

Exploring talk practices to support learning in early childhood, primary and secondary classrooms

Louise Paatsch¹

Pauline Thompson² and Andrea Nolan¹

¹ Deakin University

² The University of Melbourne

There is a growing body of research highlighting the value of quality classroom talk as a key pedagogical practice to support learning outcomes for students of all ages. Quality classroom talk engages student interest, stimulates thinking and builds understanding. In a classroom this can be observable as extended exchanges of dialogue occurring between groups of students, and also between the teacher and students, with higher order questions being asked and responded to, and knowledge being co-constructed. When teachers scaffold and facilitate this type of talk they are providing the environment for students to engage in learning at a deep rather than surface level. It is this type of engagement which leads to enhanced learning outcomes for students.

This research explored talk practices of teachers and their students in early childhood, primary and secondary classrooms in Australia. Video excerpts of classroom practice were collected from 16 teachers (3 early childhood teachers, 6 primary school teachers, 7 secondary school teachers). All videos were transcribed according to speaker turns within the interactions for each teacher in each education setting. Teacher talk behaviours, student responses and teacher-student talk patterns were analysed using a teacher-student talk coding framework used in previous studies by two of the researchers. The final analysis involved scrutinising the total number of behaviours and responses within each education setting that were then compared across settings.

Findings showed that similar teacher talk behaviours were evident but differed in frequency across early childhood, primary and secondary school teachers despite subject area and learning activity. The teacher-student talk patterns showed differences in the types of student responses and complexity of student talk. The implications of these findings suggest that more attention needs to be focused on teacher talk behaviours in all classrooms to promote effective pedagogical practice. Teachers across all education settings would benefit from professional learning that focuses on supporting teachers to understand the importance of their own talk behaviours and effective teacher-student talk patterns that encourage extended dialogue to foster learning.