play, and Dana's demand to literally 'name' in her terms seemed artificial and meaningless to the children.

There were several incidences where children were playing relatively silently together and Dana directed them to name things they were playing with and doing. In the following excerpt, Alicia and Dorinda are apparently playing at cooking, bustling around and moving pots and plastic dishes between the play stove and cabinets. Dana calls across the room to chide them for not speaking while playing. It is apparent from their contented activity that children's play did not require this sort of naming, and when Dana imposes a narrative context (cooking for someone else), they seem confused:

*Dana:* Alicia, ¿Qué es lo que tú y ella están haciendo? (What is it that you and she are doing?)

Alicia does not answer.

*Dana repeats:* Ahhh, mi Alicia. ¿Qué es lo que tú y Dorinda están jugando juntas? (Ahhh, Alicia, what is it that you and Dorinda are playing together?)

*Alicia* responds rather vaguely: Haciendo una cosa (Doing a thing).

*Dana:* ¿Qué cosa? (What thing?)

*Alicia:* Cocinando (Cooking).

*Dana* speaks their actions for them: Son cocineras, las dos. ¿Y para quién están cocinando? (You are chefs, both of you. And who are you cooking for?)

*Alicia* seems to misunderstand the question: El sandwichts (*sic*) (The sandwiches).

*Dana* restates her question: Pero, ¿para quién? (But, for whom?)

*Alicia:* Para . . . I don't know.

*Dana:* Pero entonces tienen que estar hablando las dos juntas. Ella está allí, tú estás allí. No están hablando (But then the two of you have to be talking together. She is there, you are there, you aren't talking). (3/3/99).

As illustrated by Alicia above, the children acquiesce only as much as necessary to Dana's insistence that they name their play, responding with the requisite repetition or translation, but there really is nothing more to say. Alicia's short responses to Dana's prompts suggest that she is motivated to speak by an understanding of the teacher's right to test her, not by a desire to engage Dana in dialogue. Indeed, Freire (1986) might argue that dialogue is not possible in a traditional school context such as Dana's: 'this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas into another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants' (p. 70).

Interestingly, Dana never used the word 'dialogue' but always described her goal as 'conversation'. Based on her interviews, it seems to us that Dana viewed conversation as verbal exchanges between individuals around a common topic, and was not concerned with the elements of reflection and action inherent in Freire's definition of dialogue. When I asked her what she believed to be the most effective classroom practice in stimulating conversation in the play centers, she identified this practice of entering the centers and interacting with the children as described in the above excerpt (where children are naming items that Dana holds up): 'I think my going in there and showing them what I expected. And kids are emulators. They emulate what they see. They mimic' (5/20/99). Dana's uses both 'emulate' and 'mimic' to describe the process by which children learn from her. These terms evoke Tomasello's distinction between emulation and imitation as teacher-learner relationships (Tomasello, 1998). Unlike Tomasello, Dana does not seem to distinguish between the two processes, but from the context of her statement ('showing them what I expected') she probably is closest to Tomasello's *'imitative learning'*, in which the



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individual attempts to reproduce the actual behavior or behavioral strategy of others' (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993, p. 8). While Dana's explicit description of her teaching philosophy recalls Tomasello's notion of 'imitative learning', her questioning strategy described earlier actually fits more closely Tomasello's notion of 'scaffolding', where the teacher guides the child in completing a task understood by the teacher but not yet fully understood by the child by providing clues to simplify the task (Tomasello et al., 1993). In fact, Dana did consciously name her pedagogical strategy 'scaffolding', perhaps drawing on a broader definition of the term more commonly used in teacher education (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), 'That's what I'm doing. I'm scaffolding' (5/20/99). She seems not to distinguish imitative learning from scaffolding, as Tomasello does, but, most importantly, her explicit strategies of posing guiding questions and emulating desired behaviors both strongly imply the testing discourse described by Mehan (1979), where children attempt to demonstrate knowledge by saying what the teacher expects to hear or doing what the teacher expects to see.

In contrast, Freire's implicit notion of dialogic intersubjectivity involves situations where people use the word to frame *their* world. Dialogic intersubjectivity is also crucial to Bakhtin's definition of dialogue, in which unfinalized 'truths' of diverse participants are collided and tested. Bakhtin argues that dialogue requires a non-finalized dialogic partner, where an individual's full range of possible words or actions cannot be known in advance: 'A man never coincides with himself' (Bakhtin & Emerson, 1999, p. 59)—that is, a real person in a real dialogue refuses to be predicted, refuses to be finalized.

Dana, in her role of teacher, tended to finalize the children in her interactions with them. She usually knows what they are going to or must say to be correct. If she holds up a piece of celery and asks what it is in Spanish, the children are expected to name it in Spanish. They might fail to do so, but for this she has a backup plan: acoustic hints, mouth shape, asking others—all designed to ultimately elicit a particular answer.

When a child did not produce the expected answer, she usually rejected his or her answer as incorrect, focusing on eliciting the correct answer she already knows. Bakhtin called such interactions monologic. In monologic interactions, a participant is interested in affirming the truth he or she already possesses and/or on rejecting truths of others that do not fit his/her truth (Bakhtin & Emerson, 1999). Dana was often engaged in monologic interactions with the children because she usually knew what the children would do. A command to clean up

would elicit the expected clean-up behavior, and a command to speak in the appropriate language would elicit language change, or at least a silence, a lack of speaking the non-sanctioned language.

In the previous examples, Dana is solely responsible for meaning in the exchanges she has with children. She knows what the exchanges are about (naming vegetables, cooking for an imaginary playmate) and children do not necessarily share, or even understand, these meanings. Rommetveit (1998) argues that intersubjectivity requires that participants share responsibility for meaning in their dialogues. This shared responsibility does not require shared goals or beliefs, however, and in fact in the conversation example we will analyze the fact that participants have different agendas is crucial to the development of dialogicity. Marková (2003) reminds us that when speakers abandon their stance, their words lose authenticity, and that intersubjectivity is not always destined toward a 'happy unification with the Other' (p. 255). What is required, however, is a temporary repositioning of power (Murakami, 2003), a shift in positionality where participants agree to step out of the authority and non-authority positions long enough to let the more and less powerful voices coexist.

### **Stepping out of the Institution: Coordinating Goals for Sustaining Dialogic Conversation**

In order to better understand why real-life conversation, or dialogue in our own terms, failed to emerge in Dana's classroom, we decided to make a 'reverse analysis', examining in detail an instance of a highly sustained conversation. In Freire's terms, Dana seems in this unusual instance to somehow allow the children 'to name their world' authentically, allowing their words to have meaning beyond simply translating or repeating her own words. In Bakhtin's terms, Dana allows kids in these exchanges to become non-finalized, evident in the fact that she is not sure what they will say next. Although she weaves their response in with her own expectations, she needs to listen to their responses and respond to them in their unpredictable, living state. Close analysis of this conversation suggests that conversational sustainability leading to a genuine dialogue depends not so much on the nature of the initiating utterance, but on the coordination of goals between the teacher and children, each of whom has a different reason for advancing the conversation, reasons which may not be the same but are compatible.

The dialogic conversation takes place during the morning's official Spanish time. Dana discusses *Street Sharks*, a US popular television show, with two boys, Oscar (a native Spanish-speaker) and Ian (a

native English-speaker). She is sitting at the table with the two boys. Oscar is playing with a toy car, which is not related to the television program, and Ian is playing with a *Street Sharks* transformer, a shark that can transform itself into a car.

### Step 1: Refusing to be Finalized

Dana begins the exchange with the same known-answer question that initiated the triadic dialogue exchange illustrated earlier, but with very different results:

Dana asks, indicating Ian's transformer, '¿Y eso. Qué es eso?' (And that? What is that?) She begins to pronounce the Spanish word for shark (*tiburón*), waiting for Ian to finish the word, 'Tibur . . .' Ian makes a sound that is not correct, but similar, 'rai'. Dana corrects him, finishing the word properly, 'rón'. Then she looks at Oscar, who is standing near her, playing with his car. Oscar adds his own observation, 'Y es un carro.' (And it's a car.) Dana repeats, acknowledging and at the same time maintaining her focus on the shark aspect of the transformer, 'Es un carro también, pero es un tiburón también.' (It's a car, too, but it's a shark, too.) Ian adds, in English, 'It's from *Street Sharks*' (a popular television cartoon). Dana turns back to Oscar, continuing to press her focus on target vocabulary, 'Pero ves, esta palabra en español, ¿qué?' (But see, this word in Spanish, what?) Oscar responds, 'tiburón' (shark). He moves to the chair next to Ian and sits down, still playing with his car. Dana repeats, affirmingly, 'Es un tiburón.' (It's a shark.) (3/8/99)

As Dana begins to pronounce *tiburón* (the Spanish word for shark), and waits for Ian to finish the word, it becomes clear that she specifically expects the boy to respond with the Spanish word for shark. Her expectation of a particular response remains apparent as she continues by asking Oscar, a native-Spanish speaker, to provide the word as well. In this sense, Dana begins the exchange by finalizing the boys: she 'knows' what they will say before they respond. Both boys do provide the expected response. However, they refuse to be finalized, and they both volunteer unexpected, unelicited information about the toy (It's a car; It's from *Street Sharks*). Although this exchange cannot be characterized as a dialogue in Freire's or Bakhtin's strict sense, it has some 'germs' of such a dialogue.

### Step 2: Coordinating Goals

While the two boys are willing to meet Dana's goals, they clearly have their own: they both want to share their interest in *Street Sharks* transformers with Dana. As the segment continues, the children and Dana begin to accommodate each other's goals while advancing their own. Dana begins to physically manipulate the toy, while Ian continues to

provide her with the vocabulary words in Spanish as she requests them. It seems that Ian is willing to play Dana's naming game as long as Dana is willing to continue to play the Street Sharks game with him:

Oscar and Ian play for two or three seconds silently, each absorbed in his own toy with no interaction. Ian makes a fierce animal noise, 'Rooaaar!!' as he plays with his shark-car. Dana, watching him, asks, '¿Qué estás haciendo? ¿Hace un carro? ¿Y este hace el carro? Y cuando hace un carro, ¿no puede estar . . . (What are you doing? It makes a car? And this makes the car? And when it makes a car, it can't be . . .) She takes the transformer from Ian's hand and continues, '¿Y de toda manera si lo hace así qué parece?' (And anyway, if we make it like this, what does it look like?) She holds up the transformer with the shark face pointed toward Oscar and Ian, but they do not respond. She continues, '¿No te parece un tiburón?' (Doesn't it look like a shark to you?) She indicates the teeth of the shark with her finger, asking, '¿Qué son estos?' (What are these?) Ian responds, 'dientes' (teeth). Dana confirms his answer, and continues with another known-answer question, 'Son los dientes. ¿Qué se puede hacer con los dientes?' (They are the teeth. And what can you do with teeth?) Ian responds with a close approximation of the correct word, 'Mordar'. Dana corrects him, emphasizing the correct form of the second syllable, 'MordER' (bite). (3/8/99)

Ian seems to know that in order to keep playing with his Street Sharks and in order to engage Dana's attention in his game, he must dutifully name the vocabulary words that Dana requests. Dana seems aware that allowing the children to continue playing is a way to practice vocabulary, so she lets this playing continue, even encouraging it by designing vocabulary practice within the framework of the game. In this sense they coordinate their goals, in that each participant strategically supports the other's goals in order to meet his or her own.

This is not dialogic interaction, but seems to contain elements of proto-dialogic interaction. Ian plays alone, and Dana continues to finalize him (as evidenced by the nature of her questions, which imply an expected correct answer: *tiburón*, *dientes*, *morder*). We consider this interaction to be proto-dialogic, nevertheless, because both participants seem invested in continuing the interaction without interrupting, excluding or resisting the other. Most significantly, Dana, the more powerful participant, does not require that Ian refrain from his playing and participate exclusively as a finalized monologic partner in the exchange, as with Dorinda in the earlier (vegetable-naming) example. In fact, as the exchange continues below, Ian actively maintains his role as non-finalized (proto-)dialogic partner as he initiates a shift in the conversation with an unexpected comment about his brother.

### Step 3: Establishing and Maintaining Intersubjectivity

Despite his willingness to offer up predictable answers to vocabulary 'questions', Ian seems to have decided that he has more to offer the conversation. Furthermore, when Dana seems to ignore him, he strategically recasts his comment in the appropriate language (Spanish) to achieve his purpose. As the segment continues, Dana's attention shifts to another group of children who are calling out questions to her. As she turns her head and begins to speak with these children, Ian bids for her attention:

Ian first tries to engage Dana in English, 'My brother got a flying thing.' Dana does not respond; in fact, she seems not to have heard him, as she is intently focused on other children. As she continues to speak with the others, Ian moves his chair closer to Dana and shifts to Spanish, the officially sanctioned language, 'Sra. Stefano. Mi amando . . .' He seems to be trying to say 'Mi hermano' (My brother) and at this point he stops, leans over, and pats her arm to get her attention, but she is still talking to the other children. He tries again, 'Mi hermano tengo un . . . un . . . un . . . acabón . . .' (My brother I have a . . . a . . . a . . .) He tries to approximate the word 'tiburón' (shark). Dana finally notices Ian and turns toward him, and he continues, 'mi mano tengo un tiburón tengo . . .' (My hand I have a shark I have . . .). At this point he switches back to English, 'Has . . . has' and then stops, flapping his arms to indicate wings. Dana finishes the sentence for him, 'Que tiene . . . ¿que puede volar?' (That has . . . that can fly?) Ian replies, 'Si.' (Yes). (3/8/99)

Interesting here are Ian's strategies for winning Dana's attention. One of Dana's very consistent classroom policies was to establish an atmosphere of artificial language constraint, where she generally refused to communicate with and sometimes pretended not to understand the children when they spoke in English during Spanish Time. In this instance, it seems that Dana genuinely has not heard Ian speaking in English, as her attention is entirely focused on the children in the adjacent Blocks play center. Nevertheless, Ian seems to believe that Dana has invoked her Spanish-only rule in her usual fashion, and he switches to Spanish as an attention-getting strategy. He translates his English statement rather painstakingly into Spanish. Finally his efforts yield success, and Dana indicates that she is once again engaged in the conversation by turning to him and completing the sentence in Spanish that she imagines, from his halting mixture of Spanish and English, accompanied by gestures, that he wishes to convey.

Ian's efforts convey that he is trying to establish dialogic intersubjectivity with Dana. Each time he spontaneously initiates a conversation with her, he is unexpected and unfinalized. While Ian doesn't resist Dana's finalizing questions, he insists on contributing something new. Ian manages to communicate to Dana something she cannot already

know: that his brother has a shark that flies, which actually shifts the shared focus of the conversation to this unexpected and strange new information.

### **Having Achieved Intersubjectivity, Sustainability Ensues**

Once re-engaged, however, Dana continues the conversation as a language lesson. But by this time, the exchange has turned into some kind of a humorous game, where Dana pretends to be incredulous that sharks can fly, and the boys delight in the pretence, smiling and laughing as they dutifully respond to the vocabulary questions embedded in her jokes. This time, when Dana is again interrupted by another child, she barely notices:

Dana continues, pressing Ian to remember the Spanish word, '¿Qué decimos que son esas?' (What do we say those are?) She flaps her arms a little to indicate flying. Ian replies correctly, 'Alas' (Wings). Dana affirms his answer, 'Son las alas. ¿Tiene un tiburón que vuela? ¿Como que tiene un tiburón que vuela?' (They are the wings. He has a shark that flies? How is it that he has a shark that flies?) She is smiling at this point, and her voice takes on a joking tone of exaggerated incredulity. Ian shrugs. At this point a girl makes a very aggressive bid for Dana's attention, thrusting her hand, which is gripping a toy, in front of Dana's face and asking, '¿Puedo jugar con esto?' (Can I play with this?) Dana, barely noticing her, says, 'Sí, puedes' (Yes, you can) and, with hardly a pause, turns back to Ian and continues, in the same joking tone of voice and still smiling, '¿Los tiburones vuelan? (Sharks fly?). (3/8/99)

By the time Dana is interrupted a second time by the children in the neighboring play center, she is so deeply involved in her conversation with the boys that she doesn't even turn her head, responding tersely and continuing her conversation without changing the tone of voice or losing the thread of the conversation. Apparently dialogic intersubjectivity has been achieved by pursuing their different but aligned goals. While teacher and children are mutually engaged in the Street Sharks topic at hand, their diverse goals are brought into alignment: Dana's interest in pursuing the vocabulary around flying sharks can be pursued by joking with the boys about them, and it is clear here from her joking tone of voice and the smiles all around that all parties are happily engaged in the exchange:

Dana looks over at Oscar, who shakes his head, smiling, and then she asks them, '¿Donde viven los tiburones?' (Where do sharks live?) Ian and Oscar, both smiling, call out 'Agua!' (Water!) Dana, laughing, says, 'En el agua. ¿Porque tienen alas?' (In the water. Why do they have wings?) Ian answers in English, 'They made them on TV.' Dana translates this directly into Spanish, '¿Los hicieron en la televisión?' (They made them on TV?) Ian nods, tracing a square in the air with both arms, and again speaking in English,

'They have them in the box.' Dana again translates, 'En la caja' (In the box). Ian repeats her translation of his English phrase, 'En la caja.' Dana repeats, completing the sentence, 'Las tienen en la caja (They have them in the box). She looks at Oscar and asks, '¿Tú sabes este programa de que está hablando?' (Do you know this program that he's talking about?) Orlando nods and smiles. Dana continues, '¿Y a tí te gusta también?' (And you like it, too?) Oscar, still smiling, nods again. (3/8/99)

This rather intense and lengthy mutual engagement is finally interrupted by the celebrated arrival of Khamil, an English-speaker who has been out sick and suddenly, upon his arrival, becomes the class-wide center of attention. The children gather around them as Dana spends a few seconds speaking with Khamil, asking him questions about his health. Ian stands nearby, watching Khamil intently and playing with his Street Shark. Nevertheless, even after such a distraction, the conversational thread is not entirely broken, because eventually Ian hands Khamil the transformer. Dana looks at the transformer and returns to the Street Sharks thread:

Ian hands Khamil the transformer and Dana says to Khamil, '¿Sabes lo que es?' (Do you know what it is?) Then she looks at Ian, 'Dile lo que es en español' (Tell him what it is in Spanish). Ian says something that is close to 'tiburón' (shark), but not exactly correct, 'tibreón'. Dana corrects him, 'tiburón'. Khamil and Ian walk off together towards the Blocks area, and Ian say to Khamil, in English, 'It's from *Street Sharks*.' Khamil says, also in English, 'You watch it?' (3/8/99)

Surprisingly, this conversational thread lasted for thirty turns, persisting even in the face of persistent interruption from other children, and despite the fact that Dana began it in the same way that she began so many of her less successful exchanges, with a known-answer question focused on vocabulary practice.

### **An Analysis: What Went Right and Why?**

Dana began the exchange rather inauspiciously with a typical triadic dialogue question: '¿Qué es eso?' (What is that?) The fact that she required Ian to translate his response into Spanish suggests that her question was not an open-ended one, but that she had pretty clear expectations of what the answer should be. It is Ian who steps outside of the institutional tradition. He answers her and dutifully attempts the word in Spanish at her urging, but he also refuses to be finalized in that way. He insists on participating in the conversation as a fully living and unpredictable person, but at the same time meeting her expectations. Dana may not have been able to consciously initiate this

kind of conversation, but was able to shift her participation strategy once Ian made the crucial conversational gambit of introducing his own goals.

Children's goals in the classroom may vary, depending on the activity and their relationships with each other, the teacher, and even their experience within the educational institution. While it is unlikely that teachers and children share goals, coordination of these goals is a more realistic option. Coordination is one of several possibilities for the structure of joint activity in a classroom (Matusov & White, 1996). Collaboration, which requires developing shared problems and shared goals, does not seem a likely element in most traditional educational settings, where the teacher's goals are oriented towards standards and other institutional expectations that children are unlikely even to understand or be aware of. However, cooperation, which requires only that goals are compatible, seems a more realistic possibility in traditional school settings such as the one described in this paper.

Dana and the boys did not *share* goals. The boys seemed to want to both play with Street Sharks transformers and explain to Dana about *Street Sharks*. Dana, as usual, wanted the boys to practice Spanish vocabulary. The key seems to lie in the coordination of their strategies for achieving these goals. The boys, especially Ian, determined that the best way to keep Dana engaged while explaining about Street Sharks was to play by the language rules that they knew very well so far: repeat Dana's Spanish words as requested and try to speak Spanish whenever possible. Dana seems to have discovered that she can have the boys practice target vocabulary through appearing interested in *Street Sharks*, and eventually she seems to realize that she can use humor to transform her typically lackluster 'What is this?'-type question to encourage the children to use key words such as 'tiburón' and 'alas' through feigning disbelief that a shark who lives in the water might need wings. Since Dana and the boys, especially Ian, advance each other's goals through the strategies they have chosen to advance their own goals, intersubjectivity is maintained, and the conversation continues.

This sustained proto-dialogic conversation highlights the important of recognizing the role played by the children's goals in maintaining a mutual engagement (intersubjectivity). Naturally, Dana's goal as a teacher in a program designed to promote language development is to practice language. While the children may also be interested in language development, it is unrealistic to assume that this goal of language learning leads children's activities as they engage in play in the same way as it leads Dana as she engages in her teaching activities.



Wong-Fillmore (1991) describes the elements necessary for language learning in a social setting to take place:

*Learners* who realize that they need to learn the target language (TL) and are motivated to do so;

*Speakers of the target language* who know it well enough to provide the learners with access to the language and the help they need for learning it; and

*A social setting* which brings learners and TL speakers into frequent enough contact to make language learning possible. (pp. 52–53)

Wong-Fillmore's analysis does not seem to adequately emphasize that children's activity is goal-oriented, directed toward goals among which language learning may not figure prominently. Language learning may figure more prominently in children's goals if the only way they can achieve their goals (of play, of communication with peers and the teacher) is through communicating in the target language, as in the case for English language learners in a monolingual English classroom or in a multilingual classroom where English is the *lingua franca*. However, this is not the case for Spanish language learners in this dual-language classroom, where most of the children are able to communicate in English. Spanish in this classroom was not an immediate salient goal of these children, nor did it help advance any of the salient goals (like playing with transformers).

The analysis of this exceptional case yields some hopeful evidence that indeed the classroom institutional context may provide some space for the sort of dialogue advocated as authentic (Freire) and genuine (Bakhtin). For teachers, and particularly those interested in second- (as well as first-)language development, this sort of dialogue may be essential for meeting at least one of their own pedagogical goals. The trick is to identify and subvert the institutional discourse norms, which in general foster a very different and counter-productive sort of 'conversation', which, we argue, is not any kind of (real-life) conversation (i.e. dialogue) at all.

## Notes

1. The names of the teacher and her students are all pseudonyms.
2. Here and further in the article, 'I' refers to the first author, who collected the data and made the primary analysis.
3. The apparent sexism of the quote is probably caused by a literal and not quite culturally sensitive translation of Freire from Portuguese into English.

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### Biographies

RENÉE HAYES received her Ph.D. at the University of Delaware and now lives in Galicia, in northern Spain. She is interested in improving the institution of education for everyone, but particularly for those who are systematically disadvantaged by it. To this end, she considers analysis of power relations as well as the discursive processes that help to maintain them to be important tools for transformation. ADDRESS: Renée Hayes, Cameliás 100, 6-D, 36211 Vigo, Spain. [email: rhayes@mundo-r.com]

EUGENE MATUSOV is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Delaware. He was born in the Soviet Union. He studied developmental psychology with Soviet researchers working in the Vygotskian paradigm and worked as a school teacher before emigrating to the United States. He uses sociocultural and dialogic approaches to learning, which he views as transformation of participation in a sociocultural practice. ADDRESS: Eugene Matusov, School of Education, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, USA. [email: ematusov@udel.edu]