

Interactions with children: the classroom is a place for conversation!

Interlocuções com as crianças: sala de aula é lugar de conversar!

Interacciones con los niños: ¡el salón de clases es un lugar para conversar!

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Highlights

Spontaneous conversations create avenues for language development through the expression of thoughts, desires, doubts, and opinions.

Classroom conversations enable different roles: speaker, interlocutor, and co-author in the construction of shared meanings.

Classroom conversations allow for shared reflections on everyday life.

Abstract

We start from the importance of language for the development of the human psyche and classroom mediations for its occurrence. We observed a decrease in conversation activities in the early years of elementary school and outlined our research problem: how do spontaneous classroom conversations promote children's learning and development? We investigated the language use of a teacher-researcher with her 2nd-grade elementary school students at a municipal school in Campinas in 2022, with the aim of examining the contributions of oral language use in conversation activities. Video recordings helped analyze interactions marked by words, gestures, and body language. We observed diverse ways in which children use language to express experiences, construct meanings, develop cultural norms, and form social relationships. The mediation of the teacher-researcher guided the formulation of questions, understanding of reasoning, and validation of participation, reversing the roles of teacher and learner. This research provides support for valuing conversations in everyday school life, including teacher participation, but not in a didactic sense, rather in a genuine interest in what their students have to say.

[Resumo](#) | [Resumen](#)

Keywords

Oral language. Child. Elementary School. Conversation.

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Oral language in social interactions: mediations for cultural development

In this article, we present, in the initial section, theoretical considerations on the importance of oral language for human cultural development, based on Historical-Cultural theory. In the second section, we discuss reducing conversation activities in the classroom context in the early years of elementary school and the importance of conversations being intentionally mediated by teachers, which does not mean being directed. In the third section, we present the research methodology and analyses of dialogues recorded between the teacher-researcher and her students.

Theoretically and methodologically grounded in L. S. Vygotsky's Historical-Cultural Theory, we start from the principle that language plays a decisive role in the formation of psychic processes and, therefore, of human beings. Cultural development is necessarily permeated by the mediating activity of the use of signs and instruments in social interactions, which becomes an internal means of influence/regulation over oneself.

It is in this argumentative context that Vygotsky formulates the general genetic law of cultural development, which holds that any psychic function appears twice, on two levels, in the process of cultural development. The first plane is the social plane, that is, the function consists of interaction between people as an interpsychological category; the second plane is the internal plane, that is, the function occurs in the psychic system as an intrapsychological category. The author's well-known phrase, in which he says, "We may say that we become ourselves through others and that this rule applies not only to the personality as a whole, but also to the history of every individual function" (Vygotsky, 2000, p. 149), is an excellent summary of the repercussions of the law on the formation of each person.

Semiotic mediation through all forms of language, and the mastery of external means for controlling behavior, are crucial to the process of cultural development. Vygotsky argues that, unlike the instruments that humans produce and use to alter external living conditions, signs are oriented toward the internal plane¹, which enables each subject to influence their inner activity, making use of internalized language. This complex operation requires a high level of psychic activity. Vygotsky does not provide a formal definition of oral language, devoting himself more closely to describing its function: oral language is external speech, directed toward others, which initially serves as a social instrument of communication and symbolic mediation and, gradually, as the framework for the formation of higher cultural psychic functions.

Children are immersed in spoken language from the beginning of their lives, but they acquire it through a long process involving multiple social interactions and

1 In the psychic sense of the expression "internal plane", because the instruments, more and more, allow us to alter the internal organic and biological conditions.

access to cultural productions. "In the process of cultural development, children, through language, begin to exercise their capacity for abstraction, using words as basic linguistic units that carry not only their meaning but also the fundamental units of consciousness that reflect the outside world" (Luria, 1990, p. 24) [Own translation]. It is through language that people become capable of transcending direct sensory experience, producing endless meanings about reality.

The linguistic code system, historically invented and refined by generations over the centuries, allows humans to transition from the sensory to the rational, being more than a fundamental resource in social interactions, but rather the very condition for them to occur. It is through words that consciousness, the highest form of reflection of reality, begins to be constructed in a child's development.

When participants in a conversation share a particular topic through language, this facilitates the internalization of signs and activates complex psychological functions, even when the conversation itself may appear simple. Language enables human beings to interpret, think, analyze, evaluate, agree, disagree, and, if prompted, externalize these intrapsychic processes to their environment. This movement enables multiple actions by other interlocutors, such as responding, silencing, withdrawing from the conversation, contesting, and agreeing, among other actions. In a conversational context, these processes mark and/or modify the event, making it unique and unrepeatable.

In very young children, language develops independently of thought, and thought develops independently of language. In language development, conditioning processes initially predominate. In other words, children are conditioned in their vocal reactions according to whether they gain or lose something, and not because they actually understand the social context and communicative/meaningful function of the sounds they produce. On the other hand, during the course of the experiments, usually at the end of the first year of age, they demonstrate the simplest use of tools, being capable of instrumental acts that foreshadow thinking. The beginnings of thought develop along one path and those of language along another. We can say this is the most important thesis regarding language development in early childhood (Vygotsky, 2000).

At a certain point, these lines that had followed different paths cross and intersect; as a result, language becomes intellectualized, uniting with thought, and thought becomes verbalized, uniting with language. However, initially, children do not understand or use the meaning of words; they simply master the external structure of the word, understanding that each object has its own name; they master the structure by unifying the word and the object, so that the word that identifies the object becomes the property of the object itself. The child who receives every word from adults establishes a direct connection between the word spoken and the corresponding object, according to Vygotsky (2000). In another text, the author emphasizes that words are transformed from primitive generalizations that are refined, very gradually, and as a result of opportunities for systematic and rich experiences with language, toward more abstract concepts (Vygotsky, 2009). Words evolve due to the possibility that meanings are constructed dynamically as

the child develops, and according to the multiple ways in which thought functions in multiple interactions. Moreover, by using them in conversations, they come into contact with other meanings and encounter possibilities/challenges to adjust their ways of understanding the functions of oral language.

In each period of the development of word meaning, there is a particular connection between thought and speech. This connection is a constantly evolving process of reciprocity: thoughts are not just expressed in words; both thoughts and speech are the reciprocal conditions for their existence. As thinking becomes more differentiated, children need to express it using more words, forming a composite whole, which implies the advancement of speech toward sentences. The construction of sentences, in turn, has an impact on changes in thinking, shifting (albeit not linearly) from generalization (several things and situations can be represented by just one word) to more clearly defined parts (expansion of vocabulary, sophistication of sentences, construction of discourse).

From a historical and cultural perspective, a statement considered grammatically incorrect, typical of the early stages of language use, has, in addition to its charm and aesthetic value, radical importance, as it represents a decisive step for children's entry into the cultural world. Verbal utterances cannot arise fully formed; they develop gradually, through mediation in multiple social interactions.

It is in the context of social interactions, immersed in the use of oral language, that human beings will understand the employability of words, the (non)correspondence of meanings and significances, the need for interpretation through gestures, the intonational use of the voice, among other resources typical of mediation through oral language, that mark this social activity.

Still addressing the changes that occur in the development of oral language, it is important to highlight the dynamics through which its internalization occurs. For the Historical-Cultural approach, the external speech of older children is predominantly materialized in statements consisting of complete sentences, constructed taking into account the interlocutor and the information necessary for the dialogue. Inner speech, on the other hand, consists of talking to oneself, with its own rules. The specificity of inner speech lies in its absence of vocalization; its main functions are mental organization, conscious understanding of situations or other aspects of reality, and assistance in overcoming difficulties. It is an intimate statement for the subject itself. Therefore, it may be incomplete, synthetic, restricted to the use of predicates.

Prior to the consolidation of internal speech, egocentric speech is formed, marked by audible vocalization, but with the function and structure of internal speech: it is speech to oneself, predominantly used to organize human activity. Thus, egocentric speech is a phenomenon of transition from interpsychic to intrapsychic functions: from the child's social and collective activity to their subjective activity. As children develop language skills, egocentric speech becomes internal speech, but it does not necessarily disappear, returning to be used primarily in situations where people face greater challenges (Vygotsky, 2009).

Having presented, in summary form, the general principles of language acquisition and development, we will now examine issues related to the importance of mediated conversation in the classroom.

| Mediated conversation at school: Is the classroom a place for conversation?

Investigating the conversational abilities of students in the early years of elementary school, in the school context, stemmed from the discomfort we felt (and, in particular, the first author as a primary school teacher) caused by the widespread belief in our society and in school teams, that the goal of entering this stage is almost exclusively literacy, through school activities involving reading, writing, and mathematics. This premise discredits activities such as playing, drawing, and conversations in the classroom, which are sometimes seen as causes of disruption, related to indiscipline, disorder, noise, and the improper or unproductive use of school time. As Felix (2013) states,

silence is considered essential by teachers in the classroom, which, we observe, is not effective in social relationships, and, as we have found, it is necessary to use shouting as a means of achieving silence among students, establishing the dialectic of shouting-silence in school, a very contradictory situation that needs to be overcome. (Felix, 2013, p. 90)

Although there are few studies on oral language in elementary school, recent research analyzes textbooks and guidance documents intended for teachers to develop pedagogical work in this field. Veridiano & Leal (2021) conducted a documentary analysis of a collection of textbooks, seeking to identify the concepts of oral language teaching present in the teacher's manual and the dimensions of oral teaching present in the activities in the student books. The authors found that the collection covers oral language teaching, as the students' books contain activities related to different aspects of this teaching, with greater emphasis on promoting informal situations for language use and the oralization of written text. However, there is insufficient work on the various oral genres that require greater planning and language monitoring.

Souza & Leal (2023) analyzed the curriculum document of the Recife Municipal Network. The authors conclude that this proposal covers important aspects of oral language teaching, contributing to its inclusion in plans and activities aimed at language teaching. However, they point out that the document "disregards other relevant skills related to interactions in more public settings, which require students to plan, evaluate, and reflect on essential issues, such as those related to different aspects of linguistic variation that help combat prejudice" (Souza & Leal, 2023, pp. 236–237). Therefore, the data found in this research reveal positive aspects and shortcomings in working with oral language.

Sousa & Cosmo (2023) conducted a bibliographic review of the contributions of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) to the training of educators and their educational practices in the literacy cycle involving oral text genres. As a result, they found that, although PNAIC encourages work with oral text genres,

there is still little literature on the impact of this public policy in terms of promoting literacy practices based on the value of oral communication. According to the authors, "This gap shows that writing continues to occupy a prominent position in the literacy process, while speech remains relegated to the background in school educational practices." (p.01)

We recognize that acquiring the ability to read, write, and perform calculations is a sophisticated mental process that is extremely important and the school's responsibility. However, we argue that, alongside its acquisition, education should systematize diverse activities to mediate culture and historically inherited social knowledge, and promote human development for the emancipation and exercise of citizenship. All these fields are necessarily permeated by the mediation of oral language and the multiple social interactions in which each child participates. In this sense, it is important to understand that writing is constituted in relation to other forms of semiotic production, such as pretend play, drawing, and oral language (Vygotsky, 2021). Thus, we defend the need for intentional pedagogical mediations that validate and enrich the use of these productions and, in this article, emphasize actions related to oral language, providing opportunities for its presence in the classroom.

We agree with Ávila et al. (2012, p. 38) when they point out that:

The overvaluation of writing resulted in the emergence of a mistaken view regarding the connection between speech and writing, which was guided by a dichotomous, that is, polarized perspective. From this perspective, speech has been taken as the domain of informality, while writing has been taken as the domain of formality; speech is also seen as the domain of disorganization and writing as the domain of organization; speech as the domain of error and writing as the domain of correctness.

Along the same lines, Lima and Beserra (2012, p. 57)[own translation], when discussing orality, point out that there is a "belief that speech is devoid of rules and, therefore, too simple to be taught" and that "the overvaluation of writing has led to the undervaluation of speech as an object of teaching."

As a counterpoint to this dichotomy, it suffices to cite an example of the connection between written and spoken language. In writing activities, especially in the early stages of text production, when children have not yet fully mastered the connections between sounds and the spelling of letters/syllables, it is very common to find them audibly using egocentric oral language, doing sound exercises, and experimenting with combinations before writing them down on paper. Later on, when they produce their first texts, they usually need drafts. These drafts are characterized by multiple improvements in mental reflection until the final text is reached, or it is only necessary to plan the stages of the argument in the draft in order to achieve the written record, which indicates the use of inner speech. Therefore, external, internal, egocentric, and written speech are inseparable in the process of language development. Vygotsky (2009) emphasizes that working with oral language is important and necessary, as it not only precedes the development and construction of the literacy process, but both forms of language continue to develop and contribute mutually to new advances.

We also recognize that silence is important at certain times during the school day. In activities that require greater concentration, but also at times when it is important to listen more carefully to the teacher's instructions and/or contributions from classmates, it is more convenient for the class to be quiet for a period of time. However, asking for silence in these situations is quite different from imposing it as a rule, disregarding the important contributions of conversations organized around a proposed topic, but also more spontaneous conversations, the exchange of ideas, and the sharing of everyday experiences inside and outside of school.

In his works, L. S. Vygotsky focused his studies on oral language more intensely on research and analysis of development in infants and young children. However, based on the theoretical assumptions of ongoing development throughout the life cycle and the essential mediation required for this to occur, we can consider that, even in the case of older children, oral development continues to occur. It requires mediation and conditions to reach more sophisticated levels and make new contributions to higher mental activities and to the immersion of children in their social group and culture.

In short, from our perspective, the recognized importance of oral communication in the preschool context remains valid for the subsequent years of schooling, in elementary school. In these two stages, opportunities for children to express/elaborate their thoughts and assign meaning to the drawings they produce and the objects they use in pretend play, enabling them to perform roles and relate to each other, are among the most important developmental achievements. Making oneself understood and, through communication, experiencing the need to supplement, correct, or refute information, among other actions necessary during the communication process, is the path to humanization in the most complex sense of the word.

With this question in mind, we conducted a study seeking to examine the importance of oral language in children's daily school life and in their interactions with each other and with their teacher, considering, along with Bagne (2012), that

creating situations in the classroom where students have the opportunity to dialogue and interact with their peers and teacher can provide moments that trigger learning, since it is not just a matter of exchanging information, but also of reflecting on the ideas presented, taking a critical stance in relation to them. (Bagne, 2012, pp. 58-59)

In the next section, we describe the research, informing the main methodological decisions we made to achieve our objective: to examine the contributions of conversation activities intentionally mediated by the teacher-researcher, using the oral language of the primary dialogue genre.

| Research methodology

The research was integrated into the school curriculum for the 2nd-grade B class after approval by the school administration. It took place in the last quarter of the 2022 school year, following the Ethics Committee's approval of the project under

opinion number 5,712,715. Before beginning the research, the teacher-researcher gathered the entire class and explained that she was conducting a school project to study the conversations between students and the teacher. Some children were quite surprised to learn that their teacher was still studying. After the explanations, the children received the consent form, on which they wrote their names, drew self-portraits, and chose fictitious names. If they did not want to participate in the research, they would not do the term. All children agreed with the study.

The research was developed through conversations that took place in the classroom, mediated by the teacher, during the part of the day when the children were free to choose between various activities (there were games, toys, drawing materials, and modeling clay arranged in corners of the classroom) and/or could go to the teacher's desk, where she was available to talk. Sometimes the teacher would start a conversation by asking a student for information, and gradually other children would come over to her desk to interact. At other times, it was the students who initiated the conversations. Of the groups that formed, a maximum of eight children participated, alternating spontaneously: sometimes they ended their participation in the conversation when asked by their peers to do some activity, and/or interrupted it to go to the bathroom, have side conversations among small groups, etc.

The empirical material was recorded on video because the study involved children and the object of study was oral language, marked by gestures and body language that were important to analyze together. This feature captured the dynamic complexity of interactions and allowed episodes to be examined from multiple perspectives. In this process, there are multiple elements to be interpreted, since "integrated sound and moving images can help to unravel the complex network of meanings and senses manifested in words, gestures, and relationships, to understand children's cultures, and to capture the essence of the narratives at play." (Garcez et al., 2011, p. 252)[own translation]. In addition, video recordings allow us to return to the moment of interaction by observing different perspectives, as well as enabling long-term reflection on the empirical material.

The video recordings were made using a cell phone mounted on a tripod on the teacher-researcher's desk, around which the conversations took place. The recording function was activated and recorded, without interruption, the entire period of the class that was in focus. The strategic placement of the cell phone on the tripod enabled image recordings of the teacher-researcher and children, as well as audio recordings of conversations and other sounds from the classroom environment.

This device was chosen for filming because we considered children's familiarity with cell phones and the possibility of sending the captured videos to the cloud storage service linked to the Chromebook, which was used daily in the classroom due to the use of the digital whiteboard. The video recordings took place without incident, only arousing the interest of one student, who occasionally checked whether the camera was on during these activities.

In total, we had 11 episodes of conversations, with an average duration of 40 minutes. The video recordings were transcribed in full, which enabled us to record expressions and gestures, review the images, listen to what the children said several times, return to the transcribed text, and interpret the context of the children's statements. This transcription process is marked by the researcher's subjectivity, as they interpret the images and recall the conversation while seeking to get as close as possible to the reality experienced by the interlocutors. The children's names are fictitious and were chosen by them when signing the consent form to participate in the academic research.

Below are three excerpts from the video recordings, entitled "The cat's refund," "Eat popcorn," and "Elections." These were chosen based on what they reveal about the unique meanings that each child assigns to their experiences in situations outside of the school routine and context. They experience different roles in multiple relationships marked by affection, disagreements, alliances, criticism, confrontations, and disappointments. They bring aspects of everyday life to the fore through spontaneous choices rather than in response to a question or educational activity. They are therefore very fertile ground for examination from a historical-cultural perspective, seeking to show how the process of constructing meaning in everyday conversations also enhances human development. Through the process of analyzing the statements, based on repeated readings of the transcripts, we sought to highlight the discursive strategies, the richness of the flow of topics in a conversation, and the possibilities for mediation by the teacher, made possible by occupying other positions in relation to the children, and not just the position of the teacher.

Conversations in second-grade class B: the classroom is a place for conversation

As indicated, we will present excerpts from research conducted at a municipal public school located in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in the eastern region of Campinas. This school offers education from 1st to 9th grade, in morning and afternoon sessions, consisting of eleven classes. The children participating in the study are second-grade students in Class B, taught by the researcher-teacher. There were 24 students in this class, 13 girls and 11 boys, daughters and sons of families with low or lower-middle socioeconomic status.

The children's weekly routine includes play activities, daily reading, and curriculum subjects. In the classroom setting, there are technological resources and teaching materials, such as digital whiteboards, cell phones, Chromebooks, access to children's streaming platforms, games, toys, and a classroom library. These resources are accessed by children under the teacher's guidance during the times set aside for their use.

| The cat's refund

The teacher-researcher begins the conversation by asking Larissa what she will do in the afternoon when she returns from school. Other children approach the table and join in the conversation, talking about what they usually do when they are not at school. Rollerblading, eating ice cream, coloring pictures with mom, playing with Barbie dolls, playing with cats... As the conversation unfolds, Larissa, Iara, Alice, and Marcela identify similarities in the activities that seem typical of the daily lives of children living in an urban context, in a lower-middle-class suburb. The recognition of similar experiences helps to create a favorable context for participation and dialogue. At one point, the teacher picks out one of the topics discussed by the participants and asks Larissa for more information.

Teacher: Larissa, you said you play with your cats... Do they stay quiet?

Larissa: Stay! I put them in the stroller and go out for a walk with them.

[...]

Teacher: You take them for a ride in the doll's stroller!

Larissa: Yes! I pretend I am going to the bank, to C&A... I pretend I bought a cat online and it didn't work out... I complain that I bought a yellow cat and got an orange one!

Teacher: You play that you bought a cat online and it didn't work out... And what do you do in this game?

Larissa: I hand the cat over to my uncle, who is on the computer... [turns sideways and gestures as if her uncle is typing on the computer] Then my uncle starts talking: "The refund... well... unfortunately, it shows the purchase and there's no refund... So tomorrow we'll give you a brand-new kitten!"

Iara, Alice, and Marcela are very attentive to the narrative and laugh at the way Larissa imitates her uncle's voice, who plays the role of a supposed salesman in the game.

Teacher: That's cool! What is a refund?

Larissa: A refund is when you buy something, it doesn't work out, and then you go back and demand your money back!

Teacher: Now I understand what a refund is. I learned a new word!

Marcela: My brother puts the parakeet on my shoulder and I play with it.

Larissa: I have three cats, and my grandmother has three. – She says, showing the number three with her hand. – Mine are called Kiki, Tunico, and Mica... And hers are Jade, Amora, and Duda.

Teacher: Beautiful names!

Larissa: My house is stuffed with cats. Sometimes the six of them climb up onto the roof together. (Transcription of video recording, 09/26/2022)

In Larissa's game with her cats, two plot sources intersect: the traditional game of mother and children (with the "kitten children" inside the stroller, accompanying the "mother" in her daily chores) and the inclusion of modern practices, intensified by the recent period of social distancing due to the Covid-19² pandemic (with online shopping). As Vygotsky (2021) says, play is not mere imitation. It is a symbolic creation that allows children to experiment with roles, create relationships between them, and redefine objects. This makes it possible to rework social reality and cultural experiences into a playful storyline. In this process, cultural appropriation

2 Since the beginning of 2020, Brazilian educational institutions have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

becomes evident: children appropriate social signs (words, practices, consumer goods) and reinterpret them in light of their own experiences.

During the conversation, Larissa uses gestures and expressions to make her story as understandable and interesting as possible for her interlocutors. She takes on the role of mother/shopper, using language to create scenarios: stroller and walk/bench and store. She also takes on the role of the salesman uncle, using body language (turning to the side), gestures (simulating typing), and tone of voice (deepening his voice to signal the male figure and the role of a salesman) to lend credibility to the story. These strategies in the production of their speeches attract the attention of their classmates and teacher, eliciting laughter.

In the flow of the dialogue, the teacher intervenes, requesting information about the meaning attributed to the word "refund." With this question, she interrupts the narrative flow of the game, related to scenes, actions, and fictional characters, and steers the dialogue toward an exercise in conceptual elaboration. Larissa, challenged by the teacher, correctly presents the concept of refund, demonstrating mastery of its cultural meaning. The contrast between the emphatic use of the words "demand your money back!" and what happens in the game, when the "employee" says that "unfortunately, it shows the purchase and there's no refund..." seems to be mitigated by the promise that "[...] tomorrow we will give you a brand-new kitten!" In this excerpt, oral language can be considered a tool for expressing and elaborating on experiences of everyday disappointments, which leave such a mark on people, especially those from economically disadvantaged social groups, who so often do not have their rights guaranteed and must settle for agreements.

The teacher validates and praises Larissa's statement, saying, "Now I understand what a refund is. "I learned a new word!" shifts the typical teacher-student dialogue, placing the teacher in the learner's position and assigning the child the role of teacher.

Children are sensitive to this transition between the realm of imagination and the realm of logic and concepts, and the dialogue continues with accounts of everyday experiences, such as "what they do at home when they are not at school."

| Eat popcorn

Some children are playing on the blackboard, next to the teacher's desk, who is sitting watching them, as it is playtime. Students Valéria, Laís, Gabriela, and Adriana lean on the teacher's desk, waiting for their turn to play on the blackboard. The teacher asks the girls where they watched the last men's soccer game of the 2022 World Cup, which took place in Qatar. The children tell who they watched the game with and that they cheered for Brazil. Gabriela feels comfortable sharing her experience of watching the game at her grandparents' house.

Gabriela: I watched Brazil's game at my grandpa's house, she says, looking at the teacher.

Teacher: That's cool! Did Grandpa watch it, you, and who else? – She asks, looking at Gabriela.

Gabriela: I watched it with my grandmother, too, who keeps talking with popcorn in her mouth! [She says with a strongly critical tone]
 Everyone laughs.
 Gabriela: And you can't give popcorn to dogs!!! – She says, staring at the teacher. – I have a dog!
 Adriana: I feel like eating popcorn!
 Teacher: Ahhh... You really can't... And why can't you give popcorn to your dog?
 Valéria: My grandpa gives popcorn to the dog! – She tells the teacher.
 Gabriela: Because it's bad...
 Teacher: Who said you can't give it? – She asks Gabriela.
 Gabriela: I don't know... – She says, looking at the ceiling and leaning on the table.
 Adriana: It's human food!
 Valéria: My grandpa said you can throw popcorn to dogs. – She tells everyone.
 Adriana: But it's human food! – She says to everyone. (Transcription of video recording, 11/02/2022)

This excerpt shows a very common pattern of topic flow in conversation, marked by successive changes of topic without going into depth or expanding on them. So, we have changes of topic almost every turn: watching an important game, eating popcorn, giving popcorn to the dog, having a dog, wanting to eat popcorn. The children highlight one or another word from what their classmates and teacher say and introduce new topics, feeling free not to strictly follow the subject at hand, guided by aspects to which they have contributions to make, so that the dialogue can continue. So, we see the word functioning as a trigger for memory, and conversation as a meeting point for small narratives that overlap.

But in the excerpt, we also see dialogue as a tool for children to elaborate on culture, more specifically on what is culturally acceptable or unacceptable, when they discuss behaviors that break rules, whether of etiquette (eating popcorn while talking) or health (feeding popcorn to dogs). Regarding the first one, they seem to agree. The image of Gabriela's grandmother watching Brazil's game, eating popcorn, and talking at the same time, provokes laughter, and no one disagrees with the critical tone she brings to the information. But this scene seems to remind Gabriela of other things that should not be done, and she adds her objection to giving popcorn to dogs. Furthermore, here, the rule is not consensual, as differing opinions arise, since Valéria counters with her experiences with her grandfather. The language here is anchored in internalized social voices. It is also an example of how children use others' speech as their own (internalizing *others' words*).

It is interesting to note three distinct forms of teacher mediation: first, she validates what Gabriela says (You really can't); then she questions the reason for the rule (Why can't you?); finally, she questions its source (Who said you cannot?). With these questions, children are invited to reflect and refine their arguments, which is a very important exercise for their education. Especially in contemporary times, when we are faced with the risk of accepting any information as true, this seemingly simple dialogue is of great value.

The children could respond with simple answers such as "because you cannot" or "because you can," but they accept the proposal to reflect on the statement and present three different types of arguments. The first, from Valéria, is experiential

and invokes the authority of her grandfather, who, according to her, not only gives the popcorn but also verbally affirms that this is an acceptable act. Gabriela resists and replies that it is bad, but when the teacher asks, "Who said so...?" she cannot come up with any arguments. Finally, Adriana refines the debate, shifting from the experiential to the categorical realm, when she says that it is "human food." There is a subtle shift from the specific food "popcorn" to a more abstract and generalized condition established by the statement "human food," which includes a multitude of other foods.

We thus observe how speech enables the creation of meanings through convergences and divergences of points of view. Learning to debate, listen, formulate responses, and recognize when you do not know something are very important steps for integrating into social groups and strengthening your ability to take a stand in interactions. The teacher encourages the children to move beyond common sense and toward conceptual generalizations. Here we see the transition from spontaneous language use to the construction of conceptual explanations, even if they are still rudimentary. By asking questions, the teacher encourages the children to express their subjective opinions. This mediation creates conditions for development, moving from the use of language as a means of observation to an instrument of explanation.

One more step that could have been taken, taking advantage of the debate, would have been to suggest that the children look for information about the rule against giving popcorn/human food to dogs. Can it or can't it? Not necessarily as a more complex project, as is often the case in some teaching practices, but simply as a quest for knowledge, based on everyday curiosities, stimulating curiosity and the desire to satisfy it.

We now move on to the last excerpt analyzed.

| Elections

Edson is talking to the teacher about the Rainbow Friends³ game. André, Eduardo, and Marcela are standing nearby, listening to the conversation. Eduardo interrupts the topic of the game and joins the conversation by discussing the Brazilian presidential elections, which have just taken place.

Edson: Hey, teacher! Teacher! In the Blue level, you have to place the blocks... And you'll never get out of the box. In the Green phase, there will be some holes.

André: You have to get the food.

Eduardo: Hey, teacher, did you see that Lula won?

Teacher: Yes... Lula won the elections! Were you rooting for Lula?

Eduardo: Of course! Look (represents the letter L with the index finger and thumb, a sign used in Lula's election campaign)!!! The woman did this, see

³ This game is included in a platform (Roblox) that offers several *online* games and can be accessed via computer, tablet, or cell phone with a login and password. It is a free platform, but it includes paid games. The children in the study accessed the free version of Rainbow Friends.

(makes a negative gesture with her thumb pointing down) to us inside the bus when we went to visit my grandpa!
 Teacher: I don't understand... Who did that (repeats the negative gesture) to you on the bus? Did the woman give you a thumbs down on the bus?
 Eduardo: Yeah. When we were going to see my grandpa... Then the woman showed this to us, see! (repeats the negative gesture).
 Teacher: Why do you think she did that? – she says, repeating the sign.
 Eduardo: Just because Lula won! They have it and we don't! – he says, rubbing his thumb and index finger together, referring to money.
 Teacher: They have it and we don't, what? – She says, imitating the child's gesture.
 Eduardo: Money!
 Teacher: But how would she know that you voted for Lula?
 Eduardo: It's because we made the letter L. (shows the letter with his right hand, again). Then she showed this to me, my sister, my brother, and my mom. Then she showed this to us, see... (he makes a gesture with her hand, placing her thumb up and her index finger horizontally, as if holding a gun).
 Teacher: She made a little gun with her hands? – She says in a disapproving tone. – Oh... how violent!!!
 Eduardo: Yeah. There was only Bolsonaro... Bolsonarista, there...
 Teacher: It's dangerous... You can't mess with people on the street... Be careful...
 Edson: Teacher, then... So... In the first phase... You will... It's going to stay inside the box, and it's the perfect time to explore the Rainbow Friends map. (Transcript of the video recording, 12/05/2022)

The dialogue in this excerpt can only be understood by taking into account the social, historical, and cultural context that permeates and constitutes it. Gestures and words need to be interpreted in light of a set of knowledge and information that is not explicit in the dialogue but must be understood. The gestures of the letter "L," "gun," and "negative" are signs that acquire meaning within a specific social context, which includes political campaigns and intense social debates, and can have opposite meanings depending on who "reads" them: the L means victory and celebration for Eduardo and his family, and defeat and disappointment for the woman they meet by chance. Between them, a dialogue takes place without any words, only with the power of gestures, but anchored in the discourses that circulated (and still circulate) defending opposing ideologies. In a scene that must have lasted a minute or two at most, they are not alone, for millions of voices are represented there. An excellent example is that, to understand the interlocutor's speech, it is not enough to understand their words (or gestures); we must also consider their thoughts, motivations, and intentions, because only then can we get closer to what they mean.

Expanding on his interpretation, Eduardo explains that the "L," the negative sign, and the "gun" represent not only the candidates and the elections, but also the social inequality that marks our society, divided into economic classes. In simplified terms, he explains this inequality (here, an intertwining gesture and spoken language) by saying, "They have it, and we don't!"

This excerpt shows how cultural aspects shape the perceptions and meanings produced in interactions. The interlocutors (Eduardo and his family members, the woman, and his teacher) not only reproduce gestures or speech, but also attribute

values and positions to them, demonstrating an active appropriation of cultural content.

The teacher, in the first place, validates the theme by asking questions and asking for clarifications. By repeating the gesture, she validates it, but also helps the child organize the experience into verbal language. This movement is typical of mediation in Vygotsky: giving linguistic form to experience, transforming nonverbal signs into verbal ones. However, through her mediation, she also shows that this conversation requires caution and that she and Eduardo are entering a territory fraught with tensions of various kinds: social, economic, and ideological. The gesture of the thumb up and index finger forward initially represents a concrete object—a weapon. However, when interpreted by the teacher and discussed, it is elevated to the level of more abstract concepts—violence, the need for care, and political context. This process illustrates the dynamic connection between thought and language proposed by Vygotsky and provides clues about the importance of others in the development of these mental functions.

The teacher also seeks to expand Eduardo's understanding of the dangers in everyday life, helping him understand the effects of that brief conversation on the street, reproduced in the classroom. In this way, she acts as a mediator by reinterpreting and reframing gestures, highlighting that they can have negative social and ethical implications associated with violence. The teacher heightens the tension in the narrative, encouraging the child to think about other people's points of view and inferences. This is a movement toward the development of higher cognitive functions, such as the ability to think abstractly and consider others' perspectives. The teacher's shift leads the child to reflect on the reasons behind someone else's actions. This mobilizes explanatory thinking, stimulating the transition from spontaneous concepts (personal accounts) to more elaborate concepts (social causality).

It is interesting to note that, unlike in other episodes, in which children feel comfortable intervening in what their classmates and teacher say, adding to, disagreeing with, or agreeing with them, here Edson, Marcela, and André follow the conversation in silence, which may indicate (by conjecture) that they know the topic is fraught with tensions and disputes of meaning. However, the fact that they listened to the conversation in silence does not mean that what was said did not affect them. To find this out, the teacher would need to take more directive actions, asking for their opinions on the dialogue. However, given that it has become an arena for conflict, sometimes marked by considerable violence and reactions from families regarding the discussion of political issues, and particularly polarized by this specific election campaign, it is understandable that the teacher does not wish to pursue this line of inquiry. Moreover, everyone, led by Edson, instead of discussing the struggles (symbolic and real) that mark everyday life and benefit from the opportunity to refine critical reflections, turns their attention to the fictional struggle of the Rainbow Friends group against colorful and strange-looking monsters.

Before moving on to our conclusion, we consider it important to emphasize that, despite these limitations, the teacher's participation in constructing conversations is decisive in creating dialogic moments that are crucial to language development.

The teacher-researcher's mediation strategies were to guide the reworking of statements, organize facts, understand reasoning, clarify doubts, recall and validate all contributions, and allow for a reversal of the roles typically present in the teacher-student relationship. Although clear about his goal, his main strategy was to make himself available for conversation. Although there was an implied invitation to dialogue, participation was never mandatory. We believe this is a very important condition that must be observed so that students feel empowered to raise topics and information relevant to them, to share with the group forming, and to enjoy the conversations that unfold, point by point. Throughout the episodes, we notice how often the children address the teacher, sometimes to tell her about their experiences, sometimes to ask her about hers. They address their peers much less frequently, and here is one last comment regarding the creation of concrete conditions for the development of oral language and its use as a powerful tool for relationships: the importance of adult mediation as a builder of dialogue between peers, attentive to the possibilities of acting to expand the development and use of language in its communicative function.

| Conclusions

We conclude this text by reaffirming that the development of oral language does not cease; it is a lifelong process. In this process of language use, which involves the construction and reconstruction of concepts and generalizations throughout human development, we defend the importance of teacher-mediated conversation in the school context. Communicative experiences that encourage refuting, recalling, reworking narratives, justifying, hypothesizing, conjecturing, persuading, debating, among other actions, enhance affections, feelings, and emotions that, in the context of conversation, materialize in voice intonation, gestures, looks, touch, the use of signs, and the search to make oneself understood by interlocutors. At the same time, in these experiences, dialogue ceases to be merely a narrative. It becomes a debate of meanings, which is fundamental for the development of logical and conceptual thinking. This collective construction of meanings shows how language develops on the interpsychological level (as observed in research with children and teachers) before becoming intrapsychological.

The importance of multiple teaching practices that require oral language in the classroom seems indisputable to us. However, in addition to focusing on linguistic improvement, children need openness in conversation to express their feelings, verify opinions about social norms, share their family experiences, and reflect on life, allowing them to develop critical awareness and deepen their values. The dual role of teacher and researcher assumed by the first author provided a privileged position for reflections on working with children in conversations and deeper emotional connections, while her experiences in extracurricular contexts were becoming known. The analyses, on the other hand, allowed us to visualize and

question whether the responses in the flow of the dialogues could sometimes have been better, explore different aspects, review opinions, and increase exchanges between the children.

Finally, we emphasize the importance of teachers sometimes reversing roles, placing themselves in the position of learners in this interaction. This action helps understand the context of children's speech, learn about their practices, help them rework and construct sentences, mark the context of conversation with an opening for narratives, and contribute to thinking about themes, among other ways to use speech in the context of communication.


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Resumo

Partimos da importância da linguagem para o desenvolvimento do psiquismo humano e de mediações em sala de aula para sua ocorrência. Observamos a diminuição de atividades de conversação nos Anos Iniciais do Ensino Fundamental e delineamos nosso problema de pesquisa: de que modo(s) as conversas espontâneas em sala de aula favorecem aprendizagens e desenvolvimento infantil? Investigamos o uso da linguagem de uma professora-pesquisadora com seus alunos do 2º ano do Ensino Fundamental de escola municipal em Campinas, em 2022, com o objetivo de examinarmos as contribuições do uso da linguagem oral em atividades de conversação. Videografações auxiliaram na análise das interações marcadas por palavras, gestos e expressões corporais. Verificamos modos diversificados de uso da linguagem pelas crianças para expressar experiências, constituir significações, elaborar pautas culturais e relações sociais. A mediação da professora-pesquisadora orientou a formulação de perguntas, compreensão do raciocínio e validação das participações, inversão nos papéis de quem ensina/quem aprende. Esta pesquisa oferece subsídios para a valorização das conversações no cotidiano escolar, incluindo a participação das professoras, mas num sentido não didatizado e sim de interesse real por aquilo que suas/seus alunas/os têm a dizer.

Palavras-chave: Linguagem oral. Criança. Ensino Fundamental. Conversação.

Resumen

Partimos de la importancia del lenguaje para el desarrollo de la psique humana y de las mediaciones en el aula para su ocurrencia. Observamos la disminución de las actividades de conversación en los primeros años de la educación primaria y delineamos nuestro problema de investigación: ¿de qué manera(s) las conversaciones espontáneas en el aula favorecen el aprendizaje y el desarrollo infantil? Investigamos el uso del lenguaje de una maestra-investigadora con sus alumnos de segundo año de la escuela primaria municipal de Campinas, en 2022, con el objetivo de examinar las contribuciones del uso del lenguaje oral en las actividades de conversación. Las grabaciones de video ayudaron en el análisis de las interacciones marcadas por palabras, gestos y expresiones corporales. Verificamos diversos modos de uso del lenguaje por parte de los niños para

expresar experiencias, construir significados, elaborar pautas culturales y relaciones sociales. La mediación de la maestra-investigadora orientó la formulación de preguntas, la comprensión del razonamiento y la validación de las participaciones, la inversión de los roles de quien enseña/quien aprende. Esta investigación ofrece subsidios para la valorización de las conversaciones en el cotidiano escolar, incluyendo la participación de las maestras, pero en un sentido no didáctico, sino de interés real por lo que sus alumnos tienen que decir.

Palabras clave: Lenguaje oral. Niños. Educación primaria. Conversación.

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