Frogs Eat Fish: Communication and Observation in the Preschool Classroom

Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth, and Education Studies Major at Clark University

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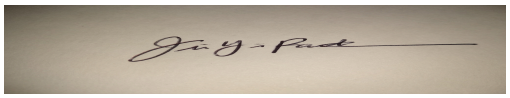

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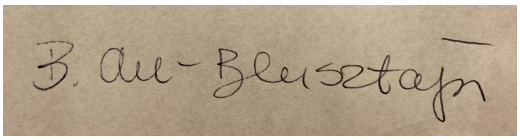

Basia Au-Blusztajn

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“If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.” - Paulo Freire (1970)

In other words…

“My mouth needs to talk!” - My 3.5-year-old student, 2022

Abstract

Over the summer of 2024, my co-teachers and I observed the verbal communication of 20 of our 2.5-almost 6 year old preschool students in order to find out what we can learn through this observation about our students and their communication in the classroom. In analyzing these observations, I found the following: 1) all communication serves a purpose; 2) students view teachers as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge; 3) students view themselves and their peers as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge; 4) teachers place students as and make space for students to place themselves as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge; 5) students communicate to follow rules and morals; 6) students enjoy communicating with their teachers and peers, and 7) verbal communication sometimes does not occur when teachers expect it to or can be "incomplete". In this paper, I explore these ideas using constructivism, speech act theory, and various ideas about communication, community, observation, and reflection.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my readers, my praxis cohort, my co-teachers, and my students for your help with this project. Thank you to my family and friends for putting up with the fact that pretty much the only thing I have talked about for the past year and a half is praxis, and funny stories about my students, which I guess is also part of this. Thank you to all of my students and co-teachers, past, present, and future, for helping me become a better teacher every day.

To my co-teachers - may your art closet always be organized, may your pens and markers always have caps, and may you never lose an entire curriculum bin (I still don't know how we managed to do that).

To my students - may your shoes always be on the right feet, may you only eat things that are edible, and may your mouth always need to talk.

And finally, thank you to frogs for eating fish, and thank you to my students for sharing with me this very important information.

Introduction

It's Monday morning at the preschool[1]. The students are going to arrive in about fifteen minutes, and two teachers are already busy in class 1, the "toddler classroom". While Mrs. F prepares an art project, I prepare other activities for the kids to do during our morning "free-play" time. Mrs. F and I talk as we work, planning the day and asking for each other's opinions on the materials we are getting out. I start with my favorite task, organizing the books on the bookshelf. The teachers care more about the books being organized than the students do, but it's important to teach them to take good care of our classroom materials. Next, I get out toys for the students to play with on the floor. I choose the dollhouse, a box of legos, and the foam blocks. The legos and the blocks are going on the same rug, so I make sure to set them far enough apart so that they create two separate play areas. I know that this won't work for one of my students, and I'll have to remind him to bring back the legos that he'll inevitably be carrying around the classroom. I think I'll sit on the floor near the legos if he is playing in that area. Finally, I put three puzzles on the green table.

Mrs. F is done preparing for the art project, and she puts the materials near the other table and sits down. We talk about how glad we are that Mrs. S organized the art closet recently. I'm on the other side of the room, trying to turn on music. Once I get the old iPod, which I call the "rotary iPod" working, I choose a Simon and Garfunkel album (to "manifest the Sound of Silence" in the classroom, even though I know there will be no silence here for at least nine more hours) and sit down at the table with Mrs. F. I used to like to sit in the rocking chair until the kids came, but someone got rid of it because teachers usually sit on the floor or at the table with the kids.

[1] This vignette is based on an actual group of students that I had (not the students that are represented in my data) and the actual events that would happen in the classroom every morning.

No sooner had Mrs. F and I sat down than did families start arriving. As soon as the clock hits 8:30, exhausted parents and energetic toddlers file in the door, recounting the events of their weekends. One family went on a trip, one family got no sleep, one child learned a new word ("it sounds like a bad word, but it's not" says his particularly exhausted but amused dad). Parents help their children take off their outdoor clothes and wash their hands, and kids enter the classroom to start free-play time. A 3.5-year-old wearing a hand-me-down dress from her friend refuses to turn off the water when she is done washing her hands, and her grown-up does it for her. I bet she will do it herself later when grown-ups are gone. She enters the classroom and greets her best friend, a tall three-year-old with bright red hair, and they begin to play with the blocks. A two-year-old with curly hair and dimples runs into the classroom and looks out the window to see if there are any birds at the bird feeder. He is followed by our youngest student, an almost-two-year-old wearing one, or three, too many sweaters, who confidently marches into the classroom and gets out his container of play-dough. He has been known to throw away play-dough, so I make sure to keep an eye on him. Back in the cubby area, Mrs. F says "Good morning!" to a two-year-old with brown hair. He yells "No!" and runs back to his dad. When Mrs. F looks away, he enters the classroom and starts reading a book. The next student to enter the classroom is a three-year-old who, as I suspected, runs directly to the legos and spreads them around the classroom. I position myself between the lego situation and the play-dough situation. The last students to arrive are three-year-old twins. They are wearing different hairstyles today, which should make them easier to tell apart. They are always hard to tell apart from the back when they are wearing the same hairstyle.

It was in this busy, vibrant, and sometimes hectic environment that I came up with the idea for this praxis project. I had originally wanted to focus only on language learning, looking at

how my students use Spanish during my Spanish classes, but each time I entered the classroom, I was struck by the variety of language happening both inside and outside of Spanish class and other teacher-led activities. Students talk to each other and to their teachers using many different forms of communication, and sometimes multiple languages. Teachers lead lessons, engage in reading, play, and other activities with their students, and ensure that students are following classroom rules and staying safe, while communicating with each other in order to stay on the same page about the events of the day and how to handle different situations and teach different topics.

I have also always had the idea that my school must be doing something right. In many schools, teachers are only expected to present information, and students are only expected to memorize and recite this information. Many scholars have discussed this type of education (Alam, 2013; Bybee, 2020; Kalsoom et al., 2020) which Freire calls the "banking model of education" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). This type of education silences students and undermines communication between members of the classroom community. If communication only takes two forms, the presentation of the material by the teacher and the recitation of the material by the students, then I believe that effective education can not occur, because students miss opportunities to learn valuable communication skills, critical thinking skills, and other abilities that they will need throughout their lives. My school values communication, and we do not use communication as a way for teachers to "deposit" knowledge into students. But what *does* a school that values communication look like? What separates us from the type of school described above? Can I claim that my school is a "good school" if I can only back up this claim with the vague word "communication"? If my school is doing something right, how can I bring this into every school that I work at in the future?

To understand what our school and our students can teach us about communication, some of my co-teachers and I observed the verbal communication of our students throughout the 2024 summer session at our school. My goal was to investigate the following overarching question: What can observing our preschool students' communication teach us about how communication works in the classroom and how our students communicate? by answering the following questions:

- How do my students communicate with their teachers?
    - E.g. How do they ask for help? What types of knowledge do they share with their teachers?
- How do my students communicate with their peers?
    - E.g. How do they solve a problem together? What types of knowledge do they share with their peers?
- How do my students participate in teacher-led activities?
    - E.g. What types of questions do they ask? How do they answer questions from teachers?
- How do my students communicate outside of teacher-led activities?
    - E.g. What do students talk about? How do they use and share knowledge that they learned inside and outside of school?
- How do students and teachers build knowledge at my school?
    - E.g. What knowledge do students share? What questions do they ask? How do students and teachers work together to create knowledge?

Towards the end of this paper, I have included a plan for how to go about communicating with students and observing their communication. These methods of communication and

observation are intended to be used and built upon by myself throughout my career, and by any other teachers who are interested.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

I believe that communication and learning are intertwined. Students can only truly engage in the topics they are learning if they are active participants in the classroom environment, which includes engaging in communication with their teachers and peers and being talked *with* not *at*. This requires teachers who are willing to listen to and engage with their students, understanding that their students come into the classroom with all of their past experiences and knowledge, and being willing to work together with them rather than throwing information at them and hoping it sticks.

Knowledge requires understanding. A student who can recite a fact may not truly understand the topic at hand. When teachers communicate *with* their students, engaging with them in dialogue about the topic and encouraging them to ask questions and share their own knowledge and ideas, students can build on their prior knowledge and experiences to better understand the world around them.

The following theories inform how I listen to and communicate with my students, how I observe their communication, and how I understand the role and function of communication in the classroom.

Constructivism

Schcolnik et al. (2006) define constructivism as "a theory of learning which posits that students learn by actively constructing their own knowledge" (p. 12). According to Bada and Olusegun (2015), constructivism is based on the ideas that "teachers cannot simply transmit knowledge to students, but students need to actively construct knowledge in their own minds" (p. 66) and that "learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning" (p. 67).

According to Schcolnik et al., there are two main approaches to constructivism. They mention cognitive constructivism, based on the work of Piaget, which concentrates on how knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner, and social constructivism, based on the work of Vygotsky, which focuses on the role of the environment that the learner interacts with and the role of interaction between learners. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Schcolnik et al. say that "we cannot possibly understand how individuals think without an appreciation of the cultural context in which their thoughts developed", and therefore cognition and the environmental and social influences described by social constructivism are "inextricably entwined" and "both are involved in the process of learning and have implications for education" (p. 13).

According to Hein (1991), some of the guiding principles of constructivist thinking include that "the language we use influences learning" and that "learning is a social activity" because "our learning is intimately associated with our connection with other human beings, our teachers, our peers, our family as well as casual acquaintances" (p. 4). Schcolnik et al. and Bada and Olusegun also emphasize the importance of communication to learning according to constructivism. Schcolnik et al. suggest that "since dialogue, discussion, and interchange affect learning, teachers should allow for activities requiring communication and exchange of ideas" (p.

13). Bada and Olusegun provide a description of what constructivist learning environments look like in practice and show how communication plays a role in these environments. They mention that one of the basic characteristics of constructivist learning environments is that "knowledge will be shared between teachers and students" (p. 68). They also mention that constructivism "promotes social and communication skills by creating a classroom environment that emphasizes collaboration and exchange of ideas" (p. 68), and that constructivist teachers "encourage student inquiry by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions and encourage students to ask questions to each other and seek elaboration of students' initial responses" (p. 69) and "have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge" (p. 68). As suggested by social constructivism, social interaction plays a large role in how people make sense of the world. When teachers and students communicate with each other and share ideas, they work together to construct knowledge.

The materials and activities involved in the environment of the constructivist classroom also work to help students construct their own knowledge. According to Schcolnik et al., the constructivist learning environment "should not impart knowledge but rather support the learners' construction of knowledge", so therefore, "learners should be exposed to materials, experiences, and situations from which they can inductively build their own knowledge" (p. 13). Bada and Olusegun say that the constructivist classroom includes "primary sources of material and manipulative materials" (p. 68). This is opposed to the traditional classroom, which contains "primarily textbooks and workbooks" (p. 68). They describe the constructivist teacher as a teacher who can "use a wide variety of materials, including raw data, primary sources, and interactive materials and encourage students to use them" (p. 69). The materials and activities in a constructivist classroom encourage students to explore the subjects they are learning about and

come up with their own ideas by having hands-on experiences with materials and direct experiences with primary sources, and by collaborating with others.

Two other important aspects of constructivism are flexibility and time. According to Schcolnik et al., "making room for constructivism requires flexibility and the willingness to preplan only a generic curriculum" (p. 15). They discuss cognitive flexibility, which "consists of the ability to look at reality from a variety of viewpoints and then construct knowledge from all these different representations", task flexibility, which includes "multiple tasks, multiple options within a task, and multiple modes of representation" and curricular flexibility, which requires a variety of materials and "allows the instructor to be responsive to the needs of the class as they arise and to make room for experimentation with student choice and preference" (p. 16). Teaching and learning in this flexible and student-centered way requires time. According to Hein, "learning is not instantaneous" because "for significant learning we need to revisit ideas, ponder them, try them out, play with them and use them" (p. 4). Schcolnik et al. agree that time is required for effective learning, saying that "transmission is probably less time-consuming than discovery and absorption and therefore may appear to be more 'efficient'; but if we are interested in effective learning, we need to allot time for that purpose" (p. 15). Just like how the role of the student must expand beyond that of a passive receiver of information, the role of the teacher must expand beyond that of someone who only presents information. Teachers must be willing to listen to their students and adapt to their needs in order to participate in the creation of knowledge with them, and this requires their teaching to be flexible and also requires them to take the time for this co-creation of knowledge.

Observation is important in this process of listening to students and adapting to their needs, but I was unable to identify any literature that talks specifically about observation in the

constructivist classroom. I hope to address this gap with this paper, as my project is an example of how observation can work in the constructivist classroom.

As I teach, I aim to center my students and give them the space to share knowledge, collaborate with others to build knowledge, and discover the world for themselves. With this project, I am investigating the role that communication and observation play in this type of education.

Speech Act Theory

In addition to looking at what my students are saying and how they are saying it, I am also looking at students' intentions in their communication. All communication has a purpose, and it is important that teachers know what students are attempting to *do* as they communicate.

According to Austin (1975), there are utterances in which "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (p. 6). The purpose of these "performative utterances" is not to "*describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (p. 6). In other words, according to Austin, *to say* can be *to do*. Austin initially says that specific utterances, such as "I bet…" or "I do", in specific conditions, perform specific acts such as making a bet or getting married. He then claims that we do three different acts every time we say something: a locutionary act, which is the speaker referring to what they are referring to, an illocutionary act, which is the speaker's intention, and a perlocutionary act, which is what happens as a result of the utterance. An example that Austin uses is "He said to me, 'You can't do that'" (p.102), in which the locutionary act is the speaker referring to me and what I can't do, the illocutionary act is him protesting against my doing of the action, and the perlocutionary act is whatever effect his protesting has on me, such as him stopping me and

bringing me to my senses or him annoying me. Searle (1969) builds on the work of Austin[2], and focuses primarily on illocutionary acts. He states that "all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts" (p. 16) and that "the speech act is the basic unit of communication" (p. 21).

Gasparatou (2018) discusses how speech act theory can be applied to education. Drawing on Austin's idea that there are three necessities for a performative utterance to function: the speaker's intentions, the following of conventions, and the speaker's authority, Gasparatou proposes that education is perhaps the "very best arena" for speech act theory, because these intentions, conventions, and authorities are "clear most of the time" (p. 3). According to Gasparatou, the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions that are considered in speech act theory can all be "useful tools in order to look closely and analyze the different aspects of educational practice" because "locutions point to all kinds of information we pass on; illocutions on all the many ways we use to do it; perlocutions on all kinds of results we get" (p. 4). Gasparatou is referring here to how educators' utterances can be analyzed using speech act theory, but speech act theory can also be applied to students' utterances, looking at what information students pass on, the ways they do this, and what happens as a result.

Gasparatou also suggests emotion as a fourth dimension to speech act theory. They say that "the original speech act theory is totally blind to the emotive force that is present in all our utterances", and suggest that "every utterance has an emotive force that adds to its meaning" (p. 5). They point out that "moods, personal values, intentions, but also customs, communal practices, even stereotypes, and biases are expressed by our emotional speech acts" (p. 6), and that this is particularly important to take into account in an educational setting, because "education relies on some kind of relation between the speakers" which "depends on the emotions and the attitudes of both parties" (p. 9). This fourth dimension suggests that when

[2] Austin's *How to do Things With Words* was originally published in 1962.

considering speech act theory, especially in an educational setting, not only must the emotions behind each utterance be considered, but also the relationship between the speaker and the receiver, which, as Gasparatou describes, is dependent on these emotions.

Speech act theory has also been used in the context of language learning and intercultural communication. According to Zhao and Throssell (2011), "understanding the connections between culture and communication is critical to improving intercultural interactions" (p. 90). They say that "evidence shows that people with different cultural backgrounds find it particularly difficult to communicate with each other" (p. 90). One reason that this type of communication can be difficult, according to Zhao and Throssel, is because "different cultures, even different communities in the same culture may have different rules in carrying out the speech acts, so it is very important to understand the sets of formulas associated with the speech acts in intercultural communication" (p. 91).

Because of this challenge, Zhao and Throssell suggest that language learners should acquire pragmatic competence, which means that they "have to know the culturally proper ways" to carry out different speech acts such as greetings, requests, and apologies, and that they should be aware of how their utterances can "be considered differently by others with different cultural backgrounds" (p. 91). Therefore, teachers should "take into consideration cultural factors and imbed culture in the linguistic forms that students are learning" and allow learners to "practice the target language in real life to achieve communicative purposes" using activities such as role playing or watching and discussing material in the target language (p. 92). Zhao and Throssell's recommendations suggest that constructivist ways of teaching that allow students to participate in immersive activities and communicate with each other allow them to practice new ways of communication and understand how speech acts work in different contexts.

In any classroom, especially a classroom with students from many different linguistic backgrounds, it is important to understand what students are *doing* with their words. Every student communicates in their own unique way, and every utterance has a different meaning, purpose, and set of emotions behind it, and a different effect that comes from it.

Constructivism and Speech Act Theory in This Project and in My Teaching

Constructivism and speech act theory inform my teaching and have informed many aspects of this project. As I observed my students and as I analyzed my data, I needed to take into account what students were doing, or what they were attempting to do, with their words in order to consider the role of each type of communication in the classroom. I needed to take a constructivist lens to do this, understanding that communication in the classroom can and should be more than just the presentation of material by the teachers and the recitation of the material by the students.

Both speech act theory and constructivism emphasize the importance of listening to students. Speech act theory suggests that I should listen carefully to my students' intentions when they speak and the purposes behind what they say. Constructivism suggests that listening to students is important because all members of the classroom community play an important role in the creation of knowledge in the classroom, and therefore all members of the classroom community need to have their voices heard and their ideas listened to.

Conceptual Framework

Communication, Dialogue, and Listening

As I describe throughout this paper, there are always many different forms of communication happening in the classroom. All of these forms of communication are integral

parts of the classroom environment. Therefore, it is important for me to have definitions of words such as communication and dialogue that work in the context of my classrooms, in order to understand what is happening in these classrooms.

There are many definitions of communication, dialogue, and other related words such as conversation, interaction, discussion, and discourse. Merriam-Webster defines communication as "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior" and dialogue as "a conversation between two or more persons", "an exchange of ideas and opinions", or "a discussion between representatives of parties to a conflict that is aimed at resolution." Because children communicate and dialogue in different ways than adults, for the purposes of this paper, I will use broad definitions of communication and dialogue to account for all of the ways that my students communicate and dialogue. I will define communication as "an utterance or other action made by an individual with the intent of engaging in or participating in an interaction" and dialogue as "an interaction between two or more individuals in which all are actively engaged in communicating with and listening to each other." Throughout this paper, I will also be using the words "conversation" and "discussion" as synonyms for the type of dialogue that I described above, as these are the words that I typically used while writing my observations.

Many scholars have emphasized the importance of communication and dialogue to education, and to the human experience in general. According to Jourard (1978) "Education, if it is anything, is dialogue. It is an invitation from someone, living or dead, to engage in a process which enlarges one's perspective. If education is not dialogue, then it is not education" (p. 1). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire calls dialogue an "existential necessity" because "if it is in

speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (p. 88).

Skidmore (2006) discusses many different ways of using dialogue in the classroom, including dialogic instruction "characterized by the teacher's uptake of student ideas, authentic questions and the opportunity for students to modify the topic", dialogic inquiry "which stresses the potential of collaborative group work and peer assistance to promote mutually responsive learning in the zone of proximal development", dialogical pedagogy "in which students are invited to retell stories in their own words, using paraphrase, speculation and counter-fictional utterances", and dialogic teaching "which is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful" (p. 503). After considering all of these pedagogies, they conclude that "there is a well-articulated case for valuing the character of classroom discourse as one of the most important influences on students' experience of learning in schools" (p. 510) and that "more dialogic modes of interaction, in which students play an active part in shaping the verbal agenda of classroom discussion, can help them to secure improved attainments in outcome, when compared with the results of teacher-dominated transmission approaches" (p. 511).

As discussed earlier in my theoretical framework, communication is essential in the constructivist classroom. The authors that I discuss here share the view that communication and learning are intertwined, with Skidmore suggesting that involving dialogue in the classroom is beneficial to students and that it influences students' learning experiences, and Jourard and Freire suggesting that dialogue is essential for education and for life itself. My students learn and experience many different things inside and outside of the classroom, and it is important that their voices are heard and that they are given the space to communicate about their knowledge and experiences.

For this to happen, it is important that teachers *listen* to the communication that is happening in their classrooms. It is especially important for teachers to listen to students, because young people's voices often get overlooked in education and in society in general. According to Kirshner (2015), young people are often seen as too impulsive, emotional, irrational, and immature to participate in making decisions about education and other matters that pertain to their lives. Kishner is mostly referring to teenagers, but this also applies to even younger children as well, as their voices also deserve to be heard but are often overlooked.

When working with young children, it is even more important to be intentional about listening to their voices, because they are in earlier stages of learning how to communicate, and therefore their voices are even more likely to be overlooked if teachers are not careful. Some scholars have discussed listening to young students and how it can improve educational experiences for them. Cruz and Schramm (2019) and de Souza and Cruz (2019) discuss how listening to what young students have to say about their schools can help to reveal the challenges that they face and improve their schools.

As I described in my theoretical framework, both constructivism and speech act theory require listening. Listening is important in the constructivist classroom. As all members of the classroom community share their own knowledge, ideas, and experiences, it is important that all of their voices are heard so that everyone can work together to build knowledge. Considering speech act theory, teachers should listen to what students are saying, the intentions and purposes behind what they say, and the effects that their utterances have. Considering Gasparatou's (2018) fourth dimension of speech act theory, the emotive force behind each utterance, teachers should also be aware of the emotions and values behind what students say and the relationships between members of the classroom community. In my action plan, I have included methods of

communicating with students and observing and reflecting on their communication that have allowed my co-teachers and I to be intentional about listening to our students and centering their voices.

Community

Like many schools, one of the core values of my school is community. We are often praised for our "good school community", and we often use words such as "community", "collaboration", and "collective effort" to describe how our school "works".

Many scholars suggest that there has been a shift from viewing education as an individual activity to an activity that is done as part of a community. Roth and Lee (2006) say that "past educational improvement endeavors were basically centered on the learner as an individual" but that "this apparently changed by the early 1990s after an increasing number of educators and researchers embraced sociocultural learning concepts such as 'communities of practice,' 'communities of learning,' and 'knowledge-building communities'" (p. 1). Meltzoff (1994) connects the idea of the classroom community to the idea that "interest in commitment and community is increasing in the public sphere as people recognize the interconnectedness of environmental, political, and social systems" (pp. 13-14).

If "community" is an abstract concept that many schools claim to value, what does community look like in the classroom?

Meltzoff uses the metaphor of weaving to describe classroom communities, in which "each individual strand interacts with others to form an integrated whole" and "the beauty of the weaving is created by the relationships of the strands, one to another" (p. 15). They describe the "strands" of classroom community, which are "shared leadership, responsiveness,

communication, moral unity, cooperation as a social process, shared history, shared environment, identification/involvement, wholeness," and "interdependence" (P.16).

Watkins (2005) describes classroom communities that value student agency, belonging, responsibility, diversity, student engagement, respect, learning together, and metacognition. They say that "a classroom run as a learning community operates on the understanding that the growth of knowledge involves individual and social processes" and that "it aims to enhance individual learning that is both a contribution to their own learning and the group's learning, and does this through supporting individual contributions to a communal effort" (p. 57). They conclude that there is "adequate evidence to support the idea that the development of learning communities should be a key feature of twenty-first century schools" (p. 59).

As Meltzoff and Watkins describe, the classroom community involves a variety of different factors. An effective classroom community requires communication and the sharing of ideas between all members of the community, working together to create knowledge and participate in shared experiences, and all members of the community respecting one another and listening to each other's voices.

Communication and Community Cannot be Separated

According to Etymonline.com, the words communication and community both come from the Latin word "communis", which means "common, public, general, shared by all or many".

One of the major strands of the classroom community that Meltzoff describes is communication. They say that "as teachers encourage children to be responsive and to

communicate clearly, they make it possible for the children to participate in a community, to have a voice" (p.17).

Skidmore also explains a teacher's role in communication and classroom community, saying that a dialogical pedagogy:

> "signals the co-presence of the teacher as a concerned other, available to guide and coach the learner, as a member of a community of learners, through the emotional rollercoaster ride of self-development, from the mixture of curiosity and apprehension we often experience when approaching the not-yet-known for the first time, through the solidarity of mutual encouragement which can help overcome the confusion and uncertainty involved in practising a new type of knowledge-activity for the first time, to the thrill of shared discovery and personal growth felt at the moment of breakthrough when one confidently masters a new way of doing things." (p. 513)

Here, the teacher is not someone whose job is only to present material to students, but someone who is a member of a classroom community and whose role in this community is to guide and coach. Skidmore says that "a shift in pedagogical practice along these lines might help to rehumanize an education system rendered radically hostile to emotional wellbeing by the drilling-and-testing didactics generated by the marketization of schooling" (p. 513).

Classrooms that value community and classrooms that value communication are often one and the same. The way members of a classroom community communicate with each other defines what the classroom community will look like. If the forms of communication present in the classroom only allow for teachers to transmit knowledge to students and students to passively accept knowledge, then the classroom community will be one that only includes transmitters of knowledge and passive receptors of knowledge. If a greater variety of forms of communication

are present in the classroom, including communication that allows students more agency in their learning, then the classroom community will be one in which all members learn together.

Literature Review

Introduction

To start my literature review, I began by searching for literature on communication in the classroom more broadly, with search terms such as "communication in the classroom" and "language in the classroom" on sites such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ERIC.

I found that much of the literature on the importance of communication in the classroom setting is written in reference to K-12 and college classrooms. Some of the literature on younger K-12 students is helpful for my research, as case studies of students of this age can reveal teaching techniques and ways of communication in the classroom that can be adapted for the preschool classroom. Roberta Hunter (2005) describes a case study of a teacher in New Zealand and her primary school math classroom. She describes classroom communities that are based on inquiry and argument, and depicts the experiences of the teacher and students as they implemented these strategies, including quotations from the students and teacher during the class and quotations from an interview with the teacher. Hunter concludes that "the enactment of a mathematical discourse culture based on inquiry and argument increased student autonomy and deepened the collective responsibility of the students to engage in mathematical practices" (p. 458). Students communicating to create and share knowledge is just as important with other subjects and age groups, including in the preschool classroom.

I spent most of my time looking for similar literature that discusses preschool-age children, using search terms such as "communication in the preschool classroom" and "language

in the preschool classroom" in the same databases. I did not narrow my search based on publication year, but I did include or exclude articles based on their relevance to my project, for example, I did not include the many results of these searches that did not specifically have to do with preschool-age children and how they communicate.

I also briefly searched for literature on children's speech and language development, using search terms such as "language development in preschoolers" and "speech and language milestones" on databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ERIC, and in a general Google search.

Literature on Speech and Language Development

While I am looking more closely at how and what my students communicate rather than their speech skills, it is important to note what has been written about the speech skills and language development of children of this age, in order to understand the "tools" my students are working with as they communicate with their teachers and peers using verbal language.

Some scholars give suggestions as to how to go about communicating with students and supporting their language development. Whorrall & Cabell (2016) discuss the impact of oral language on reading, and suggest ways for teachers to communicate with their students effectively, including using sophisticated vocabulary, taking into account children's interests, asking open-ended questions, and introducing cognitively challenging topics and ideas. Gauvreau (2019) talks about the importance of communication in the classroom during non-academic times such as meal times. She suggests the use of classroom routines such as students being in charge of passing out food and other items and the use of cards with questions and answers that students can use to engage in conversation at the table, and discusses the

importance of practices such as these for students with and without disabilities to develop their communication skills.

To understand how preschoolers use language in the classroom, one must understand which stages of linguistic development they are in. There are many different suggestions for milestones that preschool-age children should hit in relation to the development of their speech, language, and communication skills. For example, Stanford Medicine suggests that milestones for children from 2-3 years old, which is the age of my youngest students, should include knowing pronouns, using descriptive words, beginning to use plurals, answering simple questions, and using 3-word sentences. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders suggests that children of the same age should hit milestones including having a word for almost everything, naming objects to direct attention to them, using k, g, f, t, d, and n sounds, and using two- or three-word phrases. For 5-year-old children, which is the age of some of my older students, Stanford Medicine suggests that they should be able to understand time sequences, carry out a series of three directions, understand rhyming, engage in conversation, use imagination to create stories, and use sentences that can be 8 or more words in length.

Speech, communication, and use of language can be different for different children of the same age. Nicoladis & Genesee (1997) suggest that bilingual children use language differently in some ways than monolingual children. Bilingual children use code-mixing, which is "the use of two languages in a single unit of discourse" (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997, p. 259), learn how to use translation equivalents, which are "words in each language that refer to the same concept" (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997, pp. 260-261), develop different phonological systems for each language, and learn to use the appropriate language with different interlocutors.

Literature on How Students Communicate with Their Peers

Many scholars who have discussed the importance of communication in the preschool classroom have focused on how students interact with their peers. Hazen & Black (1989) describe a study of 54 preschool children between the ages of 43 and 66 months, and seek to describe a link between communication skills and social status in preschool children. They specify that the group of children was of mixed gender and included all middle-class and mostly caucasian students, but do not discuss these identities further, instead mainly focusing on the social status of the children as reported by their peers. They conclude that the children identified by their peers as "liked" were "better able to initiate and maintain coherent discourse than disliked children, both by clearly directing communications to specific other children and by responding appropriately to the initiations of others" (p. 874) and that "socially accepted children have better skills than less accepted children for initiating, maintaining, and reinitiating coherent discourse across interaction contexts" (p. 875). They also conclude that the "liked" children exhibited a "greater ability" to "split their initiations evenly between their two playmates", "provide responses that are relevant to the preceding initiations", "acknowledge the initiations of others", "reject by offering a reason or alternative idea", use "back-channel listener responses" to show that they were engaged, and "adapt their communication styles to different social interaction contexts" (p. 874).

Nucci & Turiel (1978) describe a study of 10 preschools, each with between 12 and 40 children who ranged in age between 2 years 10 months and 5 years 2 months. To determine if preschool children could discriminate between social conventional events (events that involve the following or breaking of a rule or social convention) and moral events (events that involve

doing something morally right or wrong), and how students react to these events, social conventional and moral events that occurred in the classroom were observed, students' and teachers' reactions to these events were recorded, and children were interviewed after the events. Nucci and Turiel concluded that "preschool children distinguish between social convention and morality" (p. 404) because "Events that [the researchers] classified as entailing moral transgressions were judged by the children to be wrong regardless of the presence or absence of a school rule pertaining to the act" and "Events that [the researchers] classified as entailing transgressions of social conventions were judged [by the children] to be wrong only if a rule pertaining to the act existed in the school" (p. 406). The children who witnessed the events and the adults who judged whether the events were social conventional or moral agreed in this way in 83% of the cases. Nucci and Turiel also found that "Children were much more likely to respond to moral transgressions than to transgressions of the school's social conventions" (p. 406). Even though the children were of different ages, differences between children's views of social interactions based on age were not studied, so it is not determined if and how the students' ideas about social norms and morals change during this time period of their lives. While this study is not specifically about how students communicate during social conventional and moral events, it does explore how students communicate about these events, and is therefore included in my lit review because my students also explore social conventions and morality as they communicate.

There is also scholarship that focuses specifically on students' conflicts, including the communication that occurs before, during, and after these conflicts. Dawe (1934) describes a study of 40 preschool children between the ages of 25 and 60 months, in which she "aims to study and analyze the quarrels of preschool children as they arise spontaneously in a relatively uncontrolled social environment" (pp. 141-142). Her findings included that the average duration

of the quarrels was only 23 seconds, “quarrelsomeness tends to decrease with age”, “the youngest children start the most quarrels but take the less aggressive role during the quarrel”, “the majority of quarrels are started by a struggle for possessions”, “crying, forbidding and commanding are the most common forms of vocal activity, although silence is a more frequent reaction than any single activity”, “talking during a quarrel increases with age but reciprocal conversation is rare”, “there seem to be more quarrels indoors when the children are crowded together”, “the children settle the majority of the quarrels themselves, most frequently by one child's forcing another to yield”, and “the great majority of the children recover after a quarrel very quickly and show no evidence of resentment” (pp. 155-156). The environment of the preschool classroom and how scholars view education has undoubtedly changed since 1934 (for example, the IQs of the students were mentioned; this would be seen as irrelevant and even harmful today). However, I included this paper because children, including my own students and many of the other children that I have worked with throughout my life, still exhibit the behaviors that are described in this paper. I observed some of these behaviors over the summer, including children struggling over possessions and settling disagreements themselves, and Dawe’s observations can help me describe the types of communication I observe in my own students.

Building on the work of Dawe and other scholars, Laursen & Hartup (1989) describe a study of 53 preschool children between the ages of 3 years 4 months and 5 years 4 months. The social interactions of the children were observed during indoor free-play time to study the dynamics of the childrens’ conflicts, in order to correct oversights about the interrelations of different elements of conflict (including “the issues [what the disagreement is about], the nature of the initial influence attempt, the opposition, the strategies used to effect resolution, and the outcomes”), to “detail the differences between two- and three-unit oppositions”, and to look for

age and sex differences in conflict dynamics (pp. 281-183). Laursen and Hartup's findings included that "most conflicts that were observed were brief and lacked aggression", "children who were interacting before the conflict tended to continue interacting after the conflict, regardless of the specific conflict behaviors that occurred", and that "conflicts which began with aggression were more often focused on behavioral issues than on objects" (pp. 293-294). Age differences in conflict dynamics were also studied, even though the age range of the children was relatively small. Findings based on age differences included differences in the ways that students resolved conflicts, such as how "younger dyads demonstrated high levels of conciliatory resolution behaviors during those conflicts which least needed them, in other words, in conflicts that did not involve aggression" while "older children demonstrated similar resolution strategies regardless of the presence or absence of aggression", and how "whereas younger children used disengagement for nonaggressive conflicts, the older children tended to resolve these disagreements by insistence" (pp. 294-295).

Like the scholars described in this section, I also observed the ways my students interact with each other, because these interactions are important to their development and can tell teachers a lot about the relationships between students and students' abilities to resolve conflicts, help each other, and demonstrate other skills needed to communicate with their peers.

Literature on How Students Communicate with Their Teachers

Unlike the previously mentioned scholars, Cabell et al. (2015) focus specifically on how students communicate with their teachers. They describe a study of 44 preschool teachers, some of whom had received professional development on conversational responsivity, and some of whom had not, and a random sampling of 297 children from their classrooms who were between

40 and 66 months. Videos the teachers submitted of their classes and assessments of the students' vocabulary skills were collected to study the impacts of the professional development on the volume and quality of teacher–child conversations and if these conversations were related to children's gains in vocabulary over the school year. The teachers who had participated in the professional development had been instructed to use the strategies they had learned while taking the videos, so this is not an assessment of whether the teachers were more likely to use these strategies after receiving the professional development, but rather an assessment of the communication that occurred when these strategies were used. Cabell et al. found that "professional development increased teacher–child engagement in multi-turn conversations, child-initiated conversations, and teachers' strategy use" and that "teacher–child conversations with a high concentration of teacher elicitations and extensions [strategies teachers used for continuing conversations] were positively associated with children's vocabulary gains" (p. 80). I also observed student interactions with teachers, because reflecting on these interactions can help teachers learn about their students and their relationships with their students.

Literature on How Students Communicate with Their Teachers and Their Peers

Some scholars focus on how students communicate with both their teachers and their peers. Chaparro-Moreno et al. (2019) conducted a study of 13 preschool children between the ages of 35 and 60 months who wore a head mounted camera during selected times during a school day to capture their first-person experiences. They investigated the variability in the duration and frequency of children' interactions with their teachers and peers, variability in the complexity of the linguistic input the children received, and how this shifted throughout the day, and found that children's interactions with their teachers and peers differed in number and

duration, children's interactions with their peers were more brief and contained simpler linguistic input, every child experiences different linguistic inputs and therefore has different linguistic experiences in the classroom, and that the classroom's linguistic environment fluctuates throughout the day. Because I don't have access to technology that makes it possible to record every interaction that each child has in a given amount of time, it is interesting to read Chaparro-Moreno et al.'s research. As I describe in the conclusion of this paper, it would be interesting to compare different methods of observing and/or recording what is happening in classrooms.

Doğan Altun & Jones (2017) look more specifically at the difference between students' communication with their teachers and their communication with their peers. They conducted a study of 24 preschool children in Florida who were between the ages of 37 and 55 months. The researchers observed the types of language that the children used in two different contexts, when they were playing together without a teacher actively facilitating, and when they were working on an activity with a teacher in which a teacher read a story to the students and then asked them to retell the story and draw a picture. Doğan Altun and Jones found that interactional language (language used to get along with others) was the most frequently used form of language in the context that was not led by the teacher, informative language (language used to explain things) was the most frequent in the teacher-led context, and that students used more varied forms of language in the context that was not led by the teacher. They also found that the students used the collaborative language ("children's initiation or making suggestions") discourse pattern more frequently than the other discourse patterns studied (control, withdraw, and obligate) in both contexts (p. 472). Doğan Altun and Jones did not come to a conclusion as to why the students used more varied forms of language in the context that was not led by the teacher, but this seems

to be because of the exact nature of the activities the students were doing in each context (playing an imaginative game might require more varied language than having a discussion about a book). More research on how students use verbal language in contexts that are and are not teacher-led would be necessary to fully explain this finding, and to see if other findings can also be explained by a difference in the activity students were engaged in rather than the presence or absence of a teacher.

Ballenger (1996) describes the social experiences and learning experiences of her 3-6 year old preschool students at a school for Haitian children in Boston. She audiotaped and made notes on classroom interactions at the "writing table" in her classroom. She observed that in addition to her own curriculum, there was a "shadow curriculum" based on the children's own thoughts, in which the children used writing in ways that were outside of her "plans and expectations" (p. 319). Ballenger uses observations of the students' communication about letters and writing to reveal this "shadow curriculum", and observes that her students "use letters to represent and interpret their relationships, and at times they also use letters to make actual connections among family and friends" (p. 321).

Like Chaparro-Moreno et al., Doğan Altun & Jones, and Ballenger, I will be looking at how students communicate with both their teachers and their peers. I believe that observing both of these types of interactions is important to understanding my students' experiences in the classroom and examining a larger variety of the ways that they communicate. Like Ballenger, I am studying my own classroom and taking a qualitative approach, using methods that are practical to employ while also focusing on teaching my students.

Besides the scarcity of research about preschool in general and the scarcity of this type of research that is written by the teachers themselves, I did not find any significant gaps in the

literature on how preschool students communicate with their teachers, peers, or both, but I did find ideas and methods that I wanted to further explore and develop. Some scholars, such as Doğan Altun and Jones, name specific forms and patterns of language, and other scholars, such as Dawe, Laursen & Hartup, and Balleger, describe how students use communication to learn a specific skill such as conflict resolution or writing. To continue these conversations, I will be looking at both what forms of communication my students are using and how and for what purposes they are using these forms of communication. By studying my own classroom, I am adding to the relatively small amount of literature on communication in the preschool classroom and on preschool in general that is written by the teachers themselves.

Context

Students and Teachers

My research took place at a preschool on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where I currently teach[3]. It is a private school with students between almost two and almost six years of age. During the summer, there were 23 students, and 20 of these students' families consented to their participation. The students are sorted into two classrooms based on age. During the summer, the youngest students were about two and a half years old, and the oldest students were almost six years old. "Class 1" had 8 students between about two and a half and about three and a half years of age. "Class 2" had 15 students between about four and almost six years of age. About 75% of the students who were at the school over the summer are white, about 15% are Asian, and about 10% are mixed race[4]. About 25% of these students speak at least two languages at home.

[3] The name of the school is not given because it may be connected to the names of some of the teachers.
[4] "Mixed race" in this context does not necessarily mean white and Asian.

The teaching staff included eight full-time teachers: three assistant teachers (including myself), three lead teachers, one lead teacher/assistant director, and one teacher/director. There were also multiple substitute teachers. The activities that the different types of teachers do in the classroom are more based on a teacher's experience and what they are capable of doing than their official title. Four teachers consented to their participation. This included two lead teachers, the lead teacher/assistant director, and the teacher/director. Myself, one of the lead teachers, and the assistant director spent the majority of our time in class 1 during the summer. The other lead teacher that participated spent the majority of her time in class 2, and the director spent part of her day in each of the classes. All of the teachers that participated were white women between the ages of 27 and 50.

When I mention specific students and teachers in this paper, I will be using pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are based on common names in the U.S. because most of my students were born in the U.S, and are not intended to reflect any particular race or language. I came up with the students' pseudonyms by giving each student whose family consented to their participation a letter based on their age (for example, student A is the youngest), and using a name that starts with that letter as their pseudonym. The students with pseudonyms beginning with A to G were in class 1, and the students with pseudonyms beginning with H to T were in class 2.

I will be providing approximate ages of all students to avoid any confusion that may arise because of the speech skills of students of different ages and because I noticed certain dynamics between younger and older students. This is also based on suggestions from my readers and my co-teachers. I will speak about the racial identities of or languages spoken by particular students as needed, because this information may be needed to understand specific pieces of data, but I did not identify any patterns that related to race or languages spoken. I will be referring to

students using gendered pronouns, even though I did not identify any patterns based on gender, because if I do not use gendered pronouns, readers may assume the genders of the students anyway based on the pseudonyms of the students. Any information given about students is information that my co-teachers and I would typically be comfortable sharing with others.

School Schedule

To understand the communication that happens at the school, it is important to take into account the activities that happen during school hours. During the summer, we start our day outside. Families drop off their children in our outdoor play space, called the "play yard". On the play yard, students can climb on the play structures or play in the sand or grass areas. Teachers supervise the students, talk with the students and each other, and sometimes even join in to the students' games. When it is time to go inside, the students and teachers separate into our respective classes and we have our first "transition time", in which students use the bathroom and change any outdoor clothes or shoes if necessary, and teachers help students when needed. Transition times happen before every meal. When the students are done with this transition, we have morning snack. The students can choose which table to sit at and can talk with each other and their teachers.

When the teachers excuse the students from the snack table, we typically enter into a teacher-led activity. This can include "circle time", typically led by the lead teachers, or Spanish, led by me in each class about once a week. During circle time and Spanish, both of which typically last about a half hour, we do books, songs, and other activities with the kids. Circle time includes activities that relate to the topics of the week or month. This summer in class 1, the topics were beach and ocean, woods and camping, and two week-long author studies (Dr. Seuss

and Leo Lionni). An example of an activity in Spanish class is "¿Qué es esto?", used to teach the kids vocabulary words. I show an object that represents the vocabulary word (e.g. plastic animals to teach animal vocabulary words) and ask "¿Qué es esto?" ("What is this?"). The kids answer me with the English word, and I respond with the Spanish word, which the students and other teachers repeat. Once we have identified all of the objects, I invite each of the students to choose an object as their answer to a question in Spanish (e.g. "¿Cuál es tu animal favorito?"/"What is your favorite animal?"). This time after snack can also be used to do activities with both classes together, such as field trips, activities with visitors, or special events such as field day.

If we have time after circle time, Spanish, or any other activity we may do after snack, we have "free play". During this time, the students can play with toys, puzzles, or games, read books by themselves, together, or with teachers, or do art. Kids can move freely between these activities, although we typically encourage them to participate in each art project. Teachers facilitate about two different art projects per week, with one teacher working with one student at a time, typically relating to the topic of the week or month. Some art projects are more open-ended than others. We also often have supplies available so that students can do art on their own as well. Free play typically happens with the students still separated into classes, but it can be done with both classes together as well.

After this, the students clean up any materials they were using during free play time and the classes join back together for recess on the play yard. After recess, which lasts for about an hour, we bring the students back inside for lunch. As the kids are excused from lunch, they have time to read by themselves on their nap mats while waiting for their friends. A teacher will then read a book to the students before nap. Not all of the kids sleep during nap, but they are encouraged to at least rest and are expected to not disrupt other children. The kids clean up their

nap stuff during the transition time after nap, and then we have afternoon snack and go outside for pick-up.

The following pictures are for context:

Artwork by class 1

A drawing by students and teachers of both classes

Handprints from a color mixing activity in class 1

Field day

Positionality

Myself and My Teaching

I am a white woman who grew up on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where the school is located. I attended the school as a child and began volunteering there as an assistant teacher in 2018. I have been employed as an assistant teacher since 2021. I have also taught Spanish at the school since 2019, using a curriculum that I designed myself. I work full time during the summer and volunteer and fill in for other teachers whenever I can during the school year. As an insider conducting this research while also teaching at the school, I understand that being a teacher is a position of power but also trust. My co-teachers and I only have power in the classroom because we have built trust with each other and with our students. We also understand that everything we do in the classroom affects our students. Therefore, this research has been designed to build upon rather than entirely disrupt the work that my co-teachers and I are already doing at the school.

I have always believed in the power of my students' voices, and I have always been intentional about listening to my students. This is an undertaking that I have been working on my whole life. I learned how to teach from my mother, who ran a home daycare in our house for the

first fifteen years of my life. As soon as I could speak, I would tell my mother if any of the other daycare students needed help, even if she already knew ("baby's crying" was one of my favorite phrases). Eventually, I got better at understanding what students needed and how to help them.

Being intentional about listening to my students is also an undertaking in which there is always room for improvement. Formally observing my students' communication is simply an extension of the work that I have always been doing as a teacher (and before I became a teacher), with the goal of learning even more about what my students have to say and putting my own and my co-teachers' experiences with our students into words so that myself and others can learn more about listening to students, communicating with students, and observing how and what they communicate.

My Teaching Philosophy

When I am working with young children, my philosophy is that they should be safe, happy, and learning, in that order. Students being safe means that they are not engaging in activities that have a high chance of harming themselves or others (leaving the classroom without permission, using play structures in an inappropriate way, engaging in physical fights, etc.), and that I am keeping them safe from outside dangers (I know what to do in case of emergency, I make sure the classroom is a safe environment, etc.). Students being happy does not mean that they are not allowed to feel negative emotions, but it means that if a student is in distress, the situation needs to be evaluated. It also means that students should enjoy school and want to come to school. School should not be a place that causes students distress. Students learning means that they are engaged in the topics that we are teaching (listening to teachers, asking and answering questions, etc.) to the best of their ability, and that we are teaching them in ways that

are relevant to their lives and help them understand the world around them and become the best versions of themselves. Students can not learn effectively if they are not safe or if they do not enjoy school.

A significant amount of communication among teachers, among students, and between teachers and students in the classroom every day is necessary to achieve these goals. Some communication works against these goals, such as how students calling each other names makes them unhappy and also more likely to be unsafe by engaging in a physical fight. Rather than considering this communication "bad", I consider it a moment in which I need to step in and turn it into a learning opportunity rather than a disaster (recalling the name-calling example, if students were acting in this way, I could help them learn how to resolve a conflict respectfully before it gets out of hand).

Additionally, not all of the communication that happens in the classroom happens verbally. Verbal communication is what I am focusing on in this project, but only because verbal communication is the easiest form of communication to translate into words on a page (and therefore make written observations of) besides writing, which not all of my students do a lot of yet.

Methodology and Data Analysis

Methodology

In order to create positive change in their classrooms, teachers must first observe their classrooms and seek to understand their students and their own teaching. According to the Child Care Technical Assistance Network, having observation, documentation, and reflection skills can help early childhood teachers get to know their students better, connect with families, appreciate

their students' unique learning styles, encourage students' competence and success, and make decisions about the classroom environment and curriculum.

Lytle and Cochran-Smith talk about teacher research, which they define as "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (p. 450). They say that "teachers are among those who have the authority to know — that is, to construct 'capital K' knowledge about teaching, learning, and schooling" (pp. 447-448) and argue that "teacher research is a way of generating both local knowledge and public knowledge about teaching" which is "knowledge developed and used by teachers for themselves and their immediate communities, as well as knowledge useful to the larger school and university communities" (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 450). I believe that it is important for teachers to understand their own classrooms and work together to create and share knowledge about teaching.

Cynthia Ballenger (1994) and Vivian Paley (1986) describe how this teacher research can look in practice. Ballenger describes the types of texts that she and her fellow teacher-researchers produce during the process of teacher research. She describes "data in the form of transcripts of audio-taped classroom talk", "memos on the place of our research question in our own lives", and "research papers generally presented as talks to groups of both teachers and researchers" (p. 141). She describes the importance of "texts straight from the classroom" (p. 145) such as audio recordings, transcripts of audio recordings, and field notes, and how she and her fellow teacher-researchers use these texts as a way to "stop time" and reflect on the events that happen in the classroom.

Paley (1986) describes what she learns about her students while observing her own preschool and kindergarten classrooms. She observes the students' communication during pretend play, comparing the classroom to a theater: "The children sounded like groups of actors,

rehearsing spontaneous skits on a moving stage, blending into one another's plots, carrying on philosophical debates while borrowing freely from the fragments of dialogue that floated by" (p. 124). One of the ways she does this is by creating tape recordings of her classrooms, which created for her "an overwhelming need to know more about the process of teaching and learning and about my own classroom as a unique society to be studied" (p. 124). She uses examples of verbal communication from her students to show how she discovered the importance of "fantasy, friendship, and fairness" in the classroom (pp. 124-126).

It is important for all teachers to have these observation, documentation, and reflection skills so that they can better understand and appreciate the classroom environment and all of the students and teachers within it, because this understanding leads to better teaching in the long run. Teachers create knowledge about teaching by observing, participating in, and reflecting on the events that happen in their classrooms and by interacting with their students and with other teachers. This constructivist lens on teacher learning helped me create the methods I used to collect my data during the summer of 2024.

Methods

Throughout the nine weeks of the "summer camp" portion of the school year, I wrote down observations of the verbal communication of my students in both classes. This included observations made by myself and observations shared with me by my co-teachers during typical classroom discussion. I would write these observations down while I was not actively teaching, such as during my break, at nap time after all of the students were asleep/resting, and after school. I tended to write about interactions that surprised me or interactions that helped me learn something about a specific child or children, rather than interactions that happened every day.

I focused mainly on verbal communication for this project. Because of the limited time I had to write down observations, I wanted to narrow down what type of communication I focused on. I chose to focus mostly on verbal communication because it is easy to translate into written notes, because I could easily write down quotes from students or paraphrase what they said. Verbal communication is also intertwined with other forms of communication, for example, there are many interactions that I wrote down in which students talked about art or writing or used body language to emphasize what they were saying verbally.

These methods were chosen because they allowed us to be intentional about observing our students' communication, without disrupting the classroom environment or interrupting the work we were already doing. These methods were also chosen because observation is something that any teacher can do. I want to explore the potentials of observation and reflect on the ways that I go about observing my students, because any classroom can benefit from teachers using methods of observation that are both effective and practical to use in the classroom. When I am done with this project, I will continue to use and share any effective and practical methods of observation that I found useful during this project[5].

While observing one's own classroom is a skill that every teacher should have, it does not come without limits. It is important to keep in mind that any observations made by a teacher, whether they are more formal observations, observations that a teacher shares with another teacher, or just passing thoughts that a teacher has while in the classroom, are from the teacher's point of view, and reflect what the teacher finds to be important or interesting and how the teacher interprets each experience they have in the classroom. Observations reflect a teacher's interests, knowledge, opinions, and biases. No method of observation can objectively reveal

[5] See my action plan for more information on these methods.

every single thing that is happening in a classroom, but teachers must seek to observe in ways that allow them to understand their classrooms and their students as fully as possible.

In this project and in my teaching in general, I use observation to better understand my students and my classrooms. In this project, I hope to reflect on this observation to better understand the perspectives that I am coming from as I observe my students.

Data Analysis

I began analyzing my data after the summer session ended. First, I coded my data, in an inductive way, looking specifically at what types of communication were present (e.g. question, sharing knowledge) and what the intended function of the communication was (e.g. to solve a problem, to share about their own experiences). I did this by first going through my data and writing notes to myself about the different types of communication that I noticed, and then going back through my data and coding for all of the forms of communication that I could identify. Sometimes the codes assigned to a piece of data were similar to the language used in the data, and sometimes they were not. For example, the following observations both received the code "copying or repeating after a teacher":

> I said "What are you doing over there?" to a child at snack, and multiple children copied me.
>
> [I had the following] conversation with Carl (almost 3) as he was supposed to be putting on his shoes: Me: "Why are your feet over your shoes?", Carl: "Over my shoes?", Me: "Yes, your feet were on top of your shoes, they need to be IN your shoes", Carl: "Oh, IN my shoes…".

In the first example, I had noted while I was writing down the observation that the children had “copied me”, while in the second example, I had written down quotes from my conversation with the child, in which he had been copying me. Many observations received multiple codes, because children used multiple different forms of communication at once or within the same interaction. The second example above received the codes “copying or repeating after a teacher” and “asking clarifying questions”, because the child had copied me in order to ask a clarifying question, and then copied me in order to show that he now understood what I was saying. During this point in data analysis, I kept speech act theory in mind, making sure to not only look for what was said or what was being talked about, but also what children were *doing* with their words in each interaction.

I then sorted the codes into categories based on criteria such as the type or function of the communication (e.g. sharing knowledge) or the topic of the communication (e.g. reading). I then went through my data again, at least one time per category, making sure all of my codes and categories accurately reflected my data and looking for data that suggested new codes or categories.

After this, I ended up with 21 categories:

- Repetition/copying,
- Participation (in teacher-led activities),
- Sharing knowledge,
- Asking a teacher for knowledge,
- Asking each other for knowledge,
- Teacher-led conversation,
- Listening to and joining in to teacher conversations,

- Conflict,
- Reminding other students of rules/correcting other students,
- Correcting teachers (or other adults),
- Asking for (teacher) help,
- Helping teachers (or other adults),
- Working together,
- Figuring things out on their own,
- Spanish (outside of Spanish class),
- Math (outside of structured class time),
- Reading (outside of structured class time),
- Other academics (outside of structured class time),
- Making jokes,
- Lack of communication,
- And miscommunication.

I considered how these categories overlapped and fit together, taking into account my data, my research questions, and my theoretical framework. From these categories, seven themes emerged, that all communication serves a purpose, that students view teachers as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge, that students view themselves and their peers as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge, that teachers place students as and make space for students to place themselves as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge, that students communicate to follow rules and morals, that students enjoy communicating with their teachers and peers, and that verbal communication sometimes

does not occur when teachers expect it to or can be "incomplete". These findings will be discussed in the following sections. My code book can be found at the end of this document.

Findings

All Communication Serves a Purpose

While analyzing my data, I paid particular attention to the purpose behind every instance of verbal communication that I wrote down. All of my data contributed to this theme. The children using communication to achieve a particular purpose can be most easily seen in instances of students using communication in order to complete tasks, solve problems, or figure out answers. I will also discuss in this section two other examples of purposes behind student communication: participating in teacher-led activities and solving conflicts.

The students used three different strategies to complete tasks, solve problems, or figure out answers, and these strategies all often involved verbal communication. They could ask for help, work together, or complete the task on their own.

Sometimes students were reluctant to ask for help:

> [Mrs. F told me that Belle (almost 3) was] refusing help while cleaning up her nap time stuff, then asking for it, and then refusing it again.

But students typically were confident in their ability to ask for help:

> [From Mrs. F said that] Ariel (2.5) was asking for help very nicely today, especially when she asked me to help her open a snack and was very patient when she still couldn't get the last piece out and needed to ask for my help again.

In addition to asking for help to complete tasks, they also asked for help to solve problems:

Hugo (4) came over to me and said “say to him” to tell me about a child that was blocking a ladder (as in, telling me to tell the other child to stop blocking the ladder).

And asked for help on behalf of other students:

[Mrs. F said that] some of the children (mostly Kody (4.5)) were checking on their friends and telling their teachers if friends fell down during bike day.

Students often tried things on their own before asking for help.

[Mrs. F said that she had the following interaction with Ariel (2.5):] Ariel was trying to pull up her shorts. She asked Mrs. F “My shorts are tight, will you help me?”. Mrs. F thought this was a good example of a child trying something themselves and then asking for help (Mrs. F also notes that “Turns out she had both legs in the same hole”).

Students worked together to complete tasks:

[Mrs. F told me that] Flora (3.5) was building with blocks, and Donna (almost 3) placed a block on her creation. Flora said “No, I don’t want your help”, so Donna handed a block to Flora, and Flora accepted it.

Solve problems:

Belle (almost 3) got up from a chair during inside play time, and Emily (3) sat down. They both wanted the chair and argued over it. They came to the conclusion that they could both sit in the chair, and did so.

Figure out answers:

[Mrs. F told me that] during [a] dance party, a group of kids, including Rosalie (5.5) and Sally (almost 6), wanted Mrs. L to play a song but none of them knew the name. They “discussed it for a while and ended up figuring it out”.

And follow the rules of the games they played, including these two instances of the same game played by two different groups of kids:

> Taylor (almost 6), Rosalie (5.5), Olive (5), Quicy (5), and Hugo (4) were playing duck, duck, goose on the play yard, and communicating with each other to follow the rules of the game.
>
> Belle (almost 3), Emily (3), George (3.5), and Macy (5) were playing duck, duck, goose on the play yard. They were communicating to follow the rules of the game and cheering for each other as they played.

They also helped each other, including these two instances of George (3.5) helping Ariel (2.5):

> Ariel asked me if I could help her open something during lunch, and I told her not yet because my hands were full. George said he could help her, and he got it open for her.
>
> George offered to help Ariel with her jacket before we went outside. Ariel accepted, and George helped her.

Cheered each other on, as noticed by both myself and Mrs. L on field day:

> [The kids were] cheering each other on during field day.
>
> Mrs. L congratulated the kids on how well they cheered each other on and helped each other during field day.

And talked about things that they made together:

> [Mrs. F told me that] Olive (5) and Taylor (almost 6) were excitedly showing everyone the fairy house they made.

> The students also taught others about things that they had learned how to do:

Macy (5) [was] demonstrating and explaining to Pauline (5) how she uses a play structure in a certain way.

[Mrs. F told me that Emily (3) was] demonstrating and explaining to Ariel (2.5) how to go up a play structure.

Quincy (5) was showing me how to "bake a cake" with the play kitchen toys in the sand area on the play yard.

Talked about things that they had made or done on their own:

[Mrs. L said that] Carl (almost 3) was excited about an art project, and exclaimed "I loves it!" when he was finished.

Sometimes as they were doing them:

During [a] project, Carl was telling me about the parts of the jellyfish he was making ("head", "eyes", "body"), and the colors he was using and where he was putting them ("Red here").

And even answered their own questions:

During lunch time, Emily (3) asked Mrs. F where her friend went even though she already knew the answer, and answered her own question when Mrs. F told her she knew the answer.

Sometimes, students communicated to complete a task without even informing others of their goals.

Rosalie (5.5) wanted something that had fallen from a tree on the play yard, but some of her friends had been using it, so she was making trades with her friends with other items that she found on the play yard. She started playing another game before she got the item she wanted.

The students were very independent in situations which called for working on their own, and at the same time, they were excited to tell others about things they had done or figured out.

The students learned how to do the tasks that they asked for help with or worked together or on their own to complete. Additionally, asking for help, working with others, and working on their own are skills that the students practiced that are valuable now and for the rest of their lives.

Each form of communication that students used can be considered as performing an action in itself. For example, communication was often necessary for students to participate in teacher-led activities (*participate in class* being an action that the students performed). Some students were eager to participate:

> As I was presenting vocabulary words in class 2, Kody (4.5) was sharing his own experiences with the transportation items we were learning about using Spanish and English (such as telling me that he used a "bicicleta" the other day at bike day).

While other students were more reluctant, but often challenged themselves anyway, including these three observations of Donna (almost 3) from weeks 7, 8, and 9:

> All students in class 1 answered "¿Cómo te llamas?" today during Spanish, including Donna, who usually does not participate in activities in English or Spanish in which children go around and say their names.
>
> We played a "picnic" memory game at circle time. Flora (3.5) and Belle (almost 3) participated the most and often remembered the next item before the other children. Donna did not want to participate (talking quietly, hiding her face), but did so anyway, with only a small amount of encouragement from teachers.
>
> During Spanish in class 1, 7/8 children answered "¿Cómo te llamas?", including Donna, who usually does not participate in activities like that.

Donna is good at overcoming challenges, and teachers have noted that for Donna, “everything is scary but conquerable”.

Communication was also often how students resolved conflicts (*resolve a conflict* being an action that the students performed). The students explained things to each other:

> Belle (almost 3) came up to me on the play yard in the afternoon to tell me that it was not water play but Donna (almost 3) was saying that it is. I told her that it is water play day, but water play was earlier, and this must be where the miscommunication was happening. Belle told Donna and they stopped arguing.

And learned how to compromise:

> Rosalie (5.5) and some other children were arguing over where to play a game, and Rosalie said “Let’s make a compromise”. It is unclear whether a compromise was made, but they stopped arguing shortly after.
>
> Jack (4.5) and Olive (5) were arguing over who would show me something on the play yard, and Olive ended up showing me, and Jack showed Mrs. S. This is a solution they seemed to have come to on their own.

Social skills such as participation in a group activity and conflict resolution are important skills for the students to learn, and these skills inherently involve some form of communication.

Every instance of communication that the students used served a purpose. In the above examples, some of these purposes (to ask for help, to participate in class, etc.) were very clear to teachers. Some of these interactions and others served multiple purposes, for example, to participate in class might also be to ask for knowledge or to share knowledge. The purposes of different instances of verbal communication may be more or less clear to teachers. For example, consider the following interaction:

During lunch, Emily (3) turned to Mrs. S and said "Do you like me Mrs. S?" with no context. Mrs. S said "Yes, but where did that come from?" and Emily didn't respond. The purpose of this interaction was to ask a question (as in, Emily's intention was to ask for information from Mrs. S), but the purpose of this question was not known to the teachers and was never clarified (as in, we do not know what goal Emily was trying to accomplish in asking for this information). It was possible that Emily was seeking validation or just seeking to start an interaction with Mrs. S, but she never clarified her intentions.

More on what happens when teachers do not understand the purposes of student communication can be found in the section on "incomplete" communication. The following sections reflect the purposes behind different types of communication in the classroom, the actions that these types of communication allowed students to complete, and the roles that these types of communication worked to place students and teachers in.

Teacher as Facilitator/Role Model/Holder of Abilities and Knowledge

Students viewed teachers as facilitators of communication, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge. In this section, I will discuss how these roles played a part in teacher-led conversations and activities, students copying teachers and joining into their conversations, students asking teachers for knowledge and help, and students reminding each other of rules or asking teachers to remind other students of rules.

One way that teachers were positioned in these roles was during what I call "teacher-led conversation", in which one or multiple teachers has a conversation with the whole class or a group of kids. These conversations often happen at meal times and transition times, and often

involve teachers asking students about themselves and their experiences, such as these two conversations facilitated by Mrs. S:

> All children were able to answer Mrs. S when she asked if they had a bike and what color it is.

The students were telling Mrs. S about their weekends and mornings as she asked them. Sometimes, these conversations had to do with something the students were interested in or had questions about.

> [Mrs. F said] "We had a big talk at snack about vacuuming the rugs and carpet cleaning them. I explained the whole process. They were riveted."

Often, these conversations revolved around common experiences. It is worth noting in the following interactions how much the students referenced each other while talking about common experiences:

> Mrs. F asked the kids what their favorite part of the day was so far and wrote it down on the parents' board. All of the children answered and their answers were as follows: Emily (3): "I liked playing"; Donna (almost 3): "Playing with Ariel"; Carl (almost 3): "Silly robot" (referring to a game he was playing on the play yard); Flora (3.5): "I liked making leaf sticks with Donna"; George (3.5): "Doing tricks with Macy"; Belle (almost 3): "Going around in circles"; Ariel (2.5): "Playing with Donna".
>
> Mrs. S asked the kids what their favorite part of summer camp was to put on the parents' board. Their answers were as follows: George (3.5): "Playing hide and seek with Belle and Emily"; Flora (3.5): "Going down the big slide"; Emily (3): "When our mystery readers came"; Donna (almost 3): "Swinging with Ariel and Flora"; Ariel (2.5): "Pulling the wagon"; Belle (almost 3): "Making and eating ice cream with sprinkles".

> At lunch, after [a] playground field trip, Mrs. F and Mrs. S asked the kids what their favorite part of the field trip was and wrote it on the parents' board. Their answers were as follows: Flora (3.5): "Swinging on swings"; Donna (almost 3): "Playing with Ariel"; George (3.5): "Going down ALL the slides"; Ariel (2.5): "Wiggling on the balance beam with Donna"; Carl (almost 3): "Finding a robot"; Emily (3): "Playing with Belle"; Belle (almost 3): "Playing with Emily on slides".

They sometimes even expanded on these conversations, taking over the role of facilitators.

> During lunch, after Mrs. F and Mrs. S asked the kids what part of the field trip was their favorite, the kids asked Mrs. F and Mrs. S what their favorite part of the field trip was and had Mrs. S go find me (I was cleaning something in another room) and ask me.

As discussed earlier, communication was often necessary to participate in teacher-led activities. The students shared facts and asked questions that had to do with the topics being discussed in class (or that didn't have to do with the topics being discussed in class!):

> [Mrs. F told me that] children [were] sharing their own knowledge about bees during Mrs. F's bee day presentation (including Jack (4.5), Olive (5) - who sparked a conversation about guard bees, and Rosalie (5.5)), asking questions (Kody (4.5) - "Why do bees eat honey?"), and giving off topic remarks[6] (George (3.5) - "Crabs eat sand" and Rosalie (5.5) - "Octopuses have two heads").

They answered teacher questions:

> George (3.5) was participating a lot when I would ask for English words during Spanish class.

[6] Mrs. F did not seem to attach a negative connotation to the words "off topic" when she was describing this interaction to me, but instead just seemed to be sharing the fact that not all of the comments by the children during the bee activity were about bees.

Related the topics and activities to themselves and their own experiences:

> Ariel (2.5) identified and told the class that she had heard "Yankee Doodle" before while it was playing in the classroom during a 4th of July activity.

They also found rhymes, counted, guessed and predicted, compared, identified and pointed things out, sang along, and repeated during books, songs, and other activities:

> [The kids were] naming and counting animals, comparing numbers, naming colors, and predicting what will happen next in "A Color of His Own".

Recalled things that they had learned earlier:

> [Mrs. L said that] class 2 remembered the following facts about whales while learning about the ocean: "Whales, dolphins, and porpoises are all whales", "Whales sing different mating songs", "Blue whales are the largest mammal that has ever lived", "Whales can live a very long time", and "Girl blue whales tend to be bigger than boys".
>
> Some of the children in class 2 [during Spanish class] remembered the words "pez", "perro", and "caballo" from previous classes and were able to recall "pájaro" and "gato" after I taught the words.

And related the things they remembered to the current lesson:

> At the beginning of Spanish, which was on the topic of the woods and camping today, George (3.5) recalled how we have already learned about the woods and camping during other activities this summer.

When teachers are positioned as facilitators instead of as depositors of knowledge, the students are able to share about themselves and about their own knowledge, including during discussions and activities that are led by teachers. This allows the students to learn how to put their own

experiences and knowledge into words and allows all members of the classroom community to learn from each other and work together to create knowledge.

The children copied things that teachers said, and even ways that teachers communicated. They copied the words we used:

> Flora (3.5) called something she built a "creation" after I called it that.

They copied some of our favorite sayings:

> George (3.5) tripped over something before nap and then said "gravity there", which is something the teachers say.
>
> During lunch, we were still talking about the fire inspector and how the fire alarm might go off while he is inspecting it, and Belle (almost 3) said "Teachers keep us safe" (the teachers often say "Teachers keep you safe").
>
> It was raining throughout the day, and immediately upon waking up from nap, George (3.5) began talking about the weather. He told Emily (3) the difference between rain and water dripping from trees, and also said things like "The teachers will worry about the weather, we just need to worry about putting away our stuff" (the teachers often remind the kids that some things are for teachers to worry about, and some things are for kids to worry about).

They even used our sayings in their own unique ways:

> [Mrs. S told me that she witnessed the following interaction:] Ariel (2.5) tripped and caught herself, Donna (almost 3): "Good gravity", Ariel: "Thanks".

They led conversations the way teachers do:

> [Mrs. F said that] at lunch, Flora (3.5) asked her friends "Did everyone have a good time at water play?"

Once, two students pretended to be the teachers!

> Flora (3.5) and Donna (almost 3) were playing with stuffed animals during inside play time, and they were pretending to have circle time with the stuffed animals, singing our "Say Hello" song and pretending to do other circle time activities such as read-alouds, songs, and "mystery reader" (an activity we have on Fridays).

The students joined into conversations that teachers were having, showing that they are always listening to what teachers are saying, and how much the way we communicate with each other influences the kids. One of the students' favorite topics of conversation was the weather.

> Students were joining in to Mrs. F and I's conversation about if the rain would stop so we could take the kids outside, making their own predictions about the rain and asking to see the radar.

They also tended to point out when we mentioned numbers.

> Donna (almost 3) held up four fingers while listening to a conversation between Mrs. F and I during snack about how there were only four children in class one day, and then some other children copied her.
>
> Mrs. F was telling Mrs. S and I about how we were only going to have five kids this afternoon. Carl (almost 3) overheard, turned to Mrs. S, and said "Five".

George (3.5) was particularly interested in the words we used.

> Mrs. S said the word buffalo to Mrs. F while talking about her lunch, [and] George overheard and asked if she was talking about the animal. Mrs. S explained that the word buffalo has multiple meanings and that she was referring to the sauce, and multiple

children, including George, spent the rest of lunch talking about buffalos to each other and to the teachers.

Mrs. F was telling me the story at lunch time about how Emily (3) politely told off Carl (almost 3) for crashing into someone on the play yard, and used the word "empathy". George then asked Mrs. F "What does empathy mean?" and Mrs. F replied "Empathy is when you care about others" and provided the example from the other day about how kids were checking in on each other during bike day.

At the end of the summer, I wrote that "Mrs. F, Mrs. S, and I have been working together for a long time, but we have not all been in the same classroom together [for a significant amount of time] since one summer many years ago. We communicate well with each other and are always on the same page while we are in the classroom, which serves as a good model for the students and also helps us stay on task and prepared for anything that can happen in the classroom." *The ways that we communicate in the classroom directly affect the ways our students communicate, as shown by how they copy our words and styles of communication, and how they join into our conversations and are interested in the things we tell each other.*

The students also asked teachers for knowledge and help. As already discussed in the section on completing tasks and other actions, students often asked for help to complete tasks and solve problems, and also asked for help for other students. They also asked us about facts, such as Kody's (4.5) "Why do bees eat honey?" question during our "bee day" activity, asked us for definitions:

George (3.5) asked me for the definition of the word "guiding" while we were reading about a lighthouse in a book during indoor play time.

Asked us to read things for them:

George asked me what the sign on the bathroom door said. I told him it said “restroom” and explained to him that that means the same thing as “bathroom”, and he thought I said “restaurant”. I explained the word “restroom” to him again and he seemed to understand.

Asked about the things happening around them (such as what something is or where someone is):

Mrs. L put on Curious George music after nap time and told Ariel (2.5) what it was when she asked about it, then Ariel told me about it.

And the things happening in books:

We were reading “Pete the Cat Goes Camping”, and the characters put out their campfire before going to sleep. Mrs. S pointed this out, and George (3.5) asked why. Mrs. S explained that fires spread.

Asked about the teachers, such as in this interaction, which is one of four that I wrote down that involved Hugo (4) asking me how old I am:

Hugo asked me how old I am again on the play yard for the second time today. As usual, I answered and he answered me when I asked him.

And about experiences we had with them:

[Mrs. F described the following interaction:] George (3.5) [said to Mrs. F] during lunch, when discussing what we did at water play, “Did you have fun…watching?”

And asked clarifying questions:

[I had this] conversation with Carl (almost 3) as he was supposed to be putting on his shoes: Me: “Why are your feet over your shoes?”, Carl: “Over my shoes?”, Me: “Yes, your feet were on top of your shoes, they need to be IN your shoes”, Carl: “Oh, IN my shoes…”

Math questions:

> Hugo (4) [was] making up math problems on the play yard in the afternoon - he and one other friend were going up a play structure and he asked me “Two ones makes how many?”

And questions that seemed to have a main goal of starting an interaction rather than gaining knowledge:

> Hugo keeps saying “Something or nothing?” on the play yard. This may be related to a previous interaction earlier this week in which he told me we were doing “nothing nowhere” but I said that we must be doing “something somewhere”.

And asked for permission:

> [Mrs. S told me about] the following conversation, in which a teacher helped a child solve a problem while following school rules - Hugo said to Mrs. L “It’s hot. I’ll take my shirt off?”, Mrs. L said no, then Hugo said “But It’s so hot!” and Mrs. S convinced him that the better solution would be to drink a cup of water.

My students, being preschoolers, never ran out of questions. This is typical of this age group and is an important part of their development as they try to make sense of the world around them. George (3.5), the oldest child in class 1, spent much of his time talking to his teachers, including asking us many, many questions. One of the things that he was the most curious about was double meanings of words, such as in the example in which he asked Mrs. S about two meanings of the word “buffalo”, and in the following example:

> When I said my jacket had a collar, George got confused and said “But dogs have collars”, but seemed to understand when I explained.

I also wrote down many instances of Hugo (4) asking questions, but this seems to be due to the questions he asked and how often he repeated them, rather than how many questions he asked (I eventually figured out why he was asking me how old I was so often, when he asked me when my birthday was after asking me how old I was one day, and I realized that he may have been waiting for my answer to be "22" rather than "21"). *It is important that students are allowed to ask these questions and are given the space to do so, as it helps them understand class material, understand experiences they have, and remain inquisitive about the world around them, and it helps teachers learn more about what students do and do not understand and what they are curious about. It also helps students have agency over their learning, asking for the knowledge that they wish to receive.*

In one interaction, a student used the word "teacher" as a stand-in for the word "grown-up".

> George (3.5) was talking to his friends before we went outside, and he said "I'm almost a teacher" to mean "I'm almost grown up".

George, who has expressed other future plans that do not include becoming a teacher, likely sees "being like a teacher" to be something that happens or should happen as people get older and more mature, regardless of if someone is going to become a teacher or not. He is therefore proud of himself for his similarities to teachers, because to him, to be like a teacher means to be mature.

Students also placed teachers as role models by reminding each other of rules (that teachers had already expressed) and asking teachers to remind other students of rules. This will be discussed further in the section on the following of rules and morals.

Student as Facilitator/Role Model/Holder of Abilities and Knowledge

The students also took on the roles of facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge. Their communication worked to place themselves in these roles when they communicated in order to fulfill purposes such as sharing information or helping others. Their communication also worked to place their peers in these roles when they communicated in order to fulfill purposes such as asking their peers questions or copying their peers. In this section, I will discuss how these roles played a part in students sharing and asking each other for knowledge, working together and on their own, helping others, copying other students, and correcting others.

They shared about their own knowledge and experiences, including knowledge about various academic concepts that they have learned inside and outside of class. They shared about their own lives, sharing their own experiences:

> [Mrs. F said that she was] reading "Fred and Ted Go Camping" to the kids during the camping day activity, and was pointing out different activities that the characters were doing and asking the kids if they had done those activities before (e.g. Have you ever set up a tent? Have you ever gone fishing?). The kids were sharing their experiences with those activities (e.g. When Mrs. F asked the kids if they had gone fishing, many kids answered yes. She then asked them if they used a net or a pole, and most of the kids said either "net" or "pole", but Nick (5) said "Actually, I use both.").

Their reactions to common experiences:

> On the play yard, Quincy (5) reminded me of how we saw each other the other day while walking around town.

And even their life goals:

> During [a] storm, Mrs. F suggested that some of the kids could end up being meteorologists one day. George (3.5) said that he can't be a scientist because he wants to be a fire truck driver.

They passed on information, positioning both themselves and the person they received the information from as holders of important knowledge:

> While on the play yard, we saw a car being towed in the parking lot. Mrs. F noticed that it had a flat tire. Carl (almost 3) shared this information with me, saying "Flat tire."

And gave advice by using their own prior knowledge, applying it to the situation at hand, and sharing it with others:

> Hugo (4) also heard the conversation about the flat tire, and he said "You need to pump it up" and "A tire should be a circle, not a triangle."

They also shared facts, sometimes even facts that the teachers didn't know:

> While reading "Night Animals", we were discussing what frogs eat. The children kept saying that frogs eat fish, but the teachers did not know if this was true, so I looked it up and announced to the class that they were right and frogs do eat fish.

One student even quizzed me!

> Carl (almost 3) showed me a toy from a construction set and asked "What is this?", I said "Screw driver?" and he said "No"; I said "Drill?" and he said "YES, A DRILL!"

This interaction in particular challenges the traditional role of the teacher as presenter of knowledge and the student as receiver and reciter of knowledge. Quizzing, or asking for knowledge that one already possesses to see if someone else also possesses this knowledge, is something that a teacher typically does, but here, my student quizzed me and expected me to

recite knowledge that he already possessed. Unfortunately, since this interaction occurred at 9am on a Monday, I did not do very well on this quiz.

The students talked about things that they had learned in class, even incorporating them into the games they played:

> Pauline (5) [mentioned] Jackson Pollock, an artist that [the kids] had learned about earlier in the year, on the play yard in the afternoon.
>
> Rosalie (5.5) was playing "pilgrims" on the play yard, and telling her friends and the teachers facts about "back in the day".

They shared their own interpretations of the books we read during structured and unstructured class times:

> While George (3.5) and I were reading "That's Not My Lion", we read the line "That's not my lion, its ears are too soft", and George said "But all lions' ears are soft". I explained that all of the lions are different in the book, and that while all lions' ears are soft, I thought that the book was explaining that this lion's ears are different than [those of] the other lions. We had the same conversation on another page. [I will also note that my explanation of what I thought the author was saying made a whole lot more sense in real life than in my notes.]

The students incorporating the things they learned about in class into their games and sharing their own interpretations of books shows how they take agency over their learning by applying what they learn in class to their own lives and coming up with and sharing their own ideas about the topics they learn about in class.

Another way that the students positioned themselves as holders of abilities and knowledge by showing off what they learned and applying it to their own lives was by using skills that they learned in class. They used skills such as comparing and contrasting:

> Carl (almost 3) pointed out a turtle on his shirt, and then realized that there was a turtle on a spare clothes bin in front of him. He then told me about this, saying "It's a match!"

They showed off their math skills, counting, adding, and subtracting:

> Donna (almost 3) [was] counting and doing math while doing an art project, telling me that when she had 4 fish cut-outs and stuck down one, she had 3 left.
>
> Hugo (4) was counting "1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0" as he was jumping through hula hoops on the play yard.

Identifying numbers:

> I was walking down the hallway with Hugo. He was reading the numbers on the door signs. He was highly disappointed that there was no room number 0, and he then expressed his plans to make a door sign, saying "Oh, I have a pencil, I can write 0. But I need tape." He then realized that there was also no room number 9, and seemed to be satisfied with the explanation that there are not nine rooms.

And even multiplying:

> Ariel (2.5), Donna (almost 3), Hugo (4), and I were walking two-by-two on the play yard, and we had already discussed how we were walking two-by-two, but not how many that adds up to in total. Donna said "Two-by-two is…" and Hugo said "Four", and a minute later said "Two-by-two is four".

They also showed off their language skills, using Spanish inside and outside of Spanish class:

> Belle (almost 3) remembered the word "gracias" at the end of Spanish class.

George (3.5) was reading a book about boats before lunch, and he asked me “Is this a barco?” while pointing to a boat. When I responded, he pointed to a truck and asked what it was in Spanish.

Defining words:

Nick (5) said the words “game member” when talking about a game on the play yard. Rosalie (5.5) asked what that meant, and Nick explained that it is “someone who is part of a game”.

Identifying and talking about letters:

During snack, Hugo (4) had letter cookies and was telling me the letters on the cookies and naming things that started with that letter.

While Hugo was talking about his letter cookies, he mentioned the letter D, and Kody (4.5) mentioned that one of the teachers’ names starts with a D.

Reading and writing:

On the same walk down the hallway [as when he was identifying numbers], Hugo was reading the other door signs that said “Movies” and “Puzzles/Games”. We do not use those rooms for those purposes, and he usually can not read such long words that quickly, so I assume that someone has told him what the signs say or helped him read the signs and he remembered.

Sally (almost 6) had written her name in the sand on the play yard. Hugo saw this and pointed it out to me by pointing and saying her name, and then told me the spelling of Sally’s name.

And spelling:

> Nick (5) was pretending to be a hawk, and Hugo was trying to tell me about this, but was misunderstanding Nick, so I could not understand him. Hugo spelled out what he was trying to tell me, saying "C-O-K". I then understood that he was trying to say "hawk", but was pronouncing it with a C at the beginning.

Donna (almost 3) made the first letter of her name out of blocks and showed Mrs. F. Out of all of the children, Hugo (4) seems to be the most interested in letters and numbers, or at least the most interested in sharing what he knows about math and reading. Hugo is bilingual, and has an interest in language that includes an interest in how letters and words work.

Other children also shared their interest in language. They shared their reactions to others' use of language, especially when familiar languages were used in unfamiliar settings.

> [Mrs. F said that] at the playground [on a field trip], Quincy (5) heard a family speaking Chinese, which is a language he speaks as well. He was delighted by this, and he listened to them for a while and told Mrs. F about it as well.
>
> Some students and teachers, including myself, were talking about whales on the play yard, because class 2 was going to learn about whales today. I said the Spanish word "ballena" during this conversation, and Nick (5) paused and said, in a rather reflective tone, "There are other languages…".

Both of these children recognized a language (whether it was a language they spoke at home or a language they had been exposed to at school) and understood what was being said in that language, but were surprised by the context they heard this language in (perhaps Quincy doesn't usually hear people speaking Chinese at the playground, and perhaps Nick had never heard me speak Spanish outside of Spanish class). Both of these children stopped and reflected on this

familiar but surprising use of language, and then told their teachers about the language or about what they knew about language in general.

In addition to sharing knowledge, students positioned each other as holders of knowledge by asking each other questions. The students did not seem to ask each other as many questions as they asked their teachers, but they did ask clarifying questions, such as when Rosalie (5.5) asked Nick (5) to define the words "game member", and ask about common experiences:

> [Mrs. F said that] at lunch, Flora (3.5) asked her friends "Did everyone have a good time at water play?"

About current situations:

> Ivan (4) and Pauline (5) were working together to build a fairy house on the play yard. Ivan was asking Pauline what she needed, and Pauline was explaining to Ivan what she wanted to add to the fairy house.

And about each other:

> Children and myself, Mrs. F, and Mrs. S [were] talking about what we have in our bathrooms at home ("Does anyone have a shower?", etc.) at lunch time. This was started by a student but facilitated by teachers.

And ask each other for permission:

> [Mrs. F said that] children were attempting to share toys, saying "Can I have it when you are done?" and communicating to trade toys and to express disappointment when toys were grabbed or taken without permission.

The students, instead of simply being passive receivers of information, were given the space to share their own knowledge and experiences and ask about the knowledge and experiences of others. This allowed them to build upon the concepts that they were learning inside and outside

of class and learn how to clearly convey information to others and teach others new things, and it allowed all members of the classroom community to work together to create knowledge.

As discussed earlier in the section on completing tasks and other actions, they also used and shared their own abilities by working together, helping others, and telling people about things they have done or figured out. Students worked together to complete tasks, solve problems, figure out answers, and follow the rules of the games they played. They helped each other, cheered each other on, talked about things that they made together, taught others about things that they had learned how to do, talked about things that they had made or done, and even answered their own questions. The students showed remarkable maturity when solving problems and helping others. Once, a student even stepped in to mediate a chaotic situation:

> On the play yard, I had a child on my back and other children wanted to join in, but were arguing over who would go first. Taylor (almost 6) said "Single file line!", lined everyone up who wanted a turn, and made sure everyone got a turn.

Taylor was the second oldest student in the school, and often served as a role model for her younger friends.

Students not only helped each other, but they also helped teachers as well. They helped teachers and other adults call other students:

> [Mrs. F and Mrs. S said that] the children were helping Mrs. F call the next child for art, sometimes even choosing the next child themselves.
>
> [Mrs. F said that] Donna (almost 3) went in the pool during water play when a teacher asked Flora (3.5) to call her to tell her it was her turn, but had declined on other days when a teacher had asked her directly.

Hugo (4) was yelling for his friend when he saw his friend's grownup. When he could not get his friend's attention, he told the grownup to go find him.

And they helped teachers find things:

Mrs. L said, to no one in particular, that she forgot where she put down her lunch box. Carl (almost 3) pointed to it and said "there".

One time, a student warned me of something:

On the play yard, I was bending down to talk to some kids. Pauline (5) tapped my shoulder and warned me "Olive is going to run behind you very fast".

Similarly to how they copied teachers, students copied each other, such as in these two observations from the same week of George (3.5) and Emily (3):

[Mrs. F said that] George's "new thing" is to say "Do you know something?" before almost everything he says. I have also noticed this.

[Mrs. F said that] Emily asked "Want to know something?" We believe that this came from George's "Do you know something?"

They often copied other students who they saw as role models, such as these three interactions between Donna (almost 3) and Pauline (5) from three different weeks:

Donna [was] copying Pauline's words during a game at outside play time.

Pauline, Donna, and Emily (3) [were] playing repetitive games on the play yard - picking up the same things and having me "eat" them, and then telling me the same things about what I "ate" - ex. they all pretended a leaf was mint, and all told me this as part of the game.

Donna was copying Pauline's words as they were playing together on the play yard.

Donna also copied other children who were older than her, such as Flora (3.5):

> [Mrs. F said that] Donna has been copying Flora a lot yesterday and today.

Other children also copied friends who were older than them, such as the above example of Emily (3) using an expression that she learned from George (3.5), but students copying each other and viewing each other as role models sometimes had a bit less to do with age, such as in the following interaction in which Kody (4.5) and Lewis (almost 5) were copying Nick (5):

> Nick, Kody, and Lewis were talking on the play yard. Nick was saying "cannonball", and Kody and Lewis were copying him and thought he was saying "canyon bomb".

As role models for each other, students taught each other new ways of communication and built social connections. They also used language in their own ways, interpreting things that teachers say in their own ways:

> Mrs. F told Donna (almost 3) to "line up" her boots when we came inside, expecting her to put them beside each other. She lined them up toe to heel and told me "Miss Kianna, I lined up my boots".

And finding their own ways to explain things, such as in these two observations of Ariel (2.5):

> Ariel's shoe fell off as she was walking down the hallway, and she said "I fell off my shoe" to tell her friends and teachers to wait for her. Even though the teachers found her wording comical, everyone understood her and waited for her.
>
> Ariel got a paper cut. [Mrs. F told me that] later in the day, she held up her finger and said "I got a haircut".

They also corrected each other over rules, statements that they believed to be true or not true, and perceived moral transgressions, and they corrected teachers and other adults as well, usually over what to call things. They corrected others in ways that expressed their own values and knowledge, placing themselves as role models and holders of knowledge. These uses of communication are discussed further in the section on the following of rules and morals.

Teachers Placing Students as or Making Space for Students to Place Themselves as Facilitators/Role Models/Holders of Abilities and Knowledge

Throughout the summer, teachers created space for students to share their abilities and knowledge and place themselves as facilitators and role models. In this section, I will discuss how this happened during teacher-led activities and conversations, and when students joined in to teacher conversations.

During teacher-led activities, students were allowed and encouraged to share about themselves, their experiences, and their prior knowledge. I have already shared some examples of participation in this way in prior sections, such as the following:

> [Mrs. F told me that] children [were] sharing their own knowledge about bees during Mrs. F's bee day presentation (including Jack (4.5), Olive (5) - who sparked a conversation about guard bees, and Rosalie (5.5)), asking questions (Kody (4.5) - "Why do bees eat honey?"), and giving off topic remarks (George (3.5) - "Crabs eat sand" and Rosalie (5.5) - "Octopuses have two heads").
>
> [Mrs. F said that she was] reading "Fred and Ted Go Camping" to the kids during the camping day activity, and was pointing out different activities that the characters were doing and asking the kids if they had done those activities before (e.g. Have you ever set

up a tent? Have you ever gone fishing?). The kids were sharing their experiences with those activities (e.g. When Mrs. F asked the kids if they had gone fishing, many kids answered yes. She then asked them if they used a net or a pole, and most of the kids said either "net" or "pole", but Nick (5) said "Actually, I use both.").

While reading "Night Animals", we were discussing what frogs eat. The children kept saying that frogs eat fish, but the teachers did not know if this was true, so I looked it up and announced to the class that they were right and frogs do eat fish.

But there are also many more brief examples of students sharing about themselves, their experiences, and their prior knowledge during a variety of teacher-led activities throughout the summer.

[The kids were] sharing if they had read "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish" before, prompted by Mrs. S.

When George (3.5) saw the book "A Color of His Own" at circle time, he pointed out the book "The Mixed Up Chameleon" because it also has a chameleon in it.

Teacher-led conversation, as described in the section on teachers as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge, allowed students to share about themselves and their experiences, and even take over the role as facilitator.

At lunch, after [a] playground field trip, Mrs. F and Mrs. S asked the kids what their favorite part of the field trip was and wrote it on the parents' board. Their answers were as follows: Flora (3.5): "Swinging on swings"; Donna (almost 3): "Playing with Ariel"; George (3.5): "Going down ALL the slides"; Ariel (2.5): "Wiggling on the balance beam

with Donna"; Carl (almost 3): "Finding a robot"; Emily (3): "Playing with Belle"; Belle (almost 3): "Playing with Emily on slides".

During lunch, after Mrs. F and Mrs. S asked the kids what part of the field trip was their favorite, the kids asked Mrs. F and Mrs. S what their favorite part of the field trip was and had Mrs. S go find me (I was cleaning something in another room) and ask me.

Students were allowed to join in to teacher conversations, and were listened to and not dismissed when they did. They often positioned themselves as holders of knowledge, passing on information to others and creating knowledge together:

Donna (almost 3) held up four fingers while listening to a conversation between Mrs. F and I during snack about how there were only four children in class one day, and then some other children copied her.

Students were joining in to Mrs. F and I's conversation about if the rain would stop so we could take the kids outside, making their own predictions about the rain and asking to see the radar.

Mrs. S said the word buffalo to Mrs. F while talking about her lunch, [and] George (3.5) overheard and asked if she was talking about the animal. Mrs. S explained that the word buffalo has multiple meanings and that she was referring to the sauce, and multiple children, including George, spent the rest of lunch talking about buffalos to each other and to the teachers.

Mrs. F was telling Mrs. S and I about how we were only going to have five kids this afternoon. Carl (almost 3) overheard, turned to Mrs. S, and said "Five".

Teachers being facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge, and students being facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge are not mutually exclusive ideas. Teachers can facilitate activities and discussion, act as role models for students, share knowledge, and help students, while making space for students to facilitate discussion and games with their friends and teachers, act as role models for other students, share knowledge, and help other students or even teachers.

Following of Rules and Morals

One function that the students' communication often served was to follow rules and morals and encourage others to do so as well. These types of communication placed both students and teachers as role models and allowed students to explore their values and communicate their values to others. In this section, I will discuss how students corrected each other, how these corrections created and resolved conflicts, and how students corrected adults.

The students corrected each other over rules, statements that they believed to be true or not true, and perceived moral transgressions. They used their own voices to reinforce boundaries set by teachers:

> During the playground field trip, Hugo (4) walked into the grass, even though the kids were supposed to stay in the wood chips. Pauline (5) told him to come back and made sure he came back into the wood chips, and then told multiple of her teachers what happened.

Sometimes even repeating the teachers:

> There was a puddle on the play yard, and Donna (almost 3) and Emily (3) approached it. I said "Let's not go in the puddle". Emily approached the puddle further and Donna told her "Emily, let's not go in the puddle". Emily did not go in the puddle.

Boundaries set by themselves:

> George (3.5) has been saying "Don't talk over me" to his friends, especially at meal times.

And moral boundaries:

> [Mrs. F told me that] Emily (3) politely told off Carl (almost 3) for (accidentally) crashing into someone on the play yard.

They called each other out when other students said things that they did not believe to be true:

> Ivan (4), Kody (4.5), and Nick (5) were talking about sea animals on the play yard. They were talking about how whales and sharks live in the water, and not on the sand, but they were not understanding each other because Ivan was saying "at the beach", as in, in the water, and Kody and Nick were saying "on the beach" as in, on the sand (e.g. "The shark lives at the beach", "No, it does not live on the beach").

Or when other students called things or people by names that they did not believe to be correct:

> [Mrs. F pointed out that] during lunch, George (3.5) and Belle (almost 3) were arguing about whether they call Sally by her full name or her nickname, but they were both saying the same thing (that they both call her by both of her names).

Sometimes they asked teachers to remind other students of rules:

> Hugo (4) came over to me and said "say to him" to tell me about a child that was blocking a ladder (as in, telling me to tell the other child to stop blocking the ladder).

And sometimes they even praised their friends for following rules:

> [Mrs. S said that George (3.5) said] “Good sharing guys” to two of his friends who were sharing toys.

It is worth noting that students correcting each other did not seem to have much to do with age, for example, some of the above interactions involved older students correcting younger students, such as Pauline (5) telling Hugo (4) to come back into the wood chips, some involved younger students correcting older students, such as Donna (almost 3) telling Emily (3) not to go in the puddle, and some involved multiple students trying to correct each other, such as George (3.5) and Belle (almost 3) and their conversation about what to call another child.

Some of these corrections led to conflicts, such as in the case of George and Belle and in the case of Ivan, Kody, and Nick talking about sea animals on the play yard, and some both created and resolved conflicts, such as the following:

> Belle (almost 3) came up to me on the play yard in the afternoon to tell me that it was not water play but Donna (almost 3) was saying that it is. I told her that it is water play day, but water play was earlier, and this must be where the miscommunication was happening. Belle told Donna and they stopped arguing.
>
> Donna (almost 3), Flora (3.5), and George (3.5) were playing with blocks, and Donna was attempting to join in Flora and George’s game. Flora and George were yelling “No” at Donna because she was doing it “wrong”. After some reminders from teachers to use inside voices, Flora and George explained to Donna how to play their game and Donna copied them.

The students in all of these scenarios were actually agreeing on the topic at hand (Ivan, Kody and Nick agreed that sharks live in the water, George and Belle agreed that they both call Sally by

both of her names, Belle and Donna agreed that it was water play day but water play was earlier, and Donna wanted to follow the rules of Flora and George's game), but they had not taken the time to listen to each other and understand where the miscommunication was coming from before correcting each other. Once students understood where the miscommunication was coming from, such as in the case of Belle and Donna or Donna, Flora, and George, the students were able to resolve the conflict by correcting the miscommunication. *This shows that listening skills are an important part of the students' communication, and that students build these skills as they try to resolve conflicts, often with minor intervention from teachers.*

The students tended to only correct teachers and other adults when it came to what to call things. This became a rather common theme, with some students correcting teachers over the same things:

> Donna (almost 3) corrects her teachers when we call her shorts "pants" and says "These are my shorts."
>
> Belle (almost 3) also corrects teachers if they call her shorts "pants".

Or even correcting adults that were not their teachers:

> [Mrs. F and Mrs. S said that] when the "mystery reader" came, Rosalie (5.5) was trying to correct her as she read, correcting her "pronunciations of sea creature names" according to Mrs. F, and telling her "the way to pronounce words 'correctly'" according to Mrs. S. She was also saying what was happening next in the book, which was annoying Taylor.

The students have confidence in their vocabulary skills, and are therefore unwilling to let teachers and other adults be lackadaisical with how we use and pronounce words.

The students discussed morality sometimes, with a common theme over the summer being “bad guys” and “good guys”.

> George (3.5) [said] to Mrs. F during snack, after having a conversation with Mrs. F about why she let another teacher in when she knocked and how you let people in when they knock if they are welcome in, “We are nice, but some people are not nice.”
>
> Ivan (4) said something about a “bad guy” during outside play time, Donna (almost 3) [said] “I’m not a bad guy”, [and Ivan said] “I know. You are not a bad guy, you are my friend.”

At the beginning of the summer, we noticed that the students were calling each other “bad guys” and “good guys” while playing games. This inevitably led to conflict, as not all of the students who were labeled “bad guys” intended for their character in the game to be a “bad guy”. We had to make a rule that they could not label the characters in their games “bad guys”, and we would tell the kids “there are no bad guys at this school”. *The childrens’ labeling of the characters in their games in this way shows that they have a strong sense of morality and know what they consider to be “bad” and “good”, however, these imaginative games can feel real to the students, and can cause very real conflicts.*

Entertainment/Fun

The students enjoyed communicating with each other and their teachers, and this enjoyment seemed to be a large part of why they communicated in so many of the different ways that they communicated. In this section, I will discuss some of the ways that students had fun while communicating with others in the classroom, such as repetition and copying, making jokes, and playing games.

One of the types of communication that the students seemed to enjoy the most was repetition and copying. They repeated themselves and copied other people's words for fun:

> I said "What are you doing over there?" to a child at snack, and multiple children copied me.
>
> Carl (almost 3) said "I win! I win!" after getting a basket in the basketball hoop on the play yard, and other kids copied him when they got baskets.

They also repeated themselves in order to bond with teachers, such as in these interactions from the same week, which are two of many instances of Hugo (4) using the rubber duck to bond with teachers:

> Hugo showed me how he likes to put a rubber duck in a teacup at water play; this was the third of three separate occasions that he has shown me. He knows that I remember it, but finds it funny and uses it as a way to engage with me and with his other teachers.
>
> [Mrs. F said that] Hugo showed her the duck in the teacup (that I described on Th 7/18) as well.

Hugo also enjoyed when a teacher copied him:

> [Mrs. F told me about] the following interaction during a dance party activity outside: "Hugo said 'Mrs. F, come!' He walked away and started dancing in the middle of the group. I followed him and imitated all his moves. He loved it. I copied him until he started rolling in the grass."

I wrote down more interactions that I witnessed myself that involved the children repeating themselves or copying each other towards the beginning of the summer. This may be because teachers tune out this type of repetition after a while, but since I hadn't been spending as much time with the kids in the months leading up to the summer as most of the other teachers had

been, I hadn't gotten used to all of the phrases that they had been repeating at that time. Repetition, however, never went entirely unnoticed by teachers:

> Mrs. F and I had a discussion about how the kids gravitate towards specific pages in books to show each other, as we were watching Belle (almost 3) and Emily (3) show each other a mirror in a book back and forth for a long time. Mrs. S then told Mrs. F and I a story about how Belle had been obsessed with a specific page in a book. A couple minutes later, Donna (almost 3) and Ariel (2.5) were getting very excited about a page in a book, and Mrs. F, Mrs. S, and I were observing. I told Mrs. F and Mrs. S that this was one of the pages that I had mentioned a couple minutes earlier during my discussion with Mrs. F.

At the end of the summer, I wrote down some examples of phrases that students had repeated that I had not included in my observations. I wrote that in my data, I did not include "certain phrases that the kids repeat every day, for example, 'Yummy, yummy, in my tummy' at almost every meal, and 'One and done' after almost every time a teacher says this ('One and done' is a phrase we use to redirect the kids when they have repeated a phrase too many times, but it unfortunately backfires on us almost every time)" or "specific ways kids greet us or each other every day, for example, Donna (almost 3) greets me every morning by taking my hand and saying 'I'm going to take you somewhere' and Hugo (4) greets me many times a day by saying 'There you are' or 'I found you.'" Even though I did not find these phrases that the students repeated every day to be important things to write down every day, I still acknowledged at the end of the summer that my data set seemed incomplete without this large part of the students' communication. Repetition and copying, including repetition of words that seem "random" to adults, is a typical part of young childrens' communication. Children learn to speak by observing

and copying others. Mrs. F referenced this part of speech development when trying to figure out why a child was having a hard time pronouncing a word:

> George (3.5) was saying fox as "socks" during circle time, and we were having a hard time figuring out what he was saying. Once we figured out that he was trying to say "fox", Mrs. F was trying to show him how to say it, and he was having a hard time copying the "F" sound. Mrs. F theorizes, based on her knowledge of how babies acquire language and how this may apply to toddlers as well, that this may be because he might not look at people's mouths as much as they are speaking and notice how their mouths move as they are speaking, and therefore has a harder time copying people as they speak.

The students had a lot of fun with words in other ways as well. They made jokes using puns and word play:

> Both classes went outside together to read a book before nap time because the fire alarm tests were still happening. In the book, there was a kingfisher, and Olive (5) joked "I thought it was a queen fisher".

Used different forms of jokes that they have heard from others:

> George (3.5) was making "interrupting cow" jokes at afternoon snack. Donna (almost 3) and Flora (3.5) joined in.

Joked about things that were going on around them:

> Belle (almost 3) was hiding from Flora (3.5) in her nap stuff after nap time, and Flora was pretending not to be able to find her and joked "Maybe her's on a trip."

Used "random" words or phrases to make jokes and play games:

> [Mrs. F told me that] Hugo (4) kept coming up to her and yelling "Peanut butter!"

> Multiple students [were] engaging in games with teachers on the play yard using the same phrases, such as “Miss Kianna, look away.”

And told stories:

> On the play yard, Olive (5) was telling me stories about a princess and a dragon on “the tallest mountain in the world”. Pauline (5) joined in with a story about a monster on the mountain.

George (3.5), who as described earlier, is curious about double meanings of words, also made jokes that made use of these double meanings:

> George [said the following] when talking to me about which teachers are leaving and which are staying, “Short day, a day when you wear shorts?” - he seemed to understand both meanings of the word and seemed to purposely be making a joke. [Teachers have different schedules, and a “short day” is what a teacher calls it when they leave early. George knows what a “short day” is, and we were discussing which teacher had a short day that day when George made this comment.]

As discussed earlier in the section on completing tasks and other actions, the students also needed to communicate to follow the rules of the games they played.

> [Mrs. S said that she witnessed] the following conversation on the play yard: “George (3.5) and Hugo (4) [were] playing red light green light, George has the color circles, George: ‘Hugo, red light’, Hugo: ‘OKAY’, George: ‘Green light’, *Hugo runs*, George: ‘Red light!’, *Hugo keeps running*, George: ‘No Hugo, red light’, Hugo: ‘Oh okay George’, *Hugo runs back giggling*”.

They also sometimes communicated to make up these rules:

> [Mrs. F said that] George (3.5) and Flora (3.5) were arguing over who would knock down the toy trees at indoor play time. George said "You take two turns and I take two turns". Flora agreed and followed George's rule.

And express disappointment when these rules are not followed:

> Donna (almost 3), Flora (3.5), and George (3.5) were playing with blocks, and Donna was attempting to join in Flora and George's game. Flora and George were yelling "No" at Donna because she was doing it "wrong". After some reminders from teachers to use inside voices, Flora and George explained to Donna how to play their game and Donna copied them.

In one instance, an attempt to follow (or not follow) the rules of a game turned into a joke, and the students whose rules had not been followed did not get mad.

> [Mrs. F told me about] the following interaction during indoor play time: "Flora (3.5) and Donna (almost 3) were making a circle with the little rectangular blocks. Ariel (2.5) kept taking one piece. They kept telling her no and putting another piece where she'd taken one from. The last time she did it, she waited until they weren't paying attention and took another and hid it behind her back, she was smiling. They didn't get mad."

Verbal communication is a huge part of the students' social lives. Playing games helped students learn how to work together and be patient with others, and sometimes explain things to others when the rules of the game were not followed.

Situations in Which Verbal Communication did not Occur or Could be Considered Incomplete

All communication serves a purpose, but there were times when the recipient of a piece of communication misunderstood the communication or could not identify the purpose of it, and there were times when no verbal communication occurred when teachers expected it to, whether it turned out to be necessary or not. In this section, I will discuss miscommunication and "lack of communication". I will also discuss how teachers do not always know the purpose behind every instance of student communication.

Some communication involved miscommunication, and some of this miscommunication caused conflict:

> Belle (almost 3) came up to me on the play yard in the afternoon to tell me that it was not water play but Donna (almost 3) was saying that it is. I told her that it is water play day, but water play was earlier, and this must be where the miscommunication was happening. Belle told Donna and they stopped arguing.

But some miscommunication did not cause conflict:

> George (3.5) and Flora (3.5) [were] playing games during lunch, [saying] "Do you see the…" and getting the word "umbrella" lost in communication as "gorilla".

Or even went entirely unnoticed:

> While playing a game on the play yard, Kody (4.5) was using the words "The storm is over" to mean "The storm is overhead" and Hugo (4) was using the words "The storm is over" to mean "The storm is done". They didn't seem to notice this discrepancy.

> Nick (5), Kody (4.5), and Lewis (almost 5) were talking on the play yard. Nick was saying "cannonball", and Kody and Lewis were copying him and thought he was saying "canyon bomb".

As discussed in the section on the following of rules and morals, miscommunication about facts, what to call things or people, and social situations was often a cause of conflict, and the resolving of conflict often involved the clearing up of miscommunication. The other main cause of conflict that I identified was conflict over items, which also sometimes included miscommunication.

> [Mrs. S told me about] the following conversation on the play yard: "Donna (almost 3) took Ariel's (2.5) red shovel, Ariel: 'Donna that's my shovel', Donna: 'No Ariel, that's mine', Ariel: *yells something incoherent*, Donna: 'Oh mine's here, here Ariel' *gives back red shovel*, Ariel: 'Thanks Donna'".

> Teachers could also misunderstand students:
>
> George (3.5) looked at Carl's (almost 3) applesauce pouch at afternoon snack, which had cartoon eyes on the packaging, and said "A pouch with eyes". Mrs. F said that she thought he said "A house with eyes" and that's why she was "surprised", and George pointed out that those things rhymed.

It is difficult to know how often teachers misunderstood students because we may sometimes not notice when we do so. For example, I'm not sure if Mrs. F ever found out that George was originally referring to a "pouch with eyes", because she and the students got hung up on "a house with eyes" before the original conversation was able to be continued. In my data, there are many more examples of students misunderstanding each other than teachers misunderstanding

students. However, it is difficult to know if students actually misunderstood each other much more often than teachers misunderstood them, like my data may appear to suggest, because I may have misunderstood students without noticing that I did so, or misunderstood students in the same way that other teachers did, therefore missing that miscommunication occurred in the interaction. Therefore, the frequency of teachers misunderstanding students may be underrepresented in my data.

In addition to misunderstanding the content of an utterance, teachers also sometimes could not identify the purpose of a piece of communication. In the section on all communication serving a purpose, I discussed the following interaction:

> During lunch, Emily (3) turned to Mrs. S and said "Do you like me Mrs. S?" with no context. Mrs. S said "Yes, but where did that come from?" and Emily didn't respond.

I noted that while we knew that Emily was asking for information from Mrs. S, we did not know why she was asking for this information.

Another interesting example of a teacher not being able to identify the purpose of a piece of communication was one that I discussed in the section on teachers as facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge. I mentioned that Hugo (4) asked me how old I was many times, and that I originally did not know why he asked this question so many times, but when he asked me when my birthday was after asking me this question one time, I realized that he may have been waiting for my answer to how old I was to be "22" instead of "21".

We were typically quite good at understanding our students, but miscommunication and misunderstood or unnoticed intentions are inevitable in the classroom. This highlights the importance of being intentional about listening to our students and making our best attempts at understanding what they are communicating to us and the purposes behind their communication.

Youth voices often get overlooked, so it is important for us to listen carefully to our students, even when, and sometimes especially when, we don't understand what they are communicating or the purpose behind their communication. We can even ask follow-up questions, like Mrs. S did in her conversation with Emily. Our students are very young and may not be able to clarify what they mean or their intentions, so it is also important to reflect on the communication that happens in the classroom to see if something a child says can help to explain something that they (or another child) has said before, such as in my above interactions with Hugo.

Throughout the summer, my co-teachers Mrs. S, Mrs. F, and I had many discussions about what counts as communication. We ultimately decided that "lack of communication" was a form of communication in itself. We also discussed the concept of "partial lack of communication":

> Ariel (2.5) was sleeping during nap time, and then she sat up, acted confused, and wouldn't lay back down. I asked her if she was going to go back to sleep, and she said yes but didn't lay back down. I said "You're going to have to lay down to do that" and she laid back down and fell asleep.
>
> Mrs. S asked if my interaction with Ariel at nap time counted as communication (as in, for this project) and we agreed that while there was not a lack of communication, it was certainly hard for me to communicate with her while she was tired and confused.

Sometimes students did not communicate verbally because they could not explain what they needed or could not answer a question:

> Carl (almost 3) had an extra sock stuck in his shoe during nap time, was crying and not telling Mrs. F what was wrong for about ½ hr. He eventually said "shoe" and Mrs. F

helped him fix his shoe. After nap, he told everyone in class about how there was a sock stuck in his shoe and his toes were “smashed”.

[Mrs. F said that] “Carl wasn’t able to communicate what was wrong, but in the end, he was able to tell everyone.”

Carl’s ability to communicate drastically increased over the summer. I wrote that:

Multiple teachers, including myself, Mrs. F, and Mrs. S, have commented on multiple occasions that Carl’s language abilities and vocabulary have “exploded”.

In these scenarios, in which Ariel and Carl had a hard time communicating with their teachers at nap time, the students’ abilities to talk decreased when they were tired, confused, or in distress, but they still both made attempts at verbal communication.

Sometimes students did not communicate verbally because it was not necessary.

[Mrs. F said that] Emily (3) picked up her friend’s hat without being asked and without telling anyone or even looking to see if anyone was looking. Mrs. F and I agreed that this was a “good lack of communication”.

The “good lack of communication” that Mrs. F and I described does not mean there is anything “bad” about lack of communication in any other context, but rather that no communication or no further communication was necessary to complete the students’ and teachers’ goals at the moment.

Lack of verbal communication when teachers expected it to occur was also sometimes, but not always, linked with lack of communication in a more general sense of the word. In the above example with Emily, she did not attempt to communicate with anyone about what she was doing. Mrs. F even noted that she did not even look up to see if anyone was looking. In the above example with Ariel, she did not make any attempt at communicating with me before I spoke to

her. In the above example with Carl, he was attempting to communicate with Mrs. F before he was able to tell her what he needed help with, but he was pointing to his mouth, not his shoe, so she was not able to understand what he needed before he communicated it to her verbally.

These cases of "lack of communication" show that in some cases, verbal communication is not necessary, while in other cases, it can be necessary when other forms of communication are misunderstood.

Action Plan

Introduction

These methods are based on what I learned from this project, and are intended for me to use and share with others throughout my career. They are also meant to be built upon and adapted for different contexts.

For my final project for EDUC 150: Exploring the Power of Youth Knowledge, I created a booklet that represents my action plan in a way that can be easily shared with other educators. I shared this booklet with my peers in EDUC 150, many of whom are also teachers or work with kids (or are planning to work with kids) in some way, and presented about the process of creating this booklet and what I have learned through creating the booklet, through praxis, through EDUC 150, and throughout my career about centering student voices and reflecting on one's own teaching. I also shared this booklet with my co-teachers, who helped me edit it and talked about how it helped them reflect on all of the communication that happened last summer.

My booklet can be found at the end of my action plan. It can also be found here: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGhLaGYM9o/QoLiofqWm3OR3D3FLN7c0Q/view?utm_con

tent=DAGhLaGYM9o&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=uniquelinks&utlId=hcca4e2d0e9

Communicating with Students

Method/plan/recommendation	Explanation	Example
Initiate teacher-led conversation.	Take time during any part of the school day (transition times, meal times, and time during teacher-led activities often work well for this type of communication) to ask each student, or the class as a whole, about an experience that the class just had, about their own experiences, or about themselves. If possible, occasionally write student answers down to share with families. Students may facilitate communication of this type themselves, asking their peers or teachers similar questions to what teachers typically ask during teacher-led conversation.	Ask students questions such as: - Do you have a pet at home? - What is your favorite food? - What did everyone do this weekend? - What was your favorite part of [activity] today? - What do you have for lunch?
Allow and encourage students to share their own knowledge.	Students should be allowed and encouraged to share their own knowledge in the classroom. This can be done in many different ways, such as during teacher-led conversation as described above, or during teacher-led activities by asking students about their prior knowledge and allowing and encouraging them to share connections with the material to their own lives. Remember that teachers being facilitators, role	In the following interaction, a child was connecting the material he was learning during Spanish class to his own life: “As I was presenting vocabulary words in class 2, Kody (4.5) was sharing his own experiences with the transportation items we were learning about using Spanish and English (such as telling me that he used a ‘bicicleta’ the other day at bike day).”

	models, and holders of abilities and knowledge, and students being facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge are not mutually exclusive ideas.	
Let students resolve conflicts by themselves when possible, but know when to step in.	Students often learn conflict resolution skills by themselves or with minimal teacher intervention. If students ask teachers to intervene, or if students are being unsafe or disrespectful to one another, teachers may need to step in to mediate the situation.	In the following interaction, the students resolved a conflict with teacher intervention: "Donna (almost 3), Flora (3.5), and George (3.5) were playing with blocks, and Donna was attempting to join in Flora and George's game. Flora and George were yelling 'No' at Donna because she was doing it 'wrong'. After some reminders from teachers to use inside voices, Flora and George explained to Donna how to play their game and Donna copied them." In the following interaction, the students resolved a conflict with no teacher intervention: "Jack (4.5) and Olive (5) were arguing over who would show me something on the play yard, and Olive ended up showing me, and Jack showed Mrs. S. This is a solution they seemed to have come to on their own."
Model communication.	Remember that students are always listening and learning from the ways teachers communicate. If teachers work together in the same classroom, they should be mindful of the ways they	In the following interaction, students joined in to a teacher conversation and helped to create knowledge: "Students were joining in to Mrs. F and I's conversation about if the rain would stop

	communicate with each other, and allow students to join in to teacher conversation when appropriate.	so we could take the kids outside, making their own predictions about the rain and asking to see the radar."
Allow students to have fun.	Allow students to repeat words or phrases (within reason), and give them the space and time to play games, tell jokes, and engage in other types of communication that they enjoy.	Over the summer, my students often practiced working together by playing games: "Belle (almost 3), Emily (3), George (3.5), and Macy (5) were playing duck, duck, goose on the play yard. They were communicating to follow the rules of the game and cheering for each other as they played." And they connected with others by making jokes: "George (3.5) was making 'interrupting cow' jokes at afternoon snack. Donna (almost 3) and Flora (3.5) joined in." "Hugo (4) showed me how he likes to put a rubber duck in a teacup at water play; this was the third of three separate occasions that he has shown me. He knows that I remember it, but finds it funny and uses it as a way to engage with me and with his other teachers."

Observing and Reflecting on Student Communication

Method/plan/recommendation	Questions to ask yourself	Example
Remember that all communication serves a purpose.	What was the student's intention when they communicated in that way?	One student, Hugo (4), kept asking me how old I was. He made it very clear to me, by asking "How old are you?",

	Were they sharing information, asking for information, asking for help, etc.? Do teachers know the reason that they shared the information they shared, asked the question they asked, etc.?	that he was asking me for information and what information he was asking for. I did not, however, know why he kept asking me this question so many times throughout the summer. Eventually, when he asked me when my birthday was, I realized that he may have been wondering when my answer to how old I was was going to be "22" instead of "21".
Remember that while there may be communication that works against the goals of students being safe, happy, and learning, there is no "bad" communication.	Why do I want the student to stop engaging in the type of communication that they are engaging in right now? Is it unsafe*, disrespectful, or disruptive? Why do I consider it unsafe, disrespectful, or disruptive? What can I do to redirect the student's communication so that they know why I can't allow them to communicate in that way and they know what to do instead? Can I use this as an opportunity to help kids learn communication skills such as conflict resolution? *If a child is in an unsafe situation, attend to the situation now and reflect on it later	If students are arguing in an aggressive or harmful way, such as yelling at each other or calling each other names, I must step in to mediate the situation before it escalates further, because the students are not only being disrespectful to each other, but they may also start a physical fight if the argument escalates. The students are not being "bad", but the communication they are using does go against my goals of keeping them safe and happy. If I step in quickly, mediate the situation calmly, and ask the students to explain the situation and why they were communicating in the way they were communicating, I can use this as an opportunity to help the students learn conflict resolution skills.
Observe the ways that students participate in teacher-led activities.	Which students are participating the most? Which students are participating the least? In what ways are students participating?	I observed students participating in the following ways during teacher-led activities over the summer: - Sharing facts

	Are students allowed (and encouraged) to share their own knowledge? What knowledge are students sharing? What knowledge are students asking for; what are they curious about?	- Sharing about themselves - Sharing their own experiences - Asking questions - Answering questions - Finding rhymes - Counting - Guessing/predicting - Comparing - Identifying things/pointing things out - Singing along - Repeating - Sharing what they remember
Observe the ways that students use concepts that they learn in class as they go about their day.	Do students talk about the things that they are learning in class? Do they use words that they learned in class? Do they talk about the things they read? Do they talk about numbers or use math? Do they use other skills that they have learned in class such as comparing and contrasting or identifying letters, numbers, colors, and shapes?	I identified the following ways that my students used concepts that they learned in class over the summer: - Using words (and songs) they learned from Spanish class - Asking for Spanish words - Counting - Identifying numbers - Adding and subtracting - Multiplication - Talking about spelling/letter sounds - Talking about letters (Identifying letters/ABCs) - Saying words they have read - Using other academic concepts (rhymes, shapes, colors, matching, opposites, etc.) - Talking (or singing) about things that they

		have learned in class
Listen to what students share about themselves.	When and to whom do students share about themselves? Do students share about their interests? Do they share about their experiences? Do they share their plans or goals?	An instance of a student sharing about themselves that stood out to me over the summer was the following, in which a student shared future goals: "During [a] storm, Mrs. F suggested that some of the kids could end up being meteorologists one day. George (3.5) said that he can't be a scientist because he wants to be a fire truck driver."
Reflect on what students' communication can tell you about their values.	What school rules, social rules, morals, etc. do students remind others to follow? Do they correct their peers about different things than they correct their teachers about? Who do students view as role models and whose abilities and knowledge do students value? How do they position themselves and others as holders of abilities and knowledge?	Over the summer, my students corrected each other over many things, such as school rules, things that they believed to be true or not true, what to call things or people, and things that they did not like others doing. They only tended to correct teachers and other adults when it came to what to call things. I believe that this is because the students have a lot of confidence in their vocabulary skills, and are therefore willing to place themselves as holders of knowledge when it comes to what to call things, even when talking to teachers.
Reflect on the types of communication that the students enjoy participating in.	What are the students' favorite topics to talk about? When do they seem most engaged in conversation? What types of words or phrases do they like to repeat and who do they like to copy? How do they use	Over the summer, my students spent a lot of time copying things that their peers and their teachers said. This is because this is a typical part of their development, and it may also relate to how they view their peers and their

	communication to connect with each other and their teachers?	teachers as role models. My students also enjoyed communicating to play games and tell jokes, and used this as a way to engage with and connect with their teachers and peers.
Reflect on what you consider "communication".	Am I considering both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication? What can verbal communication tell me? What can other types of communication, such as body language and writing, tell me? Is "lack of communication" a type of communication? What do I consider to be "lack of communication"? When does lack of communication happen?	I focused on verbal communication for this project, but there are many other ways that my students communicate. One type of communication that I did consider while doing this project was "lack of communication". My co-teachers and I discussed "lack of communication" a lot over the summer, and ultimately decided that it was a type of communication in itself.
Share your observations with other teachers.	What did I observe today that I thought was interesting or important? What do other teachers think about these observations? What observations do other teachers share with me? What can I learn from these observations? What views do the other teachers and I have about communication and the role it plays in our classroom(s)? What do we consider to be communication? Do we have similar or different views about what communication is and the role it plays in our classroom(s)?	In the following interaction, teachers talk about a type of communication as they are observing it: "Mrs. F and I had a discussion about how the kids gravitate towards specific pages in books to show each other, as we were watching Belle (almost 3) and Emily (3) show each other a mirror in a book back and forth for a long time. Mrs. S then told Mrs. F and I a story about how Belle had been obsessed with a specific page in a book. A couple minutes later, Donna (almost 3) and Ariel (2.5) were getting very excited about a page in a book, and Mrs. F, Mrs. S, and I were observing. I told Mrs.

		F and Mrs. S that this was one of the pages that I had mentioned a couple minutes earlier during my discussion with Mrs. F.”

Booklet

Listening to

For educators working with
preschoolers or other young children

Kianna Fiske

1

"**If it is in speaking their word** that people, by naming the world, **transform it**, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. **Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.**"

– Paulo Freire

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In other words...

"My mouth needs to talk!"

– My 3.5-year-old student, 2022

About this booklet

This booklet was made based on my praxis project for the community, youth, and education studies major at Clark University. My project was about how students communicate in the classroom and how teachers observe this communication, and was based on observations that my co-teachers and I made of our 2.5 - almost 6 year old preschool students. These observations were made throughout the summer of 2024. All names used in this booklet are pseudonyms. Photos are not necessarily from 2024, and are not all by me.

Table of contents

Why student voices?

In some classrooms, student voices are not heard. In these classrooms, communication only involves the presentation of the material by the teacher and the recitation of the material by the students. Communication in the classroom can be so much more than this traditional model. There are ways of communicating with students and observing their communication that center students, allow them to share their own knowledge and experiences, allow them to connect with their teachers and peers, and allow them to learn effectively and enjoy learning. It is also important that teachers share their knowledge of teaching with each other and build knowledge together. Throughout this booklet, I will share some of my favorite strategies for communicating with students and observing their communication. These strategies are intended to be used, built upon, and adapted by myself and other teachers as we listen to our students' voices.

Why are student voices sometimes overlooked?

Student voices are sometimes overlooked because youth knowledge, abilities, experiences, ideas, needs, and perspectives are often undervalued by society. Youth are often seen as too inexperienced and impulsive to have a say in what happens in the classroom or elsewhere. As educators, it would be easy for us to perpetuate this adultism in our classrooms because of the power dynamics at play in the relationship between teacher and student, but we can not let this happen. It is our job to listen to our students and value their knowledge, abilities, experiences, ideas, needs, and perspectives because we have as much to learn from them as they have to learn from us, and learning from and about our students helps us teach them effectively. For those who work with younger children, this can be especially difficult because our students are in earlier stages of learning how to communicate, and therefore their voices are even more likely to be overlooked if we are not careful.

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Part 1: Communicating with students

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Teacher-led conversation

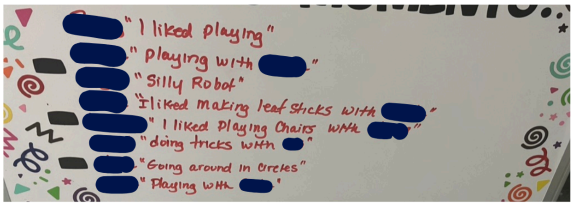
How to lead conversation:

Take time during any part of the school day (transition times, meal times, and time during teacher-led activities often work well for this type of communication) to ask each student, or the class as a whole, about an experience that the class just had, about their own experiences, or about themselves. If possible, occasionally write student answers down to share with families. Students may facilitate communication of this type themselves, asking their peers or teachers similar questions to what teachers typically ask during teacher-led conversation.

What to ask:

- Do you have a pet at home?
- What is your favorite food?
- What did everyone do this weekend?
- What was your favorite part of [activity] today?
- What do you have for lunch?

The following answers were given by a group of 2.5 - 3.5 year old students when they were asked what their favorite part of their day was so far:



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Allowing and encouraging students to share their own knowledge

What this means:

Students should be allowed and encouraged to share their own knowledge in the classroom. This can be done in many different ways, such as during teacher-led conversation as described on the previous page, or during teacher-led activities by asking students about their prior knowledge and allowing and encouraging them to share connections with the material to their own lives. Remember that teachers being facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge, and students being facilitators, role models, and holders of abilities and knowledge are not mutually exclusive ideas.

Example:

This 4.5-year-old child was connecting the material he was learning during Spanish class to his own life:

"As I was presenting vocabulary words in class 2, Kody was sharing his own experiences with the transportation items we were learning about using Spanish and English (such as telling me that he used a 'bicicleta' the other day at bike day)"

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Dealing with conflict

Let students resolve conflicts by themselves when possible, but know when to step in.

Students often learn conflict resolution skills by themselves or with minimal teacher intervention. If students ask teachers to intervene, or if students are being unsafe or disrespectful to one another, teachers may need to step in to mediate the situation.

Examples:

These students resolved a conflict with teacher intervention:

"Donna (almost 3), Flora (3.5), and George (3.5) were playing with blocks, and Donna was attempting to join in Flora and George's game. Flora and George were yelling 'No' at Donna because she was doing it 'wrong'. After some reminders from teachers to use inside voices, Flora and George explained to Donna how to play their game and Donna copied them."

And these students resolved a conflict with no teacher intervention:

"Jack (4.5) and Olive (5) were arguing over who would show me something on the play yard, and Olive ended up showing me, and Jack showed Mrs. S. This is a solution they seemed to have come to on their own."

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Modeling communication

Remember that students are always listening and learning from the ways teachers communicate.

If teachers work together in the same classroom, they should be mindful of the ways they communicate with each other, and allow students to join in to teacher conversation when appropriate.

Example:

These students joined in to a teacher conversation and helped to create knowledge:

"Students were joining in to Mrs. F and I's conversation about if the rain would stop so we could take the kids outside, making their own predictions about the rain and asking to see the radar"

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Allowing students to have fun

What this means:

Allow students to repeat words or phrases (within reason), and give them the space and time to play games, tell jokes, and engage in other types of communication that they enjoy.

Examples:

Over the summer, my students often practiced working together by playing games:

"Belle (almost 3), Emily (3), George (3.5), and Macy (5) were playing duck, duck, goose on the play yard. They were communicating to follow the rules of the game and cheering for each other as they played."

And they connected with others by making jokes:

"George (3.5) was making 'interrupting cow' jokes at afternoon snack. Donna (almost 3) and Flora (3.5) joined in."

"Hugo (4) showed me how he likes to put a rubber duck in a teacup at water play; this was the third of three separate occasions that he has shown me. He knows that I remember it, but finds it funny and uses it as a way to engage with me and with his other teachers."

Part 2: Observing and reflecting on student communication

All communication serves a purpose

Questions to ask yourself:

What was the student's intention when they communicated in that way?

Were they sharing information, asking for information, asking for help, etc.? Do teachers know the reason that they shared the information they shared, asked the question they asked, etc.?

Example:

One 4-year-old student, Hugo, kept asking me how old I was. He made it very clear to me, by asking "How old are you?", that he was asking me for information and what information he was asking for. I did not, however, know why he kept asking me this question so many times throughout the summer. Eventually, when he asked me when my birthday was, I realized that he may have been wondering when my answer to how old I was was going to be "22" instead of "21".

There is no "bad" communication

Questions to ask yourself:

Remember that while there may be communication that works against the goals of students being safe, happy, and learning, there is no "bad" communication. You can ask yourself:

Why do I want the student to stop engaging in the type of communication that they are engaging in right now? Is it unsafe*, disrespectful, or disruptive? Why do I consider it unsafe, disrespectful, or disruptive?

What can I do to redirect the student's communication so that they know why I can't allow them to communicate in that way and they know what to do instead? Can I use this as an opportunity to help kids learn communication skills such as conflict resolution?

*If a child is in an unsafe situation, attend to the situation now and reflect on it later

There is no "bad" communication cont.

What I do when communication gets out of hand:

If students are arguing in an aggressive or harmful way, such as yelling at each other or calling each other names, I must step in to mediate the situation before it escalates further, because the students are not only being disrespectful to each other, but they may also start a physical fight if the argument escalates. The students are not being "bad", but the communication they are using does go against my goals of keeping them safe and happy. If I step in quickly, mediate the situation calmly, and ask the students to explain the situation and why they were communicating in the way they were communicating, I can use this as an opportunity to help the students learn conflict resolution skills.

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Observing the ways that students participate in teacher-led activities

Questions to ask yourself:

Which students are participating the most? Which students are participating the least? In what ways are students participating?

Are students allowed (and encouraged) to share their own knowledge? What knowledge are students sharing? What knowledge are students asking for; what are they curious about?

Examples:

I observed students participating in the following ways during teacher-led activities over the summer:

- Sharing facts
- Sharing about themselves
- Sharing their own experiences
- Asking questions
- Answering questions
- Finding rhymes
- Counting
- Guessing/predicting
- Comparing
- Identifying things/ pointing things out
- Singing along
- Repeating
- Sharing what they remember

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Observing the ways that students use the concepts they learn in class

Questions to ask yourself:

Do students talk about the things that they are learning in class? Do they use words that they learned in class? Do they talk about the things they read? Do they talk about numbers or use math? Do they use other skills that they have learned in class such as comparing and contrasting or identifying letters, numbers, colors, and shapes?

Examples:

I identified the following ways that my students used concepts that they learned in class over the summer:

- Using words (and songs) they learned from Spanish class
- Asking for Spanish words
- Counting
- Identifying numbers
- Adding and subtracting
- Multiplication
- Talking about spelling/letter sounds

- Talking about letters (Identifying letters/ABCs)
- Saying words they have read
- Using other academic concepts (rhymes, shapes, colors, matching, opposites, etc.)
- Talking (or singing) about things that they have learned in class

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Listening to what students share about themselves

Questions to ask yourself:

When and to whom do students share about themselves?

Do students share about their interests? Do they share about their experiences? Do they share their plans or goals?

Example:

An instance of a student sharing about themselves that stood out to me over the summer was the following, in which a 3.5-year-old student shared future goals:

"Mrs. F suggested that some of the kids could end up being meteorologists one day. George said that he can't be a scientist because he wants to be a fire truck driver."

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What students' communication can tell you about their values

Questions to ask yourself:

What school rules, social rules, morals, etc. do students remind others to follow? Do they correct their peers about different things than they correct their teachers about?

Who do students view as role models and whose abilities and knowledge do students value? How do they position themselves and others as holders of abilities and knowledge?

Examples:

Over the summer, my students corrected each other over many things, such as school rules, things that they believed to be true or not true, what to call things or people, and things that they did not like others doing. They only tended to correct teachers and other adults when it came to what to call things. I believe that this is because the students have a lot of confidence in their vocabulary skills, and are therefore willing to place themselves as holders of knowledge when it comes to what to call things, even when talking to teachers.

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Reflecting on the types of communication that the students enjoy participating in

Questions to ask yourself:

What are the students' favorite topics to talk about? When do they seem most engaged in conversation? What types of words or phrases do they like to repeat and who do they like to copy? How do they use communication to connect with each other and their teachers?

Examples:

Over the summer, my students spent a lot of time copying things that their peers and their teachers said. This is because this is a typical part of their development, and it may also relate to how they view their peers and their teachers as role models. My students also enjoyed communicating to play games and tell jokes, and used this as a way to engage with and connect with their teachers and peers.

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Reflecting on what you consider "communication"

Questions to ask yourself:

Am I considering both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication? What can verbal communication tell me? What can other types of communication, such as body language and writing, tell me?

Is "lack of communication" a type of communication? What do I consider to be "lack of communication"? When does lack of communication happen?

Example:

I focused on verbal communication for this project, but there are many other ways that my students communicate. One type of communication that I did consider while doing this project was "lack of communication". My co-teachers and I discussed "lack of communication" a lot over the summer, and ultimately decided that it was a type of communication in itself.

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Sharing your observations with other teachers

Questions to ask yourself:

What did I observe today that I thought was interesting or important? What do other teachers think about these observations?

What observations do other teachers share with me? What can I learn from these observations?

What views do the other teachers and I have about communication and the role it plays in our classroom(s)? What do we consider to be communication? Do we have similar or different views about what communication is and the role it plays in our classroom(s)?

Example:

In the following observation, teachers discussed a type of communication as they were observing it:
"Mrs. F and I had a discussion about how the kids gravitate towards specific pages in books to show each other, as we were watching Belle (almost 3) and Emily (3) show each other a mirror in a book back and forth for a long time. Mrs. S then told Mrs. F and I a story about how Belle had been obsessed with a specific page in a book. A couple minutes later, Donna (almost 3) and Ariel (2.5) were getting very excited about a page in a book, and Mrs. F, Mrs. S, and I were observing. I told Mrs. F and Mrs. S that this was one of the pages that I had mentioned a couple minutes earlier during my discussion with Mrs. F."

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Conclusion

What I Learned About my Students

Over the summer, my students demonstrated that not only are preschool-age students capable of communicating a diverse range of ideas in a variety of different ways, but also that this helps them work on many different life skills, such as resolving a conflict, standing up for themselves, asking for help, helping others, or even just solving a math problem.

Through observing their communication, I was also able to learn about some of my students' values. They value their own knowledge and the knowledge of their teachers and peers. They value a classroom in which they can share their own knowledge, ask for the knowledge of

others, and work together to create knowledge. They value rules and morals, and are not afraid to correct others. Finally, they value having fun and building social connections at school, and use communication as a tool to do so.

I also learned about individual students and about the relationships between them.

I watched Ariel (2.5) build confidence.

I watched Belle (almost 3) build friendships with many other students.

I watched Carl (almost 3) learn how to express himself.

I watched Donna (almost 3) overcome fears.

I watched Emily (3) display kindness toward her friends.

I watched Flora (3.5) become a role model for her friends.

I watched George (3.5) develop a love for words.

I watched Hugo (4) develop a love for reading and math.

I watched Ivan (4) explore his values.

I watched Jack (4.5) work together with his friends.

I watched Kody (4.5) explore his interests.

I watched Lewis (almost 5) bond with his friends.

I watched Macy (5) share her knowledge and skills with others.

I watched Nick (5) become more independent.

I watched Olive (5) demonstrate her creativity.

I watched Pauline (5) look out for others.

I watched Quincy (5) explore language and use language to connect with others.

I watched Rosalie (5.5) learn how to cooperate and collaborate with her friends.

I watched Sally (almost 6) find many new ways to interact with others.

I watched Taylor (almost 6) learn how to be a leader.

I watched older students help younger students and become role models for them.

I watched younger students copy and look up to older students.

I watched all of my students build friendships with one another.

I also learned a lot about my three students whose families did not consent to their participation in this project, even though I could not write these observations down. I watched one student stay true to themselves, I watched another student learn how to use their emotions in a positive way, and I watched another student use their imagination.

What I Learned About Myself and my Co-teachers

This section could have just been about what I learned about myself and my own teaching, but I find that my teaching cannot be separated from that of the teachers who I work with, because of how much we influence each other's teaching and how much we collaborate as we teach together. Over the summer, my co-teachers and I discussed communication and worked together to observe our students. We created a community of practice, sharing observations with each other and working together to understand how communication works in the classroom and even what "communication" means in general. As discussed in the section on "incomplete" communication, my co-teachers Mrs. S, Mrs. F, and I had many discussions about what counts as communication throughout the summer, and we ultimately decided that "lack of communication" counts as communication. We then developed this idea as we observed our students' communication, discussing "partial lack of communication" after a tired child was confused during a conversation, and noting that lack of communication can be a positive thing after a child did a good deed without telling anyone.

My observations often blurred the lines between what I witnessed and what other teachers witnessed, as other teachers would often point out conversations between students to me as they were happening, or suggest that I write down an interaction that I may not have otherwise remembered, noticed, or thought to write down. This suggests that good communication between teachers helps us listen to and observe our students more effectively. Some teacher conversations about communication were captured in my notes, even though teacher conversation was not what I was intending to capture.

> Mrs. F and I had a discussion about how the kids gravitate towards specific pages in books to show each other, as we were watching Belle and Emily show each other a mirror in a book back and forth for a long time. Mrs. S then told Mrs. F and I a story about how Belle had been obsessed with a specific page in a book. A couple minutes later, Donna and Ariel were getting very excited about a page in a book, and Mrs. F, Mrs. S, and I were observing. I told Mrs. F and Mrs. S that this was one of the pages that I had mentioned a couple minutes earlier during my discussion with Mrs. F.

At the end of the summer, I wrote that "Overall, communicating with my students this summer was slightly easier than in years past. This may be due to a variety of factors, including the speech abilities and behavioral needs of our students this year in comparison with years past, but one important factor, that Mrs. F and Mrs. S have also brought up many times, was communication between the teachers. Mrs. F, Mrs. S, and I have been working together for a long time, but we have not all been in the same classroom together [for a significant amount of time] since one summer many years ago. We communicate well with each other and are always

on the same page while we are in the classroom, which serves as a good model for the students and also helps us stay on task and prepared for anything that can happen in the classroom."

My observations also reflect how teachers view student communication. The inclusion of instances of "lack of communication", as discussed earlier, relates to our shared ideas of what communication is. My co-teachers and I happened to have very similar ideas about communication and about teaching in general, which could have been another factor that led to communication being "slightly easier" as I described. My observations reflect how we view specific types of communication, such as how I wrote down more interactions that I witnessed myself that involved the children repeating themselves or copying each other towards the beginning of the summer. This may be because teachers tune out this type of repetition after a while, but since I hadn't been spending as much time with the kids in the months leading up to the summer as most of the other teachers had been, I hadn't gotten used to all of the phrases that they had been repeating at that time. This demonstrates that while we may have similar ideas about communication and about teaching in general, it is important for teachers to communicate with each other not only to discuss these ideas but also because different teachers notice different things that are happening in the classroom, no matter how similar their ideas about teaching may be.

As discussed in the previous section, my data revealed some of my students' values. In addition, my data also reflected some teacher values. The variety of communication present in our classrooms shows how we value communication as part of the learning environment. The fact that we not only allow but also encourage our students to share their own knowledge and share about themselves and their experiences shows that we value our students and their

knowledge, and that we value a classroom in which all members of the classroom community can learn from each other and work together to create knowledge.

One factor that could have contributed to communication being "slightly easier" that I did not mention at the end of the summer was that teachers learn about communication and about observing communication throughout their careers. In the case of Mrs. F, Mrs. S, and I, this may be especially true since I was a relatively new teacher the last time I worked with Mrs. F and Mrs. S in the same classroom for an entire summer, and I may be better at communicating with students and observing communication now than I was then. This project was intended to help us with this process of learning about communication and observation, but it also allowed me to work on some skills that I had not anticipated. One thing I noticed about my observations is that they became more detailed as the summer went on. This is an example from week 1:

> Asking questions during "The Lorax" (where is the Onceler, ect.)

And from week 9:

> It was raining throughout the day, and immediately upon waking up from nap, George (3.5) began talking about the weather. He told Emily (3) the difference between rain and water dripping from trees, and also said things like "The teachers will worry about the weather, we just need to worry about putting away our stuff" (the teachers often remind the kids that some things are for teachers to worry about, and some things are for kids to worry about).

My goal was not to take notes that were extremely detailed, but rather put into words the observations myself and my co-teachers make throughout the day, but I found myself including more context in my notes as the summer went on. I found this helpful as I began to analyze my data, as sometimes information about what happened before or after an interaction or information

about how myself or my co-teachers viewed an interaction was relevant. This suggests that putting observations into words is as much of a skill as the observation itself.

My co-teachers and I sometimes found it difficult to remember the interactions that happened throughout the day since I could not write observations down while I was actively teaching. In order for an interaction to be written down, I had to be able to recall it when I had the time to write[7], and if it was something that one of my co-teachers witnessed, they often had to remember it until the next time they saw me if they were not able to point it out to me or tell me about it when it happened. I have more observations written down from later weeks in the summer, suggesting that identifying and remembering interactions that stood out to us was also a skill that we were able to work on.

Theoretical Implications

This project shows the importance of understanding what students are doing with their words, and demonstrates what viewing classrooms through the lens of speech act theory looks like. As Gasparatou (2018) and Zhao and Throssell (2011) suggest, education is an ideal space for applying speech act theory. Considering what students are doing with their words can help teachers understand the intentions, goals, needs, and values behind student communication, which can help make the classroom a space in which student voices are heard.

This project also allowed me to further understand what a constructivist classroom looks like in practice. As I discussed in my theoretical framework, scholars such as Hein (1991), Schcolnik et al. (2006), and Bada and Olusegun (2015) consider communication to be an integral

[7] I did not write any of the interactions that I witnessed down if I was not able to clearly recall what happened. There were a lot of interesting interactions that occurred over the summer that I did not write down because I could not remember them exactly by the time I had a chance to write, but the interactions that I did write down represent a large variety of the communication that occurred over the summer.

part of learning and an integral part of the constructivist classroom. My observations show that students are able to share their own knowledge and participate in the co-creation of knowledge at my school. The forms of communication that I observed demonstrate how important communication is to my students' processes of constructing knowledge and understanding the world around them.

The communication, sharing of knowledge, and co-creation of knowledge that I observed also points to the importance of the classroom community. I watched students communicate in order to connect with their teachers and peers, and I believe that these connections are part of what allowed students to share about themselves and their own knowledge and experiences, and work with others to create knowledge. Scholars have also noted that the opposite is true, that the sharing about oneself and of one's own knowledge and experiences in the classroom leads to a stronger classroom community. Bell hooks says that "one of the ways we become a learning community is by sharing and receiving one another's stories" (hooks, 2010, pp. 51).

This project specifically highlighted how social constructivism plays a part in the classroom. Social constructivism, which is associated with the work of Vygotsky, focuses on learning through social interaction (Schcolnik et al., 2006). Throughout the summer, I watched my students learn many things through interaction with their teachers and peers. For example, my students viewed their teachers and their peers as role models, often copying the things they said and their ways of communicating. This allowed students to learn new ways of expressing themselves through verbal communication.

This project also demonstrates the importance of observation, documentation, and reflection in the constructivist classroom. Observing my classrooms and reflecting on students' communication by writing about the interactions that occur in the classroom, talking with other

teachers about them, or even just taking time to think about them to myself allowed me to be more intentional about listening to students' voices. Being intentional about listening to student voices is essential in the constructivist classroom because it allows students, their knowledge, their experiences, and their learning to be centered.

This project also builds on some of the literature that has already been written about how young children communicate in the classroom. Nucci and Turiel (1978) describe how children understand social conventional and moral events in the classroom by looking at how children communicate about these events. I observed how my students communicated about rules and morals and also how they communicated in order to follow these rules and morals. This demonstrates the large role that communication plays during social conventional and moral events.

Doğan Altun & Jones (2017) talk about the differences between how students communicate during an activity that is teacher-led and an activity that is not teacher-led. While my project does not answer why Doğan Altun & Jones found a greater variety of communication in the context that they observed that was not teacher-led, it does show some of the similarities and differences between how students communicate with their teachers and with their peers. For example, I found that my students correct both their peers and their teachers when it comes to what to call things, but that they also corrected their peers about things that they did not typically correct their teachers about, such as rules and morals. Looking at the differences between how students communicate with their teachers and peers can tell me a lot about my students and their relationships with other members of the classroom community. The above example suggests that students are confident enough in their vocabulary skills that they are willing to correct both their teachers and peers about what to call things. In my experience, students also correct teachers

about rules and morals when given the opportunity, but this opportunity does not often arise and did not arise that I know of over the summer, so it would be interesting to further explore these forms of communication.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of this project is that I focused almost exclusively on verbal communication. There are many other forms of communication that are happening in the classroom that can also tell us a lot about students' intentions, goals, needs, values, experiences, and knowledge. Future research could focus on another form of communication, such as body language or student work such as art or writing, and seek to understand what teachers can learn from observing this form of communication.

As discussed in my context section, I did not make any findings based on the race or gender of the students or languages spoken by the students, and I made only a few findings based on age. This does not mean that patterns based on race, gender, language, and age do not exist in my data, but rather that I did not notice any besides what I found about the dynamics between younger and older students. Future research could look for similarities and differences between how students of different demographics communicate and how teachers view this communication, similarly to how Nicoladis & Genesee (1997) discuss how bilingual and monolingual students use language differently in some ways.

As discussed in my methods section, observing one's own classroom has both limitations and benefits because it reflects a teacher's point of view. In future studies, teachers making written observations could be compared with other forms of observing or studying classrooms,

such as video or audio taping, non-teacher researchers making observations, or teachers making observations in classrooms that are not their own.

Closing

This project has demonstrated the importance of being intentional about communicating with students and observing their communication. My students used a great variety of communication in the classroom, and teachers reflected on our students' communication and on what communication means in general. Communication is an important aspect of the classroom community and an important part of student (and also teacher) learning.

With my co-teachers, I observed, participated in, and reflected on forms of communication that created a classroom environment that went beyond the traditional model of teacher as presenter of information and student as passive receiver of information. I explored methods of communicating with students and observing and reflecting on their communication that allowed this variety of communication to occur in the classroom and allowed me to achieve my goals of keeping students safe, happy, and learning. I believe that having these communication, observation, and reflection skills has allowed me to continue to become a better teacher every day.

While I am pleased by the variety of communication that happened in my classrooms, how much students and teachers learned from this communication, and how much I was able to work on my own abilities to communicate with my students and my co-teachers and observe the communication that happens in the classroom, I must also remember to bring what I learned about communication and observation during summer 2024 and what I have learned throughout my time at this school with me wherever I may teach in the future.

I am excited for summer 2025, and I can't wait to learn more from my students. After summer 2025, I will likely be teaching at a different school. I will take what I have learned from this project, my school, and all of my students and co-teachers with me wherever I go throughout my career.

Final Note on Frogs Eating Fish and Teachers Listening to Students

> This is one of my favorite observations from the summer:
>
> While reading "Night Animals", we were discussing what frogs eat. The children kept saying that frogs eat fish, but the teachers did not know if this was true, so I looked it up and announced to the class that they were right and frogs do eat fish.

If all you or I learned from this project is that frogs eat fish, then we have succeeded in my goal of listening to students.

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Appendix: Code Book

All Communication Serves a Purpose

- ❖ All data

Teacher as facilitator/role model/holder of abilities and knowledge

- ❖ Teacher-led conversations
  - ➢ Asking the students about a common experience
  - ➢ Asking the students about themselves
  - ➢ Asking the students about their own experiences
  - ➢ Other teacher-led conversations (including those started by students)
- ❖ Participation (in teacher-led activities)
  - ➢ Sharing facts
  - ➢ Sharing about themselves
  - ➢ Sharing their own experiences
  - ➢ Asking questions
  - ➢ Answering questions
  - ➢ Finding rhymes
  - ➢ Counting
  - ➢ Guessing/predicting
  - ➢ Comparing
  - ➢ Identifying things/pointing things out
  - ➢ Singing along
  - ➢ Repeating
  - ➢ Sharing what they remember
- ❖ Repetition/copying
  - ➢ Copying or repeating after a teacher
  - ➢ Saying something that the teachers typically say
- ❖ Listening to and joining in to teacher conversations
  - ➢ Listening to and joining in to teacher conversations
- ❖ Asking a teacher for knowledge
  - ➢ Asking for facts
  - ➢ Asking for definitions/words
  - ➢ Asking a teacher to read something for them
  - ➢ Asking about what is going on (such as what something is or where someone is)
  - ➢ Asking about what is happening in a book
  - ➢ Asking about a teacher's own self
  - ➢ Asking about a common experience
  - ➢ Asking clarifying questions
  - ➢ Asking math questions
  - ➢ Asking questions with the sole intent of starting an interaction

- ➢ Asking permission
- ❖ Asking for (teacher) help
  - ➢ Asking for help to complete a task
  - ➢ Asking for help to solve a problem
  - ➢ Asking for help for another student
- ❖ Reminding other students of rules/correcting other students
  - ➢ Reminding other students of rules
  - ➢ Asking a teacher to remind another student of the rules

Student as facilitator/role model/holder of abilities and knowledge

- ❖ Sharing knowledge
  - ➢ Sharing facts
  - ➢ Sharing about themselves
  - ➢ Sharing their own experiences
  - ➢ Sharing about a common experience
  - ➢ Sharing plans
  - ➢ Passing on information
  - ➢ Giving advice
- ❖ Using Spanish (outside of Spanish class)
  - ➢ Words (and songs) they learned from Spanish class
  - ➢ Spanish words they learned from elsewhere
  - ➢ Asking for Spanish words
- ❖ Math (outside of class)
  - ➢ Counting
  - ➢ Identifying numbers
  - ➢ Adding and subtracting
  - ➢ Multiplication
- ❖ Reading (outside of class)
  - ➢ Spelling/letter sounds
  - ➢ Letters (identifying letters/ABCs)
  - ➢ Saying words they have read
- ❖ Other academics (outside of class)
  - ➢ Using other "academic concepts" (rhymes, shapes, colors, matching, opposites, etc.)
  - ➢ Talking (or singing) about things that they have learned in class (started by a student)
- ❖ Asking each other for knowledge
  - ➢ Asking about a common experience
  - ➢ Asking clarifying questions
  - ➢ Asking about the current situation

- ➢ Asking about each other
- ➢ Asking permission

❖ Working together
- ➢ Working together to complete a task
- ➢ Working together to solve a problem
- ➢ Helping each other
- ➢ Working together to figure out an answer
- ➢ Cheering each other on
- ➢ Working together to follow the rules of a game
- ➢ Talking about something that they made together

❖ Figuring things out on their own
- ➢ Demonstrating/teaching someone how to do something
- ➢ Talking about something that they have done/made on their own
- ➢ Answering their own questions

❖ Helping teachers (or other adults)
- ➢ Helping teachers (or other adults) call other students (prompted or not prompted)
- ➢ Helping teachers find things
- ➢ Warning a teacher of something

❖ Repetition/copying
- ➢ Repeating themselves for fun
- ➢ Repeating themselves to get their point across or make themselves heard
- ➢ Repeating something from a prior conversation (not reminding about a prior conversation)
- ➢ Copying another child

❖ Reminding other students of rules/correcting other students
- ➢ Reminding other students of rules
- ➢ Correcting other students about what they believe to be true/not true
- ➢ Correcting other students about what to call things/people
- ➢ Telling another student off (or just saying “no”) for doing something they do not like
- ➢ Asking a teacher to remind another student of the rules

❖ Correcting teachers (or other adults)
- ➢ Correcting teachers (or other adults) about what to call things

Teachers placing students as or making space for students to place themselves as facilitators/role models/holders of abilities and knowledge

❖ Participation (in teacher-led activities)
- ➢ Sharing facts
- ➢ Sharing about themselves
- ➢ Sharing their own experiences

- ➢ Asking questions
- ➢ Answering questions
- ➢ Finding rhymes
- ➢ Counting
- ➢ Guessing/predicting
- ➢ Comparing
- ➢ Identifying things/pointing things out
- ➢ Singing along
- ➢ Repeating
- ➢ Sharing what they remember

❖ Teacher-led conversations
- ➢ Asking the students about a common experience
- ➢ Asking the students about themselves
- ➢ Asking the students about their own experiences
- ➢ Other teacher-led conversations (including those started by students)

❖ Listening to and joining in to teacher conversations
- ➢ Listening to and joining in to teacher conversations

Following of Rules and Morals

❖ Reminding other students of rules/correcting other students
- ➢ Reminding other students of rules
- ➢ Correcting other students about what they believe to be true/not true
- ➢ Correcting other students about what to call things/people
- ➢ Telling another student off (or just saying "no") for doing something they do not like
- ➢ Asking a teacher to remind another student of the rules

❖ Conflict
- ➢ Conflict over items
- ➢ Conflict over what they believe to be true/not true
- ➢ Conflict over social situations
- ➢ Conflict over rules/safety

❖ Correcting teachers (or other adults)
- ➢ Correcting teachers (or other adults) about what to call things

Entertainment/Fun

❖ Repetition/copying
- ➢ Repeating themselves for fun
- ➢ Repeating something from a prior conversation (not reminding about a prior conversation)
- ➢ Copying another child

- Copying or repeating after a teacher
- Saying something that the teachers typically say

- Making jokes
  - Puns/word play
  - Saying "random" words or phrases
  - Jokes about the current situation
  - "Traditional" jokes (Knock-knock, etc.)
  - Games with teachers
- Working together
  - Working together to follow the rules of a game

Situations in Which Verbal Communication did not Occur or Could be Considered Incomplete

- Miscommunication
  - Miscommunication (caused by mixing up words, misunderstanding of words, or two uses of the same word)
- Conflict
  - Conflict over items
  - Conflict over what they believe to be true/not true
  - Conflict over social situations
- Lack of communication
  - Child can't/won't tell teacher what they need/answer someone
  - Lack of communication because it is not necessary
  - "Partial lack of communication"