

Children's Responses to Culturally Relevant Oracy Practices

By

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B.Ed., University of Victoria, 2010
B.A., University of Victoria, 2003

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Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative action research was to explore how early primary children respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in an inclusive classroom. This study, which took place over five months in an inner city school in Western Canada, focused on children's oracy skills following four events facilitated by an Aboriginal Elder. Data consisted of an oral assessment, transcriptions of the four events, artefacts created by the students, photographs, and the teacher's research journal. Data analysis consisted of a comparative assessment of the student's oral language skills and a content and discourse analysis of the transcriptions. Data analysis revealed that children respond favourably to culturally responsive oracy practices, that they are able to meet the B.C. Ministry of Education prescribed learning outcomes, and such practices adhere to the *Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement* (2005).

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List of Acronyms

The following table provides a brief list of the acronyms used throughout this paper in the order in which they first appear.

| | |
|------|---|
| ELL | English Language Learner |
| ESD | English as a Second Dialect |
| IRP | Integrated Resource Package |
| PLO | Prescribed Learning Outcome |
| LINK | Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge |
| MCFD | Ministry of Children and Family Development |
| IBI | Requiring Intense Behaviour Intervention |
| ASD | Autism Spectrum Disorder |
| EA | Educational Assistant |
| IEP | Individual Education Plan |
| ADHD | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to answer the question: How do students respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in the early primary classroom? I do this by first situating myself in regards to my study. I then provide a rationale for why this research is of interest and relevant to the academic and teaching community. Chapter 2 of this document reviews the theoretical and conceptual frameworks on which I base my research and provides a comprehensive review of the most relevant and significant research related to my topic. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology, instructional strategies, and data collected to conduct this study. Chapter 4 presents the research context, research participants, literacy events, and how I analyzed my data. Chapter 5 reports the results of my study. I have organized it by literacy event. Chapter 6 discusses the implications for Aboriginal students and my teaching practice. This final chapter also suggests recommendations for future research and the strengths and limitations of my study.

Before I begin, it is necessary to situate myself in regards to this study, as my own context and life experience have influenced my choice of research subject and my worldview. Before having children, I completed a Bachelor degree in philosophy and political science. After having children, my interests changed from the inner world of philosophy to the more concrete world of education. My children currently attend elementary school in the British Columbia public school system.

Although my teaching degree focused on middle school, circumstance and opportunity have led me to teach predominantly at the early primary level. During the 2010/2011 year, I taught grade 1 French immersion in an upper middle class, primarily Caucasian, neighbourhood school. One quarter of my class spoke a home language other than English; the home languages were

German, Japanese, and Spanish. In the 2011/2012 school year, I moved to a small inner city school where I taught kindergarten to a culturally diverse group of students. Seven percent of my students were recent immigrants and 21% were Aboriginal. At the end of 2011/2012 school year I again moved, this time to a dual track inner city school. At this school, I taught grade 1 and 2 to another culturally diverse group of students. During the 2012/2013 school year, 18% of my class were recent immigrants (Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Columbia) whose home language was other than English and 23% were Aboriginal.

Living in the Tsilhqot'in, stories of my own First Nations ancestry, and my experiences with Aboriginal, immigrant, and minority children in Victoria's inner city schools have led me to have a particular interest in the status and success of the culturally diverse students in my own and other classrooms. The following section explains my rationale for choosing to investigate how students respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in the early primary classroom.

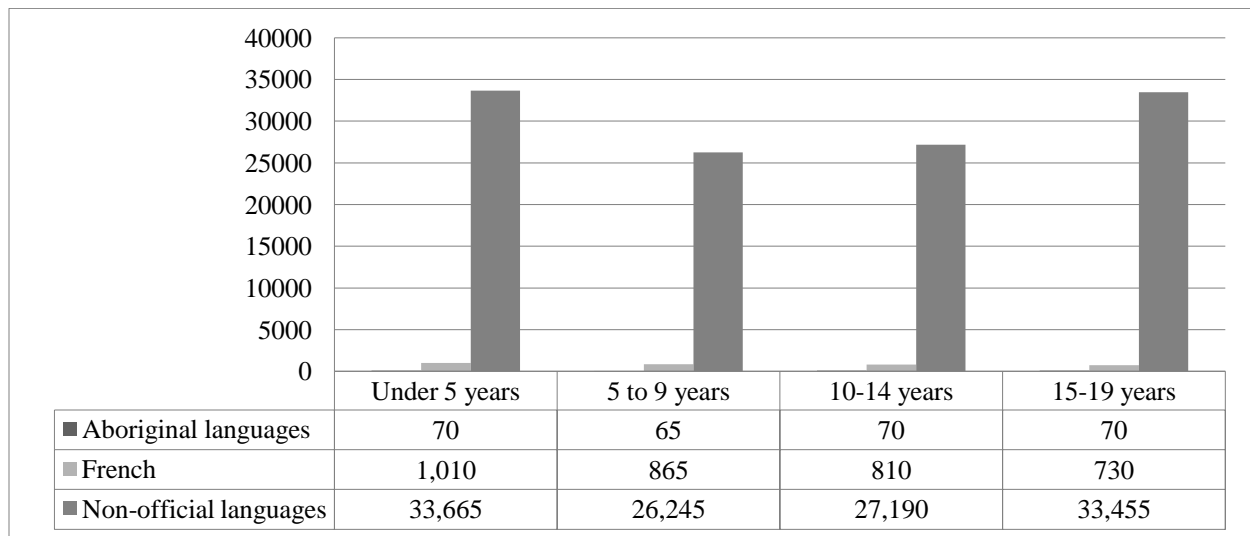
Rationale

The public school system in Canada brings together children from a wide-range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Fifteen percent of children under the age of 15 living in Canada speak a home language other than French or English (Statistics Canada, 2012). Within British Columbia 33,735 children, speak a home language other than English. The number of school age children, age five to nine, who speak a home language other than English, is 26,310. This suggests an increasing, and an increasingly ethnically diverse population (Statistics Canada, 2010). Due to this increasing diversity, it is of the utmost importance that teachers focus on ways to strengthen and support the diverse learners in their classrooms. Table 1 graphs the number of

children living in British Columbia whose home language is one other than English. I have separated out children who speak an Aboriginal language or French in their home.

Table 1

Children's Home Languages Other than English



Note. Adapted from “Detailed Mother Tongue (232), Knowledge of Official Languages (5), Age Groups (17a) and Sex (3) for the Population Excluding Institutional Residents of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Divisions and Census Subdivisions, 2011 Census” by Statistics Canada, 2012. Copyright 2012 by Statistics Canada.

Canada’s municipalities reflect its national diversity. The Greater Victoria School District, the context for my study, provides public education to children from the municipalities of Saanich, Esquimalt, View Royal, Oak Bay, the Highlands, the City of Victoria, as well as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, and international students. During the 2011/2012 school year, the Greater Victoria School District reported enrollment of 18,434 students. One thousand, four hundred, forty-one of these students identified as having Aboriginal ancestry, 1556 were identified as English Language Learners (ELL) or as speaking English as a Second Dialect (ESD), and 743 were international students (Greater Victoria School District, 2013). According

to the mission statement, contained in the Greater Victoria School District's (2013) *2012-2013 Achievement Contract*, "The Greater Victoria School District is committed to each student's success in learning within a responsive and safe environment" (p. 1). Given the school district's diverse demographic, I believe the responsive piece of their mission statement should be interpreted as culturally responsive. Another district document, the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* (2005) provides a framework for educators to teach from a culturally responsive stance.

As a British Columbian teacher, I must also acknowledge and address the curriculum mandated by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. The *English Language Arts Integrated Resource Package* (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006) emphasises the importance of developing oral language skills, as well as reading and writing. Moreover, this document states, "Oral language is the foundation on which literacy is built" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 33). Dickinson and Tabors (2001) support the Ministry's claims by showing that children's early primary vocabulary skills are a strong indication of their later reading success and school success.

Taking into account both the importance of oral language and the cultural diversity of my classroom, my goal, through this action research project, is to answer the research question: How do students respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in the early primary classroom?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the body of research related to looking at student responses to culturally relevant oracy practices that teachers might use with their early primary students. I have grounded my research in Vygotsky's theory of socially shared cognition and Halliday's functions of language. As talk plays a foundational role in literacy skills (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Booth, Swartz, & Zola, 1994; Powell & Kalina, 2009) and I have chosen to look at my student's oral responses, it is important to define oracy. I describe where the term originated, and review the current research on oracy relevant to the focus of my study. Finally, I look at culturally responsive teaching, how it relates to early primary education, and how the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* is congruent with culturally responsive teaching.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks Related to Oral language Development

Socially shared cognition and the functions of language.

Socially shared cognition, the belief that children make meaning through social interaction, is an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding oral language development and children's responses to culturally relevant practices. According to Vygotsky:

All forms of mental activity are derived from social and cultural contexts and are shared by members of those contexts because these mental processes are adaptive.

Furthermore, language is a critical bridge between the sociocultural world and individual mental functioning. The acquisition of language is the most significant

milestone in children's cognitive development. (Berk & Winsler, 1995, pp. 30-31)

By collaborating with others in meaningful cultural activities, Vygotsky argues that children are the active agents in the development of meaning (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Jones (2007) explains, "Learning takes place most effectively within a context of social interaction through joint

construction of meaning” (p. 570). This suggests that allowing children talk time can help them to learn and co-create meaning. The B.C. Ministry of Education (2006) acts on this insight in their mandated curriculum, by promoting the development of cognitive processes (making connections, developing ideas) through oracy.

The term frequently used for student learning, that is taking place just beyond a student’s independent level, is the *zone of proximal development*. Vygotsky (1978) defines the *zone of proximal development* as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The zone of proximal development is the region in which abilities are transferred from expert to child, from the shared environment to the individual. It is the “dynamic zone” where learning and cognitive development occur (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Combined with the idea of the zone of proximal development is the gradual release of responsibility model. “As students become more proficient in using new strategies through guided practice and interaction with one another, the teacher can gradually release responsibility for the strategies to students, to encourage their independence” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 18). Appendix A shows gradual release of responsibility as a continuum in relation to oral language.

However, before teachers can facilitate the active participation of children in classroom discussions, teachers need to be aware of how children use language to learn and children need to be aware of how to use language (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006). Piper (1998) wrote, “A very concrete way of categorizing children’s language development within a social interaction theoretical framework is to define the different functions that language serves in their lives” (p. 196). Halliday (1969), one of the first and most influential researchers to use functional analysis

states, “It is necessary to know how to use language to learn; and also, how to use language to participate as an individual in the learning situation” (p. 35).

Tough (1977), Schachter, Kirshner, Klips, Friedrickes, and Sanders (1974), and Shafer, Staab, and Smith (1983) also suggest functional systems of language, but Piper (1998) argues that the most comprehensive of the functional systems of language is Halliday’s. Halliday (1969) identifies seven functions of language that a child has acquired by the time he or she comes to school at the age of five. These seven functions are instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and representational.

The first function of language to develop is the instrumental, as a way of getting things done. It is the power to say, “I want.” Closely related to the instrumental form of language is the regulatory. Children learn this to regulate the behaviour of others. It is the “do as I tell you” function of language. Directly related to the regulatory function of language is the social function or the interactional model, “the use of language in the interaction between self and others” (Halliday, 1969, p. 30). Building on the interactional function of language is the personal, which allows the child to use language as a form of individuality. As the child defines his or her individuality through language, he or she comes to see the “non-self” (Halliday, 1969, p. 31). The “non-self” model of language is the heuristic model and develops as a means of investigating reality, a way of learning about things. A student who has developed this function of language is, at the age of five, already using words such as *question* and *answer*. Children also develop an imaginative use of language. This is the *let’s pretend* function of language, where the talk is not necessarily about anything ‘real’ at all and may even be nonsense sounds. The final function of language to develop is representational. The representational mode develops as a means of communicating about something and of expressing propositions. It is the *I’ve got*

something to tell you function of language. Halliday (1969) holds that this is the dominant form of language for the adult, but not for the child, where it forms just one piece of how he or she uses language.

Although Halliday (1969) suggests several functions of language, the three that would seem to be most important to understand children's responses to culturally relevant practices, are the interactional, the personal, and the heuristic. By being aware of students' diverse background experiences, teachers can nurture the personal function of language by giving them time to talk about who they are. Giving children the space to explore an idea or concept through talk will also help them further develop the heuristic function of language. By encouraging talk in a collaborative environment, teachers can also cultivate the interactional function of language. Providing opportunities for children to use these functions of language will help them to develop their oracy skills, a key component of later school success (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

Oracy

Andrew Wilkinson coined the term *oracy* in 1965. Wilkinson, a professor at the University of Birmingham, defines oracy as the "general ability in the skills of speaking and listening" (Harvey, 1968, p. 3). In reaction to the *Crowther Report* (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1959), which named numeracy and literacy as essential skills for the educated person, Wilkinson added oracy. He felt that there was a lack of attention given to the important skills of listening and speaking. Wilkinson (1965) argued that an educated person "should be numerate, orate, and literate" (p. 14). Evans and Jones (2007) add, "That the oral competencies children need to develop to become fully participative citizens in a highly mobile global context cannot be left to chance (p. 559).

The importance of oracy skills and their foundational role in a child's education cannot be overestimated (Evans & Jones, 2007; Jones, 2007; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Tomblin, 2005). "Oral language is the foundation of literacy learning. Talk is the bridge that helps students make connections between what they know and what they are coming to know" (Booth, Swartz, & Zola, 1994, p. 254). Research shows us that approximately half of children who experience speech language delays during their early primary years will subsequently experience reading and other academic problems (Fisher, 2007; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Tomblin, 2005; Tomblin et al., 1997). Therefore, it is essential that teachers engage their students in meaningful oral language activities.

As previously noted, the B.C. Ministry of Education also emphasises the importance of oracy. In 2009, the Ministry published a pamphlet called *Ready, Set, Learn*. The Ministry continues to provide this document to B.C. families to help them prepare their child for school. In the first chapter, "Talking," the Ministry (2009) states, "Language development is a cornerstone for being ready to learn in school" (p. 2). The *English Language Arts Kindergarten to Grade 7* integrated resource package (IRP) echoes this by making oral language or 'speaking and listening' as one of its three key literacy components. The other key components are 'reading and viewing' and 'writing and representing' (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006).

The oral language section of the IRP is organised into four sections: purposes, strategies, thinking, and features. The purposes section of the oral language curriculum suggests teachers provide opportunities for students to develop their capacity to interact effectively with peers and adults, to present material orally, and to listen attentively, respectfully, and with a purpose. The curriculum expects teachers to foster students' awareness and engagement in the processes, skills, and techniques they can use to be more successful in their oral interactions. Teachers

should also provide opportunities for students to extend their thinking by using oral language to make connections to text, develop ideas, increase vocabulary, and use metacognition to assess their strengths and set goals to scaffold improvement. Finally, teachers should increase their students' knowledge of different forms of oral expression and the expectations of a variety of audiences (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006). Appendix B lists the Ministry prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) for oral language for grade 1 students.

Strategies for oral language development.

Supporting oracy in the early primary classroom involves providing many opportunities for talking and listening. Griffin, Beach, Ruan, and Dunn (2008) suggest the following research-based instructional strategies for supporting oral language development: A literacy rich classroom, storybook reading, and oral language activities. To develop sufficient oracy skills in the early primary classroom it is also important to differentiate instruction based on each student's zone of proximal development (Shirakawa & Iwahama, 2007). A literacy rich classroom implies a classroom environment that is "rich in print, reading and writing materials, and literacy related activities" (Griffin et al., 2008, p. 30).

Storybook reading supports oral language development, particularly if the reading is dialogic in nature, where the children actively participate in the book reading session (de Jong, Mol, & Bus, 2009; Lyle, 2009; Roberts, 2008). Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, and Vaughn (2004) suggest a variation of storybook reading where the reading takes place over a five-day cycle and incorporates a focus on high utility vocabulary, read alouds, discussion, rereading, and story summarization. High utility vocabularies are words that a reader might encounter across a wide group of reading materials.

Through structured oral language activities, children deepen their understanding and integrate their learning. This in turn leads the children to make new connections. Children actively engaged in partner talk tend to focus for longer periods and experience learning that is more powerful. “Structured partner talk is one of the best tools for maintaining engagement, building accountability and for sustaining learning” (Close, McClaren, & Stickley, 2002, p. 2). Some strategies for structured talk that teachers can implement in the classroom are A/B partner talk and grand conversations (Tompkins, 2006). A/B partner talk is when two students, A and B have a discussion on a set topic for a given amount of time. The purpose of this structuring is that it seeks to ensure both partners get an ‘equal’ opportunity to talk and to listen. Grand conversations are discussions that take place between students where students have the opportunity to respond to other students’ comments and engage in turn taking. Using the strategy of grand conversations, students make connections between themselves and the text being studied, between other texts and the focus text, and between the world and the focus text. An important distinction to make while using grand conversations is that the discussion is student led rather than teacher led. There is very little teacher talk during these discussions.

Other oral language activities that can be effective in the early primary classroom to develop oracy skills are show and tell, storytelling and retelling, singing, pretend play, and games (Griffin et al., 2008, p. 36). “Storytelling helps to build expressive language, receptive language, oral language comprehension, story structure, and vocabulary” (Griffin et al., 2008, p. 36). Imaginative play and role-play allows children the opportunity to practice unfamiliar words. Games, such as Simon Says, reinforce vocabulary and listening skills. Throughout these activities, teachers must acknowledge that children come into the early primary classroom from different home environments and vastly different literacy experiences (Hart & Risley, 1995).

This means that words familiar to some children will be unknown to others. The teacher must therefore purposefully introduce new words to students each week using kid friendly definitions and provide games and activities that give students frequent encounters with new words. Table 2 lists the nine strategies the B.C. Ministry of Education (2006) feels are important for teachers to implement in their classrooms to support learning through oral language.

Table 2

Supporting Learning through Oral Language

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| <p>To maximize oral language development, it is important that teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build a personal relationship with each student • create a safe climate of respectful listening • provide frequent, sustained opportunities for language development, including structured partner talk and small-group interaction • interact regularly on a one-to-one basis with each student • challenge students to talk, think, and explore their knowledge of the world • ask open-ended questions to help students make meaning • support students as they develop language and learning strategies necessary to articulate and extend their interactions with the world • give students adequate wait time for thinking to occur • encourage students to question and justify |
|---|

Note. Adapted from “English Language Arts Kindergarten To Grade 7: Integrated Resource Package” by B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006. Copyright 2006 by B.C. Ministry of Education.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

As children interact with others in their home environment, they quickly learn the rules of everyday conversation (Berk & Winsler, 1995). The child bases these rules on his or her sociocultural setting (Heath, 1982a; 1982b). When two different sociocultural communities come into contact, as with ethnically diverse students in the public school system, difficulties can often

arise (Ball, 2009). These difficulties can include misunderstandings between teachers and students, as well as between students and their peers.

Many culturally diverse students from cultural backgrounds that differ from the mainstream or dominant culture experience a lack of success in the traditional Eurocentric public school system (Ball, 2009; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Brown, 2007; Gee, 1989); consequently, educational researchers point towards culturally responsive teaching practices as a solution (Brown, 2007; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Santamaria, 2009). Culturally responsive teaching is a set of recommended best teaching practices intended to enhance learning for students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Santamaria, 2009). The intent is that by using culturally responsive teaching practices, students from the non-dominant culture will also experience success at school. Battiste and Henderson (2009) add that by integrating Indigenous knowledge into the education system, we can create a new, balanced center and a fresh vantage point from which to enhance our learning competencies.

One way to become more culturally responsive in the classroom is by incorporating aspects of a student's home culture into the classroom and instruction. By being aware of students' home and community culture and by using *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1995a, 1995b, 2000), teachers can scaffold onto their students' *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992). The term, *funds of knowledge* refers to the historically and culturally developed sources of knowledge for any given cultural group (Moll et al., 1992). Instead of using a deficit model that focuses on what children do not know, Moll et al. (1992) suggest educators focus on the bodies of knowledge the children do have, their funds of knowledge. In the case of Aboriginal students, this could include information such as oral storytelling, the importance of the seasons in relation

to food gathering and hunting, and the significance of native animals. Moll et al. (1992) argue that the funds of knowledge children bring with them contain more than enough cultural and cognitive resources to enrich the learning environment. Teachers can incorporate these funds of knowledge into classroom instruction, thereby giving students an education relevant to their personal experiences and culture. More recently, Battiste and Henderson (2009) have argued that we should expand this notion further by encouraging a transformative approach to learning that embraces Indigenous knowledge and experience while respecting mainstream knowledge and experience. They have identified the involvement of Elders in conventional learning community, such as schools, as a promising practice in mainstream education (Battiste & Henderson, 2009).

In order for teachers to be successful when working with diverse cultures, Ladson-Billings (2000) calls for a culturally relevant pedagogy. Indicators of a culturally relevant pedagogy are academic achievement, cultural competence, and a socio-political critique (Ladson-Billings, 2000). An emphasis on, and valuing of, academic achievement are visible in a classroom where teachers' expectations of their students are high (Santamaria, 2009), the learning atmosphere is engaging and challenging, and students work hard and welcome their role as responsible learners (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In addition to high expectations when it comes to academic achievement, teachers using a culturally relevant pedagogy support the development of cultural competence and legitimize their students' culture within the classroom context. "Cultural competence refers to the ability to function effectively in one's culture of origin" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210). Finally, culturally relevant teachers acknowledge the wider socio-political context by looking critically at existing structures of power and authority within society.

Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more

effectively” (p. 106). Many of the elements identified by Ladson-Billings (2000) as necessary for a critically responsive pedagogy are visible in Gay’s (2002) five crucial elements for culturally responsive teaching. These are: explicit knowledge about the cultures present within the classroom; converting that explicit knowledge into a culturally responsive curriculum; facilitating classrooms that are conducive to learning for culturally diverse students; ensuring effective communication with culturally diverse students; and finally, diversifying the delivery of instruction to match the learning styles of culturally diverse students.

Both Ladson-Billings (2000) and Gay (2002) identify a knowledge base about the cultures present in the classroom as necessary for culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2002) identifies three cultural characteristics of particular importance: how members understand group work and problem solving, the appropriate ways for children and adults to interact, and gender roles. She also states that for a teacher to be culturally responsive, they must obtain comprehensive information about the culture. Gay (2002) says that “acquiring this knowledge is not as difficult as it might at first appear” (p. 107) and points to the abundance of information and research on multicultural education. Gay (2002) concludes, “It just has to be located, learned, and woven into the preparation programs of teachers and classroom instruction” (p. 108).

Once teachers acquire a knowledge base about a particular culture, they need to make use of that knowledge in how they teach the curriculum. Culturally responsive teachers look critically at both the formal and hidden curriculum for how it affects students of diverse cultures (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings 2000). They do this by explicitly teaching about power structures, and how the school system, perpetuates those structures. At one school in South Australia, a group of teachers implemented a program in their early primary classrooms entitled “literacy and social power” (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001). After the media portrayed their area of town as less

desirable and a place for “others,” this program invited students to consider whether they had the power to change this perception (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001, p. 455). Hirst and Vadeboncoeur (2009) define “other” as an identity that is created, marginalized, and suppressed while preserving the status quo in school settings. Culturally responsive teachers also look at the implied values and beliefs within the curriculum and discuss who benefits from those values and beliefs. Comber, Thomson, and Wells (2001) documented practices in schools where educators developed critical and multiple literacies that permitted students to take action in their worlds and to design meaningful futures. With their students, culturally responsive teachers look critically at the ways the media portrays cultural groups and become aware of which cultural groups are missing altogether. O’Brien (1994) did this in her classroom by examining advertisement flyers as a basis for analyzing the “naturalness” of Mother’s Day with her five to seven year old students. The students investigated which cultural groups were dominant in the flyers, which were unrepresented, and compared this to the diversity represented in their own classroom. By going through these steps, culturally responsive teachers insure a culturally responsive curriculum.

Culturally responsive teaching is important for many reasons: classrooms in Canada are increasingly diverse; without culturally responsive teaching, it will be impossible to meet the needs of the diverse set of learners that enter the public school system; and all children regardless of culture or ethnicity should be able to experience success in the school system. Culturally responsive teaching offers the tools for ensuring that success. In Victoria, British Columbia, the school district has attempted to become more culturally responsive by implementing the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* (2005). The purpose of the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* (2005) is to ensure that all Aboriginal students “receive a quality

education in the public school system and a meaningful graduation that leads to future options and increased opportunities” (p. 2). As illustrated in Table 3, the four goals suggested by the *Enhancement Agreement* are congruent with culturally responsive teaching and suggest a reliable framework for a culturally relevant pedagogy.

Table 3

Comparison of the Enhancement Agreement with Elements of Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices

| Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement | Funds of Knowledge | Culturally Relevant Pedagogy | Culturally Responsive Teaching |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Increase Aboriginal students’ sense of place, of caring, and of belonging | Community knowledge is validated | Cultural competence | Demonstrate cultural caring, and build a learning community |
| Honour and improve relationships between the School District of Greater Victoria, and the Aboriginal community and parents | Relationships between students’ families and teachers strengthened | Cultural competence | Design a culturally relevant curricula and establish cross-cultural communications |
| Increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions and culture | Teachers enter students’ homes as learners | Socio-political consciousness | Develop a cultural diversity knowledge base |
| Increase success of all Aboriginal students | Educational excellence is supported | Academic achievement | Establish congruity in classroom instruction |

Note. Adapted from “Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement,” by Aboriginal Nations Education Council, 2005. Copyright 2005 by Greater Victoria School District. “Culturally responsive differentiated instruction: Narrowing gaps between best pedagogical practices benefitting all learners,” by L. J. Santamaria, 2009, *Teachers College Record*, 111(1),

p. 225. Copyright 2009 by Teachers College Record. "Educating all students: Creating culturally responsive teachers, classrooms, and schools," by M. A. Brown, 2007, *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 43(1), p. 59. Copyright 2007 by Intervention in School in Clinic.

Research supports the values held in the *Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement* (2005). Battiste and Henderson (2009) state that incorporating Indigenous knowledge "improves the learning of Aboriginal individuals...while respecting mainstream knowledge and experience" (p. 10). Ball (2009) suggests that promoting "cultural continuity and self-esteem" is a promising practice in the education of young Aboriginal children (p. 41). Further, Goulet's (2001) study demonstrates that effective teaching of Aboriginal students in the classroom must include traditions and culture, but also take into account the "sociohistorical realities" (p. 68).

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature relevant to my research question: How do students respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in the early primary classroom First, I grounded my research in Vygotsky's theory of socially shared cognition. Second, I discussed oracy and strategies for oral language development. Finally, I reviewed the research on culturally responsive teaching and suggested how the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* could provide a framework for culturally responsive teaching. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology I used to complete my action research, the instructional strategies used in my classroom, and my method of data collection.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 3 explains my research methodology, including the use of qualitative methods and the principles of action research. It also outlines the instructional strategies I used with my students to increase oral language proficiency. In addition, Chapter 3 outlines the types of data collected throughout this study. Finally, it discusses the ethical aspects I considered in preparing for this study, particularly concerning my relationship with my students as both their teacher and the researcher.

Qualitative Research

This study employed qualitative methods to explore how students respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in the early primary classroom. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human phenomenon. Qualitative methods are frequently used to perform research in an educational context as evidenced by the *Qualitative Research in Education* journal that dedicates itself to publishing the results of qualitative research aimed to promote the understanding and improvement of the educational process.

I selected qualitative research as my approach to data collection as I believed it would be capable of providing rich insight into the responses of early primary students to culturally responsive oral language activities. In addition, as I am embedded within the culture of schooling, qualitative research allowed me to use my subjective knowledge. Qualitative research seemed the best fit for documenting my data and developing conclusions as “a qualitative researcher starts with specific situations, finds patterns or themes in the data, establishes a tentative hypothesis, and then develops theories or conclusions” (Bui, 2009, p. 14). Furthermore,

I employed the principles of action research as it provided a practical way to carry out my research, reflect on my teaching strategies, and improve the learning in my classroom.

Action Research

Action research is a methodology that challenges an educator to examine a question relevant to their school environment. In this way, the teacher can immediately implement the instructional practices they find fruitful from their study, instead of relying on the conclusions and recommendations of other researchers whose context may not be reflected in their unique classroom. The purpose of action research is to deal with real-life problems in context and to produce tangible results (Greenwood & Levin, 2005).

By doing my research in my classroom, I was able to use the incoming data, observations, and reflections to change practices and focus-in on the ongoing process of the research. Using action research to complete this study provided me the opportunity to examine the responses of my students and to reflect on my pedagogy in the context of my own classroom (Koshy, 2010). It also allowed me to adapt my study as the needs of my classroom and research evolved. Classroom action research “involves the use of qualitative interpretive modes of inquiry and data collection by teachers ... with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 561). By using action research, I gained a deeper understanding of my teaching practices and the diverse needs of the students in my classroom.

Instructional Strategies to Increase Oral Language Proficiency

Through the course of this study and as part of my ongoing professional practice, I used many teaching strategies within my classroom to create an inclusive atmosphere and to increase the oral language proficiency of my students. These strategies included creating a classroom

environment rich in text, talking circles, Aboriginal guest speakers, interactive read alouds, and imaginative play.

My classroom library included many books written by Aboriginal authors and featuring Aboriginal themes. It also included books depicting family life and social situations from around the world. As the composition of my classroom was diverse in nature, I made a particular effort to include books that depicted the cultures of the children present. Every two weeks, I borrowed additional books from the Greater Victoria Public Library to supplement my classroom library. I read to my students on a daily basis from a range of texts, including picture books, familiar books (ones the students have heard before), and chapter books. The children had daily opportunities to read on their own or with peers. During these reading periods, the children could choose their books from either the levelled bins or the themed bookshelf. The children also had daily opportunities for singing and imaginative play. For the purposes of this project, I focused on oral language activities following storytelling or informational sessions with Aboriginal Elders. As I discussed in my literature review, Battiste and Henderson (2009) identified the inclusion of Elders and the knowledge that they bring to the learning community as a promising practice in mainstream education.

Talking circle.

Every school day the students in my class sat in a talking circle to complete a show and tell activity. This activity took place on a rectangular carpet, although I would have preferred a circular or oval shaped one. The students sat in a circle so that each member was able to see each of the other members. At the beginning of the school year, I sat with the students in the circle, but following the gradual release of responsibility model, I moved to the sidelines to allow the students ownership over this activity. The child, whose turn it is presented the object he or she

had brought in. There was no time limit for this presentation and the other students were not supposed to ask questions or make comments during this time. I have modelled this circle activity after the Aboriginal talking circles. A talking circle is a traditional Aboriginal way of sharing information. Rather than having a “talking stick,” the student’s item is used. Once the presenter feels he or she is ready, they pass their item to the left. The receiving student can then ask a question or make a comment after examining the item. Only the student holding the object is supposed to speak. They are under no obligation to speak and can simply look at the object and pass it along. The purpose of the talking circle is to allow each child a space to speak without limitations or obligation. It also reinforces the legitimacy of Aboriginal traditions within the classroom. During this oracy activity, I modelled, prompted, and made suggestions for those students who had not yet reached an independent stage in their oral language development.

Aboriginal guest speakers.

The purpose of inviting Elders into the classroom was to raise cultural awareness and to integrate research based culturally relevant pedagogy through authentic means into the curriculum as suggested by the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* (2005). The Indigenous knowledge that the Elders shared with the students may help to fill the ethical and knowledge gaps in our predominantly Eurocentric education system (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). There is evidence that inviting Elders into the classroom both increases Aboriginal students’ sense of belonging and demonstrates cultural caring (Aboriginal Nations Education Council, 2005; Goulet, 2001; Santamaria, 2009). It also honours and improves the relationship between the school district and the Aboriginal community. Moreover, it increases awareness and understanding of Aboriginal traditions and culture, which in turn helps students to develop a culturally diverse knowledge base (Antone, 2003; Brown, 2007; Gay, 2002; Guofang, 2010).

Roughly, once a month, during the course of this study, an Aboriginal guest speaker, or Elder came into our classroom. On one occasion, we met with an Elder at the First Peoples Galleries of the Royal BC Museum. I arranged these visits in advance through the Aboriginal Nations Education Division of the Greater Victoria School District. In previous years, I have had the opportunity to make use of the funds of knowledge held in my own classroom. For example, in the 2012/2013 school year, I had the opportunity to invite in an Elder from the Snuneymuxw Nation near Nanaimo, B.C., who was the grandmother of one of my students. She instructed the students in the art of traditional cedar weaving.

Oral language activities.

Before beginning my study, I taught several explicit lessons on speaking and listening. These took the form of whole class discussions, small group discussions, and partner talk. During these lessons, I provided direct support to my students. I did this by modelling, giving examples, and directing the talk. For example, following a read aloud of the book *When I Feel Angry* (Spelman, 2000), I asked the children to share instances of when they felt angry and how they dealt with it. Before beginning their A/B partner talk, I modelled listening and speaking in front of the class with another student. After they had an opportunity to both share with their partner, we came back together as a group to discuss how the speaking and listening activity had gone, whether they felt their partner was listening to them, and what evidence there was of this listening (nodding, asking questions, etc.)

During this, and other, activities, I ensured adequate wait time for thinking to occur by counting silently in my head to ten before moving to the next question or comment. This strategy also helps the English language learners by providing time for them to translate what has been said to their home language, think about it, and then translate it back to English. During whole

class discussions, I explicitly instructed on the differences between a comment, a question, and a response. I also modelled my expectation on how to take turns and speak during a whole group activity. For the past four years, I have followed an Indigenous model of sharing knowledge by sitting in a circle and passing a talking stick that symbolises who the speaker is at any given moment. I have found that this reduces a hierarchical model of class discussion where all comments, questions, and responses are directed by and at the teacher. Throughout the length of the study, I used this model on a daily basis for sharing knowledge during whole group discussions.

Data Collection

During my five-month study, I collected four types of data: 1) Oral assessments using the B.C. Ministry of Education *Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continuum*, 2) audio recordings taken during each of the four literacy events that are the focus of this study, 3) photographs of the students and the artefacts created by them, and 4) my anecdotal observations recorded in a research journal. A detailed description of the four literacy events is included in Chapter 4 under the subheading Literacy Events.

Oral assessment.

One method I used to collect data was by doing three oral assessments using the *Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continuum* attached in appendix A. This oral language assessment continuum is a “field-developed and tested” assessment tool provided by the BC Ministry of Education for assessing the oral language of early primary students (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2004). Although this assessment tool was developed for use with kindergarten students, it was recommended by the Learning Initiatives team of the Greater Victoria School District as providing an accurate baseline of the developmental aspects of early primary students’

oral language. The Ministry of Education makes this assessment tool available to teachers on their website as a tool for assessing and better understanding their students' oral language development and needs. This assessment tool is a guide to how much support or scaffolding, the child needs to complete listening and speaking activities successfully and not as a performance standard. I have used this tool to assess the oral language development of my students for the past three years. Although for the purposes of this study I am using the assessment data from the continuum, I would nevertheless have used this assessment tool as part of my standard assessment process. At the beginning of the five months, I highlighted where each of my participating students fell on the continuum. I then completed the same process half way through my study and at the end of my study. Each time I completed this assessment tool, I used a different colour highlighter. I completed this assessment by listening to the audio recordings of the children engaged in oracy activities and by observing the children's oral language during structured and unstructured activities. These oral language assessments allowed me to structure and modify subsequent oral language activities based on the needs and abilities of my students.

Audio recordings.

I used one or several digital audio recorders during each of the oral language activities following a visit from an Elder. I then listened to the audio recordings looking for instances where the children were making and sharing connections and co-creating meaning. Next, I transferred the file using a SD Card from the audio recorder to my computer and subsequently transcribed the dialogue. Although some portions of the dialogue overlap, I wrote each group of words from each speaker on its own line.

I chose to use audio recordings because "audio tape recordings are valuable for capturing the spontaneity of people expressing opinions" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, p. 66). They also

allowed me to hear myself and reflect on my contribution to these activities. During the process of listening to and transcribing the audio recordings, I reflected upon my pedagogy in my research journal. I did this by writing anecdotal notes about how the lesson had proceeded and what I noticed about my role in regards to wait time, behaviour management, and use of names. In addition, I used the audio recordings to add additional information to each student's oral language continuum.

Photographs and drawings.

During the course of this study, I took photographs of the students engaged in the literacy events and of the artefacts, they made during these events. I used these photographs to remind me of certain events (they often evoked clearer memories than my journal notes) and to document the learning that took place during the oral language activities. While looking at the photos I reflected on the level of engagement the children were demonstrating through their facial expressions and body language.

I also collected two sets of drawings and photographs of the talking sticks that the children had created. The children made drawings on two separate occasions. They made the first set of drawings during a small group discussion following our visit to the First Peoples Galleries of the Royal British Columbia Museum. They made the second set during a guided drawing lesson from an Inuit artist. I photographed the talking sticks as it was impractical for me to keep the talking sticks the children had created and they were anxious to take them home. I used the drawings and photographs when analysing the audio recordings to provide additional data and to see if the children's discussion matched with the product they produced. The visual data also helped me to better understand the somewhat challenging audio recordings. Together, the

photographs, drawings, and audio recordings painted a more complete picture of each of the four literacy events.

Teacher observations in research journal.

The purpose of the research journal was to keep a running record of how lessons were proceeding and what areas I needed to adjust to facilitate the students' oral language development. My intention was to write anecdotal notes on each of the events and my professional practice in the journal with particular attention paid to my research question. In effect, I found taking photographs of the children engaged in the various literacy events far more evocative than my note taking. For example, after the talking sticks activity, I photographed each of my students with their talking sticks. Although I had not noted it in my research journal, when I reviewed these images I noticed how proud the children were of their creations and how eager they were to be photographed with them. This evoked the intense level of engagement of my students during this cultural activity.

Teacher journals allow teachers "to systematically reflect on their practice by constructing a narrative that honours the unique and powerful voice of the teachers' language" (Mills, 2003, p. 68), and thus are a particularly valuable tool for those undertaking action research. During and after oral language activities, I recorded in the research journal my observations of students' language use. For instance, I noted if the students were taking turns, listening to each other, or on topic. I also kept track of the challenging behaviour that affected the learning environment. Challenging behaviour included children out of their seats, calling out, repetitive noises, tantruming, and interfering with other students. Taking time to sit and reflect on individual student performance was informative and I learned much more about my students as a result. The

practice of journaling not only enhanced my scholarly endeavours, but contributed to my knowledge of my students as well.

Ethical Consideration

Because this research occurred in my own classroom, I assumed the dual role of teacher and researcher. Being simultaneously teacher and researcher put me in a position of power over my students, a situation not experienced by researchers who do not have another role with their subjects. The Human Research Ethics Office (2008) further explains:

Dual relationships exist between the researcher and participants when people in positions of status (“power-over”) or undue influence undertake research in addition to their already established roles and responsibilities, and the research will potentially involve individuals of lesser power or status such as students. (p. 2)

To minimize inducement, coercion or potential harm I took the following safeguards: I assured parents and guardians on the consent form that they had the right to refuse to have their child participate and that they could withdraw their information from the research at any time without consequences or penalty of any kind. In the consent form, I acknowledged that I was aware that potential participants might feel pressure to agree to their child’s participation because of my position of power or influence as their classroom teacher. The consent form also assured parents and guardians that their participation or non-participation would have no effect on outcomes, for example grades, or on their relationship with me, the researcher, and there was no disadvantage in not consenting. For example, all students would participate in the same lessons regardless of their participation in the study. The consent form also informed parents and guardians that if they had concerns about their rights or treatment in connection with this study, they could contact the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria, as they may

not be comfortable contacting me, or someone at the school, who they perceived had a stake in the research. A copy of the Parent/Guardian consent form is attached as appendix C.

I stated in the consent form that it could be submitted to our school secretary so that I would be unaware until after the second term grades were entered which children had consented to the study. I must note that none of the parents or guardians took advantage of this opportunity and all signed consent forms arrived in students' agendas. At the end of the study, I destroyed any data from children who did not consent to be part of the study, by either erasing the files or shredding paper data. Finally, during and after the research period I have kept all data in a locked filing cabinet or in a password-protected file.

In consideration of my research context, I submitted an application for ethics approval for human participant research to the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria. Upon approval from the Human Research Ethics Board, (Ethics protocol number 13-290), I submitted a request to use public school students in research to the superintendent's office of the Greater Victoria School District. Once both of these agencies had approved my research, I asked for parental consent by sending home the Parent/Guardian Consent Form attached in appendix C. The families of 16 of my students granted permission for them to participate in this study.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative research methods and the principles of action research used in this study. It also explains the instructional strategies I use to increase oral language proficiency including talking circles and Aboriginal guest speakers. This study gathered data using various methods, including three oral language assessments, audio recordings of the four literacy events, photographs, drawings, and teacher observations and reflections recorded in a research journal. I also carefully considered my dual role as both researcher and teacher.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter discusses the research context and the participants in this study. It also provides a description of the four literacy events that are the focus of this investigation. It then explains how I analyzed the data from those events.

Research Context

This study took place over five months (October 2013-February 2014) in the early primary classroom where I was teaching full time. I chose to make it a five-month study because it gave me the opportunity to implement a series of culturally responsive oracy practices in my classroom and record the students' responses. I began the study in October rather than at the commencement of the school year, so that the children were already familiar with the routines and the expectations of the classroom. This also gave me an opportunity to gain permission from the parents and guardians of my students. By beginning my study in October, I was able to set up my classroom community, and be well on my way to creating an environment where the students were comfortable working with their peers and had developed a relationship of trust with me. In addition, I was able to begin my lessons on some of the oral language skills I expected my students to be familiar with by the end of the school year.

The classroom used in this study is located in an elementary, kindergarten to grade 5, dual track (English and French) inner city school with a diverse socio-economic clientele. Three hundred and forty-nine students registered for the 2013/2014 school year, 175 in French Immersion and 174 registered in English¹. Approximately 60 of the students registered in the English track are English language learners. Approximately 20% of the student body identifies as

¹ These numbers have fluctuated over the course of the school year as children have transferred in or out of the school.

Aboriginal. Many of the students at the school who are not either identified as English language learners or Aboriginal, nevertheless come from ethnically diverse families. Twenty-five percent of the school population come from low-income homes and 18% of our student body is involved with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). One third of the school population is on the subsidised hot lunch program provided through Community *LINK* (Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge). The Ministry of Education provides Community *LINK* funding to each school district in the province to establish effective programs for vulnerable students. The school district classifies 58% of the school's population as vulnerable and at risk of not graduating. The school principal provided these school demographics (Campbell, personal communication, May 6, 2013).

Through much of this study, my grade 1 and 2 class contained 21 students ranging from age five to seven. As we service a transient population, the enrolment in my class changed seven times over the course of this study either with students withdrawing or registering. Poverty was an undeniable factor in my classroom and school. Almost half of my students made use of the subsidised lunch program and many of those children came to school having not eaten breakfast. Seven of the students were recognized as either English Language Learners or as speaking English as a Second Dialect. Four of the students identified as Aboriginal. The Aboriginal students received additional in-class support twice a week for 40 minutes from an Aboriginal educational assistant. The Ministry of Education had designated two of my students under the special education services policy. These two children, together, qualified for a full time educational assistant (EA) in the classroom, although she was not replaced over her breaks. Both

designated students followed an Individual Education Plan². Three students received therapy from the speech and language pathologist. Two received therapy from the occupational therapist. Six of my students attended a social skills group with a youth and child family councillor and two students received counselling from the school counsellor. As I had so many students who were in need of additional learning support, the learning support teacher worked with me in the classroom for 40 minutes five days a week. Many of my students were waiting for further assessment in regards to their social, emotional, and learning needs. These waitlists were incredibly long and, despite the need, these students did not receive additional support during the course of this study. Sixteen families gave permission for their children's data to be included in this study.

Research participants

The following section provides a description of the sixteen participants in this study. To identify each child and keep their anonymity, I have given them pseudonyms. I chose their pseudonyms by doing an internet search of the most popular regional baby names from 2006.

- Myriam was a grade 1 student who emigrated from Saudi Arabia last year. She started the school year in a different district and transferred to our school in late September. Her home language was other than English and she was identified as ELL. She required additional learning support. She attended the social skills group.
- Aiden was a grade 1 student whose parents and sibling struggled with mental illness. His family received support from the MCFD. He required additional learning support.

² “An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes individualized goals, adaptations, modifications, the services to be provided, and includes measures for tracking achievement” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2011, p. V).

- Ethan was a grade 1 student designated as ASD (autism spectrum disorder) and identified as having ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Ethan frequently exhibited extremely disruptive behaviour; consequently, the EA was often out of the room and with him in alternate learning spaces. Ethan received therapy from the school's occupational therapist and the speech and language pathologist.
- Emma was a grade 1 student whose family emigrated from Eastern Europe. Her home language was other than English and she was identified as ELL.
- Madison was a grade 1 student who recently emigrated from China. Her home language was other than English and she was identified as ELL. She required additional learning support.
- Emily was a grade 1 student. Her home language was other than English and she was identified as ELL. She required additional learning support.
- Isabella was a grade 1 student. She required additional learning support.
- Olivia was a grade 2 student. This was her second year with me. She was meeting grade 2 academic expectations. She attended the social skills group.
- Jack was a grade 2 student. He was meeting grade 2 expectations.
- Akala was a grade 2 Aboriginal student. This was her second year with me, although she moved away last year and returned to my class part way through September. Akala was identified as ESD. She was on the caseload of the speech and language pathologist, but she did not receive any therapy sessions during the course of this study. She attended the social skills group.
- Noah was a grade 2 student. He was meeting grade 2 expectations. He attended the social skills group.

- Sachini was a grade 2 student. She emigrated from Sri Lanka. This was her second year with me. She was meeting grade 2 expectations. She attended the social skills group.
- Nicholas was a grade 2 student. This was his second year with me. He was meeting grade 2 expectations.
- Joshua was a grade 2 student designated as Requiring Intense Behaviour Intervention (IBI). This was his second year with me. Joshua received therapy from the school's speech and language pathologist and counselling.
- Thomas was a grade 2 student who emigrated from Australia last year. He spoke ESD.
- Hailey was a grade 2 student who required additional learning support. She attended the social skills group.

Literacy Events

During the course of this study, I arranged for six classroom visits plus a tour of the First Peoples Galleries during the time of this study. One of our guests cancelled two of the sessions due to illness. Due to my own illness, I was not present for the final visit scheduled for February 5th, 2014. Nevertheless, four of the planned events went ahead. For clarity, table 4 outlines the seven scheduled literacy events.

Table 4

Literacy Events and Scheduled Date

| Literacy Event | Date |
|---|---------------------------|
| First Peoples Galleries of the Royal British Columbia Museum | October 2013 |
| Seasonal change | November 2013 |
| Aboriginal story telling | November 2013 – CANCELLED |
| Inuit guided drawing lesson | November 2013 |
| Aboriginal story telling | December 2013 – CANCELLED |

| | |
|---|---|
| Creating talking sticks | December 2013 |
| Significance of animals to the Coast Salish People | February 2014 – RESEARCHER NOT PRESENT (No data collected) |

Following each of the literacy events, the class engaged in oral language activities. I held structured activities as whole class discussions, small groups, and in student partners. I also allowed children opportunities for informal talk. I noted in my research journal, that it was in the unplanned moments that some of the most interesting learning took place. As my students became more proficient in using oral language strategies, I was gradually able to release responsibility for the strategies to them. Using the *Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continuum* as a guideline, I determined my role during the oral language activity as the modeller, the coach, the advisor, or the mentor (appendix A). As my class was diverse in nature, I had to switch roles quickly in relation to the needs and skills of each of my students. For example, I sometimes modelled the language and listening skills I expected the students to use. At other times, I listened and advised how the students might respond to their peers' comments. Taking notes in my research journal helped me to identify times and plan lessons that would require me to take on different roles. I was interested in seeing my students' responses to the Elders in our classroom and the meaning that they co-created from these experiences. As I hold with Vygotsky's theory that children make meaning through social interaction, I looked for examples of meaning making and connections in their talk.

The first event took place in October 2013. This event involved a fieldtrip in the morning and then an oral language activity in the afternoon. I organized a field trip to the Royal British Columbia Museum by asking permission from my administrator to take the children out of the building, booking the time with the museum, and arranging for volunteer drivers to transport the children to the museum. Through the Aboriginal Nations Education Division of the Greater

Victoria School District, I was able to organise a guide to give us a tour of the First Peoples Galleries. The children had the opportunity to look, listen, and actively engage with the exhibits. Following the museum visit, the children worked in small groups to draw and then discuss what they saw at the museum. I audio recorded the children engaged in their drawing activity. I also collected the drawings.

The second event took place in November 2013. For this event, an Elder visited the classroom. With the aid of pictures and artefacts, she taught the children about the Coast Salish moons and seasonal change. This session was done as a whole group activity where the students had the opportunity to practice listening for a purpose and demonstrating comprehension by asking questions for clarification and understanding and by sharing connections made (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 51). I audio recorded the entire session and took notes in my research journal.

The third event also took place in November 2013. For this event, an Inuit soapstone carver visited the class. She presented information on how she grew up in the high arctic. She also shared many artefacts with the children. These included soapstone carvings, Inuit snow glasses, a seal pelt, and photographs. Following her presentation, the children engaged in a guided drawing lesson. During this activity, the children had the opportunity to listen, ask questions, and discuss their artwork. I audio recorded the children engaged in the guided drawing lesson. I also took photographs and collected their drawings.

The fourth event was held in December 2013. This event was organised with the help of the Aboriginal educational assistant employed at the school. For this event, the children sang a traditional Aboriginal song accompanied by drumming. Following the song, the children sat in a circle, passed a talking stick, and shared their name, where they were from or to what nation they

belonged. The children then had the opportunity to discuss their experience while making their own talking sticks from driftwood, shells, beads, and twine. I audio recorded this event, took photographs of the children creating their talking sticks, and took photographs of the talking sticks.

Data Analysis

Keeping my research question in mind, how were the children responding to the event, the first step in my analysis was to listen to the audio recordings several times while reviewing the other documentation (photographs and drawings) to get a “general feel” for what the data were telling me (Koshy, 2010, p. 112). I then went back and transcribed the audio recordings. Next, I coded my data. “Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (Koshy, 2010, p. 113).

To appreciate how the children were learning through social interaction, I coded the transcript of their dialogue using the principles of content analysis and discourse analysis. Content analysis was the first method used. Content analysis techniques aim primarily at determining the presence of words, concepts, and patterns within a text (Stemler, 2001). To understand which words were present multiple times in the document I used the word frequency counter available at http://www.writewords.org.uk/word_count.asp. I highlighted the words that appeared multiple times, ignoring high frequency words such as *I* and *to*, and the names of the participants. The word frequency counter helped focus my attention on the themes that ran through the children’s dialogue. I then highlighted reoccurring themes in the transcription.

Next, I turned to “discourse analysis as a way to make sense of the ways in which people make meaning in educational contexts” (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & O’Garro, 2005, p. 366). Discourse analysis looks at conversation as organized fundamentally

through turn taking. Through an examination of the responsive pairs in the children's conversation, I was able to make my interpretations on how the children responded to culturally relevant oracy practices in the early primary classroom. I also noted the instances when the students were meeting the prescribed learning outcomes for oral language, these included making meaning and making connections.

As I analyzed the audio recordings, I noticed that the students were consistently demonstrating some of the oral language prescribed learning outcomes. As this pattern became apparent, I thought it useful to look at which of the oral language learning outcomes appeared multiple times for each of the literacy events. I felt that showing how the children were meeting the learning outcomes would best demonstrate how they were responding and thus provide insight into my research question. Table 5 shows the oral language learning outcomes prescribed by the Ministry of Education (2006) that I looked for in my data.

Table 5

Grade 1 Prescribed Learning Outcomes – Oral Language

It is expected that students will:

Oral Language (Speaking and Listening)

Purposes (Oral Language)

A1 use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of

- contributing to a class goal
- exchanging ideas on a topic
- making connections
- completing tasks
- engaging in play

A2 use speaking to explore, express, and present ideas, information, and feelings, by

- generally staying on topic

- using descriptive words about people, places, things, and events
- telling or retelling stories and experiences in a logical sequence
- sharing connections made

A3 listen for a variety of purposes and demonstrate comprehension, by

- retelling or restating
- following two-step instructions
- asking questions for clarification and understanding
- sharing connections made

Strategies (Oral Language)

A4 use strategies when interacting with others, including

- making and sharing connections
- asking questions for clarification and understanding
- taking turns as speaker and listener

A5 use strategies when expressing and presenting ideas, information, and feelings, including

- accessing prior knowledge
- organizing thinking by following a simple framework
- predicting some things the audience needs to know

A6 use strategies when listening to make and clarify meaning, including

- preparing for listening
- focussing on the speaker
- asking questions
- recalling ideas

Thinking (Oral Language)

A7 demonstrate enhanced vocabulary knowledge and usage

A8 engage in speaking and listening activities to develop a deeper understanding of texts (e.g., presenting a personal collection, listening to the telling of a story from an oral tradition)

A9 use speaking and listening in group activities (including creative exploration and play) to develop thinking by identifying relationships and acquiring new ideas

A10 reflect on their speaking and listening to identify their strengths and to discuss attributes of good speakers and listeners

Features (Oral Language)

A11 use the features of oral language to convey and derive meaning, including using most words correctly and expressing ideas clearly

A12 demonstrate phonological awareness, by

- identifying and creating rhyming words
- identifying and creating alliteration
- segmenting the flow of speech into separate words
- using sound segmenting and sound blending of syllables and phonemes in words

Note. From English Language Arts Kindergarten to Grade 7: Integrated Resource Package (p. 51), by the B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006, Victoria: Author. Copyright 2006 by the Province of British Columbia.

As I listened to and analysed the audio recordings, I kept the photographs or drawings pertinent to that particular section of recording in front of me. In that way, I was able to analyze the drawings and photographs and see if they were a good fit for what I was hearing in the audio recordings. Instances when they were either at odds with what I was hearing or fit with what I was hearing are further described in the next chapter. Looking at these images helped me understand what the children were saying at times, as the speech was at times immature and hard to understand without visual clues. If I had known before hand, how useful and evocative the photographs of the children engaged in the activities would be, I would have taken far more.

I also compared the oral language heard on the audio recordings with the oral language assessment I had done using the Kindergarten Oral Language Continuum. Throughout the study, I adapted my research plan to fit with the learning needs of my students, which I had assessed, using this continuum. This adaptability was one of the advantages of doing action research. I was able to change how I grouped the children or how I scaffolded the activity depending on their individual needs and their growth throughout the study.

Finally, I was able to add in the information that I had recorded in my teacher research journal. Among other things, this provided a rich narrative description of each of the events. It also provided data on how the lesson had proceeded and what I might adapt for future lessons.

This information I was able to use with my other data sources to provide a deeper analysis of each of the events. By collecting and analysing various sources of data, my intention was to add validity to my study. “In action research, validity is achieved by sound and robust data collection and the consensus of accurate interpretations” (Koshy, 2010, p. 152). Table 6 provides an overview of the four sources of data I collected to answer my research question.

Table 6

Triangulation Matrix for Action Research

| Research Question | Data Source 1 | Data Source 2 | Data Source 3 | Data Source 4 |
|--|---|------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| How do children respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in the inclusive classroom? | Kindergarten emergent literacy continuum: Oral language | Audio recordings | Photographs and artefacts | Teacher research journal |

Note. Adapted from “Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher” by G. E. Mills, 2003. Copyright 2003 by Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Summary

Chapter 4 has provided a description of the research context and research participants. It included a description of the four literacy events organized for this study, and explained how I analysed my audio recordings using content and discourse analysis, and how I organized my data by literacy event and learning outcome. I also explained how I used the oral language assessment, images, and my teacher journal to add validity to my study. In Chapter 5, I present and discuss my study’s findings.

Chapter 5: Findings

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the qualitative data analysis following the principles of action research. The purpose of this study was to explore children's responses to culturally relevant oral language activities. The focus of the study was to identify instances of meaning making and connections made through social interaction, and through them gain a better understanding of the children's responses. Below I present my findings related to pedagogy, such as teaching prompts and strategies, as well as observations about student oral language and engagement. I have organized these by literacy event and the prescribed learning outcome met during each event. I provide a thick narrative description of each event followed by the learning outcome or outcomes that the students demonstrated. At the end of this chapter, I summarize my key findings.

Assessment of Oral Language

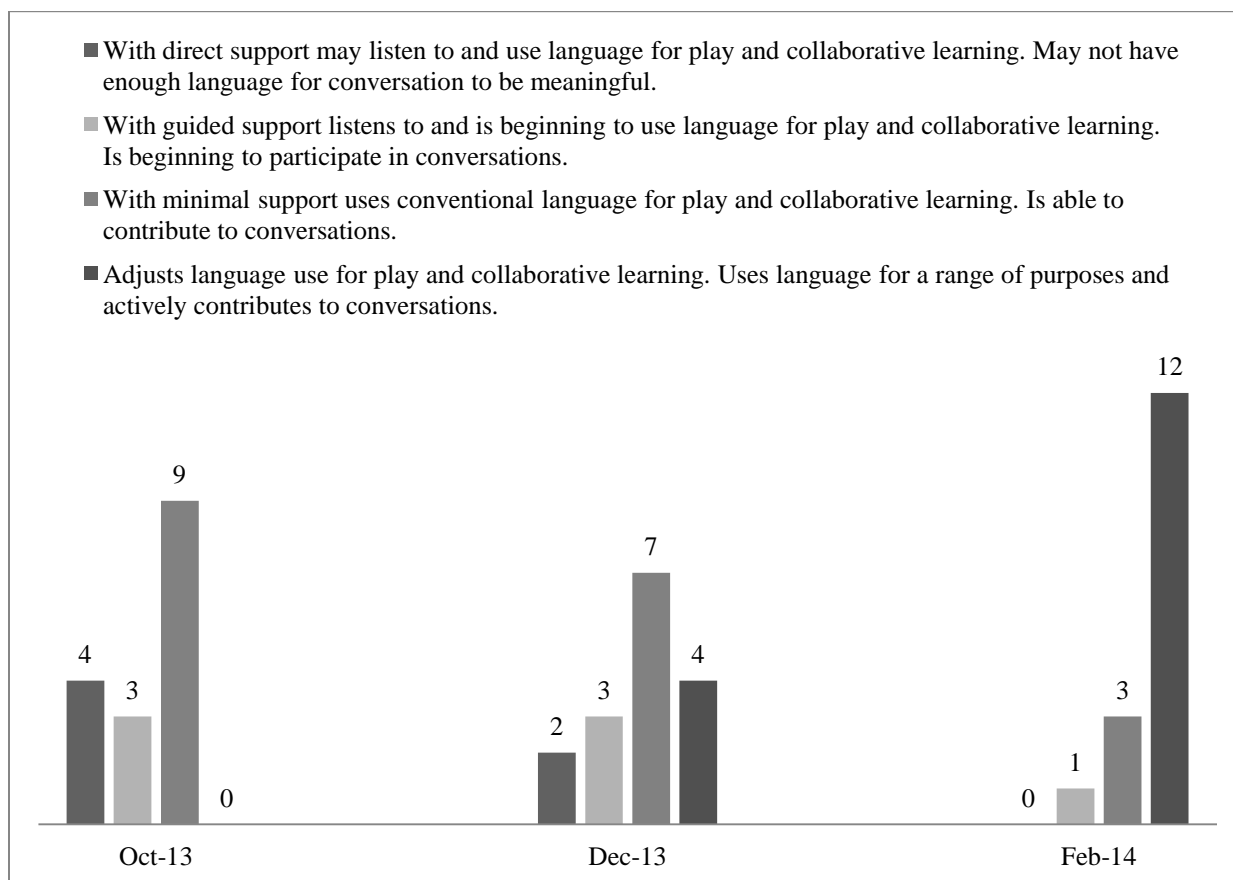
At the commencement of my study, I assessed each of my students using the Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continuum: Oral Language. At the beginning of the school year, all of the study participants needed direct, guided, or minimal support to use language for a range of purposes and to actively contribute to conversations. By the end of the study, 75 % of the students were able to use language without support in both formal and informal interactions for a variety of purposes. Table 7 graphs the results of these assessments.

I assessed my students through informal observations of their English language use during structured (group discussions, carpet time) and unstructured (free play) activities. The Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continuum is divided into three sections: 'speaking and listening', 'knowledge of the content and structure of language', and 'knowledge of the sounds of language'. As I observed my students, I highlighted in yellow on each of their individual

assessment sheets where they were developmentally on the continuum. For example, I observed that Ethan struggled to take turns during conversations without direct support from his EA. I therefore highlighted the box on his assessment sheet that states, “With direct support may take turns in a conversation” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 1). Gathering these data also provided me the opportunity to reflect in my research journal on what actions I might take in future lessons to advance Ethan’s oral language skills. For example, I found that if I sat him next to a particular student who had similar interests, Ethan was far more likely to engage in conversations.

Depending where the child falls on the continuum (please see appendix A), there is a suggestion about what supports would best benefit the student. At the top of this assessment tool there is also a sentence describing the child. In table 7, I have graphed the results of my assessments by using this descriptive sentence as a legend. Above each column is a number denoting how many students were at that development stage at the three assessment dates. As can be seen in the graph, at the beginning of my study none of my students could be described as “adjusting language use for play and collaborative learning” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 1). By the end of the study, 12 of the 16 research participants were successful in consistently adjusting “language use for play and collaborative learning” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2004), as evidenced by their ability to attend and participate in informal language interactions, listen while ignoring distractions, speak clearly and fluently, take turns, and stay on topic.

Table 7

Results of Oral Language Assessments

At the beginning of the study, the four children who required direct support were either ELL or ASD. By the end of the study, Ethan, the child with ASD, had made significant strides in his language use, although he continued to require direct support for all speaking and listening activities, including attending, listening, speaking (tone of voice, volume), turn taking in conversations, and staying on topic. As the children recognised as being ELL became more competent in English, I observed rapid growth in the proficiency of their English language use. One of the ways I recognized this was in wait time. At the beginning of the study, it took these children a minimum of 10 seconds to respond to a question or comment. The wait time decreased substantially and their vocabulary increased by the end of the study. Two of the children

identified as ELL, Madison and Myriam, continued to need support to speak clearly and fluently with peers and adults particularly in regards to raising the volume of their voices to an audible level.

The following sections contain rich narrative descriptions of each of the literacy events as well as my findings in regards to the learning outcomes the students demonstrated. To understand better the oral language competencies the children demonstrated, table 8 provides a list of the literacy events and the majority of the oral language learning outcomes observed.

Table 8

Literacy Event and Learning Outcome

| Literacy Event | Students used oral language for |
|---|---|
| First Peoples Galleries of the Royal British Columbia Museum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making and sharing connections • completing tasks • asking questions for clarification and understanding • exchanging ideas on a topic • retelling or restating • demonstrating an enhanced vocabulary knowledge and usage |
| Seasonal Change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening for a purpose • making and sharing connections • making and clarify meaning • developing a deeper understanding |
| Inuit guided drawing lesson | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following two-step instructions • asking questions for clarification and understanding |
| Creating talking sticks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sharing connections made • listening and demonstrating comprehension by following directions • making and clarifying meaning by asking questions |

First Event: Small Group Discussion Following Museum Fieldtrip

The first event, involving a fieldtrip in the morning and then an oral language drawing activity in the afternoon, took place in October 2013. We spent the morning at the Royal British Columbia Museum with a guide organised through the Aboriginal Nations Education Division of the Greater Victoria School District. The children had the opportunity to look, listen, and actively engage with the exhibits. The purpose of this field trip was to expose my students to Aboriginal history and culture. From this, I hoped they would begin to gain an understanding and respect for a culture that was not their own, or for my Aboriginal students, their own culture if relevant. After the tour, I noted in my research journal the details of the event. The following thick narrative description was written from those notes.

At the museum, our guide escorted us to the First Peoples Galleries. We started our tour at the house of Chief Kwakwabalasami or Jonathan Hunt. This house is not only a museum installation, but also a real ceremonial house. Our guide explained, using language appropriate for early primary students, the significance of the totem poles, masks, and other features of the house. In my research journal, I noted the students were very engaged and reacted positively to the guide's presentation by listening attentively. From there we travelled upstairs to look at the Kekuli or pit house. Our guide invited the children to comment on the items they saw in the Kekuli and how many people might have lived there. I noted that most of the children thought it would be four people, i.e. parents and siblings. Only one child suggested there could be more people including grandparents. We then continued through the First Peoples Galleries towards the mezzanine surrounding Totem Hall. In this portion of the exhibit, the children were particularly interested in examining the large canoe. This later showed up in some of their drawings. On the mezzanine, we also sat and listened to a short audio recording of drumming

and a narrated story about the mask exhibit. Although I had noted in my research journal that many of the students were restless during this portion of our tour, this must nevertheless have left an impression with the students as many of them drew masks upon our return to the classroom. Finally, we finished in the Totem Hall, which is the central exhibit of the First Peoples gallery. Totem Hall features carvings from the communities of Kwakwaka'wakw, Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Gitsan, Haida, and Nuu-chah-nulth.

The personal connection our guide had with the exhibits and her extensive knowledge made it significantly easier for the children to engage with the exhibits. The children demonstrated their engagement by listening intently to our guide's stories, asking questions, and by making personal connections to the exhibits. Our guide noted, to the delight of the children, that her grandmother had woven the actual cedar blanket on display. She even taught the children some First Nations words. Since this tour, *hych'ka*, meaning thank you in Coast Salish, has become a popular and appropriately used word in our classroom.

In the afternoon, following the museum visit, the children worked in small groups to draw and discuss what they saw at the museum. I divided the children into four groups of either three or four students. I chose the groups based on how proficient the children were with their oral language skills and how much support they would need. I chose to group the children as homogeneously as possible because I felt it would allow for the best conversations. Often I group my students heterogeneously, so that the students who are meeting or exceeding expectations could model for the students who are approaching expectations, but for this activity, I wanted to see what my more capable students would discuss if they were not fettered by the behaviour challenges of some of their peers. I also wanted my less proficient students to have the opportunity to learn at their level without their group being dominated by their more competent

peers or the children who tend to do most of the talking. Finally, I considered friendships and grouped students together who would have chosen to work together as I felt this would lead to more conversation.

Group 1 comprised of Ethan, Joshua, and Aiden. As noted in the section on research participants, Ethan and Joshua are both designated and share an EA. Aiden was the only child in my room with which Joshua had, thus far, been able to develop a friendship. I felt it necessary to group these students together so that the EA, the only other adult in a very busy classroom, could manage their frequent disruptive behaviour. I also had this group work together because their English language skills are at a similar developmental stage. On reviewing the audio recordings, I realized I should have been clearer with my EA on my expectations of her participation, as she was more concerned with having them produce a picture, then on allowing them to talk.

Group 2 comprised of Myriam, Emma, and Madison, three of the ELL students and Isabella, who displays immature grammar usage. All of these girls are in grade 1. Myriam and Madison, those with the least knowledge of the English language, often speak with very quiet voices. This made it difficult to decipher what they were saying on the audio recordings. Because I had more groups than available facilitators this group did not have a facilitator, although I checked in with them often to ensure they remained on task. All four of these children were able to practice appropriate grade level self-control, so I felt they would be able to draw their pictures and discuss without an older peer or adult sitting directly with them.

Group 3 contained four of the grade 2 students who were meeting expectations in the area of language arts, Olivia, Sachini, Jack, and Thomas. A grade 7 student from St. Michaels University School facilitated this group. He was instructed to ask questions about their experiences should they get off the topic of their museum field trip. Two of the students in this group recently

moved to Canada, one from Australia and the other from Sri Lanka. Thomas, the child from Australia, speaks ESD.

Group 4 contained a mixture of grade 1 and 2 students, Akala, Emily, Nicholas, and Noah. All four of these students struggled with self-control, but with direct support, they often had interesting and insightful contributions to make to discussions. Akala is Aboriginal and designated as ESD and Emily as ELL. With the help of her grandmother, Akala was very active in the local First Nations community. A student from St. Michaels University School facilitated this group as well. I gave both facilitators the same instructions.

Although there are not always older children available to help facilitate groups, I was able to organize this activity in such a way that I had the two volunteers from St. Michaels University School. I have appreciated the opportunity to make use of volunteers in my classroom. During the 2013/2014, I had a grade 8 class visit us from a neighbouring middle school once a week to read with my students. In the past, I have also made use of parent volunteers and students from the intermediate classrooms at our school. Often the local university has been able to provide volunteers from their teaching program. For this event, my principal had asked if I would like to have two students from St. Michaels University School volunteer in my classroom as part of their leadership course. As I have had positive experiences with students from this school in the past, I coordinated the time they would volunteer with the time I was running these groups in hopes they would be able to help with the logistics of managing such a large group of young children.

To begin this activity, I had the children sit down in their designated, predetermined groups. Each group had a digital audio recorder placed next to them. Before the students returned from lunch recess, I had set out white paper for each student and a container of crayons for each

group. I then instructed the children that they were going to draw a picture of things we had seen at the museum. As a whole group, we brainstormed some ideas of things we might draw. I used this strategy to help the children recollect what they had experienced that morning. The children then drew and engaged in informal language interactions in their small groups while I circulated, asked questions, and managed behaviour. The purpose of this activity was not to produce a drawing, but to use drawing as a process for discussing what they had seen and experienced. In order to answer my research question, how do children respond to culturally relevant oral language activities, I wanted to see what the children noticed and found interesting from their field trip, what connections they made, and what meaning they made out of their experience. After the children had been drawing for about 10 minutes, I had them stop by counting down from 10. I stopped the drawing activity at this point because the majority of the children had finished their drawings and were getting off topic. Following the drawing activity, each of the children had approximately one minute to present what they had been drawing to the other members of their group.

In this activity, I noticed many instances where the children demonstrated the learning outcomes for oral language. This included using oral language for the purpose of making connections, completing a task, and exchanging ideas on a topic. They also demonstrated they were able to use the strategy when interacting with each other of asking questions for clarification and understanding. The children demonstrated they could retell or restate information learned at the museum. Some of the children also demonstrated an enhanced vocabulary knowledge and usage.

In group 1, Joshua repeatedly uses the word *ship*: “I saw a ship,” “A pirate ship” and “I can’t draw a pirate ship,” along with seven other utterances of the word *ship*. What I thought was

interesting about this, was that during our trip to the museum that morning, we had not gone through the exhibit that features a large-scale replica of Captain George Vancouver's ship the HMS Discovery. However, I had taken my students the previous year to the museum and Joshua had seen this ship. I confirmed with his mother and these two school fieldtrips have been Joshua's only visits to the museum. Joshua was making a connection and wanting to draw a picture of the exhibit he had seen more than a year previous, rather than choosing something he had seen that morning. When the EA tried to redirect Joshua by asking him what he had seen that day, Joshua became extremely agitated. The EA then stated, "Oh [Joshua] don't do that. What else did we saw [sic]? Masks, why don't you draw a cool mask? Do you remember the bear masks?" Despite the EAs, multiple attempts to refocus Joshua, and have him draw something he had seen that day, the word *ship* was repeated at least two more times. Given his rigid nature, this difficulty with refocusing his attention was not surprising. What was surprising or at least unexpected was the connection Joshua made between the museum and seeing a ship. That connection had stayed with him despite not seeing the ship on his second visit.

The transcription of this group's dialogue contained the word *sun* 26 times and was the most common word in the transcript, if one excludes high frequency words such as, *you*, *a*, and *I*. The first time the word *sun* was when the EA stated in reference to Joshua's picture, "It looks like the sun." Ethan then caused a great deal of disruption by throwing the container of crayons and trying to crumple up the other students' pictures. I intervened and asked Ethan to leave the room for a break to calm down, stating, "That is not okay, you can leave." The EA removed Ethan from the room and the other two students continued their drawings. Although the students had not verbally responded to the EA's earlier suggestion of drawing masks, when I checked in with them, two of them were drawing what appeared to be sun masks. This suggested that the

dialogue with the EA had led them to make a connection between their experience at the museum and their current drawings.

When I asked Joshua, “What are you drawing about? What did you learn about today?” He responded, “I’m drawing a mask.” Although Joshua had earlier been fixated on the ship and wanting to draw the ship, he was eventually able to shift his focus and make a connection to something he had seen that day. The photograph embedded here is of Joshua’s sun mask drawing. As can be seen, the picture was brightly coloured in orange and yellow, with brown for the outlines and the outside of the eyes. Joshua’s image bore a reasonable resemblance to one of the masks seen at the museum. He also demonstrated pride in his work, as he later stated, “Mine is awesome.”



Figure 1 *Joshua’s sun mask*

In the audio recording of group 2, the most frequent words that were decipherable, ignoring high frequency words and proper names, were *need* and *black*. The word *need* appeared 25 times and the word *black* 24 times. The word “*cave*” appeared fewer times (14), but often in conjunction with the word *black* or other colour words, such as grey, blue, and brown. This

suggested a theme in this group's discussion. As this group did not have a facilitator, I checked in with them often during this activity. Shortly after the drawing portion had started, I checked in with group 2 and asked, "What are you drawing?" The response was, "I'm drawing the cave," "Me too," and "We're all drawing the cave." Combined with the reoccurrence of colour words, the word *need*, and their response to my direct question which I had noted in my research journal, i.e. that they were all drawing caves; I made the decision to focus my analysis on the paired dialogue responses around this theme.

This group demonstrated they could use speaking and listening to interact with each other for the purpose of completing a task. All four girls wanted to draw a picture of the cave they saw at the museum, but there was only one black crayon. Utterances such as, "okay you can have it" or "I'm almost done" demonstrated that the children knew how to use language to solve the problem presented by one black crayon. At minute 2:07, one student justified her need of the crayon by saying "it was so dark in the cave I need black." Another student responded with, "I'm using it after Madison." The girls then widened their use of colours by suggesting that they will use grey or brown, "okay, I guess I'll just use brown." Despite their inability to use their preferred colour, the members of this group stayed on task and continued to negotiate with each other in a respectful manner. This could suggest that using a culturally relevant activity to stimulate small group discussion may encourage some children, even ELL, to be successful.

In addition, this group demonstrated they were able to use oral language strategies when interacting with others by asking questions for clarification and understanding. Throughout the colouring activity, the students in this group discussed what they were drawing and what the cave looked like. A series of paired exchanges occurred between the students regarding whether or not there was a door to the cave. "And there was a door right?" Followed by, "Yeah, no there

wasn't a door, there was not a door.” And then by, “Yeah there was a door to go in the cave.” I think that at this point the students could not find a word other than door to describe the opening to the cave. Later, one student suggested the word *hole* to describe the opening to the cave. However, her peers did not respond to this suggestion. For this part of the dialogue, it would have been constructive for this group to have a facilitator, as the facilitator may have been able to suggest some alternate vocabulary word, to enhance the depth of the discussion. Not having a facilitator for each group was one of the challenges and shortcomings of this activity; however, the lack of older peers or other adults in a classroom is also typical of the constraints placed on many teachers during their daily learning activities.

When the activity switched to describing their pictures to each other, this group was quite successful in using speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of exchanging ideas on a topic. This following quote is a typical example of their ability to use language to describe their pictures, “Okay so my picture’s about the cave and these are the [inaudible] that were, those are the masks. That was the part that we came in. That was door and this is the teal where the cave was and remember when we saw the thing where the cave was, the teal?” A photograph of the drawing described here is embedded on the following page. It is mostly black and Emma drew the masks with a teal crayon.

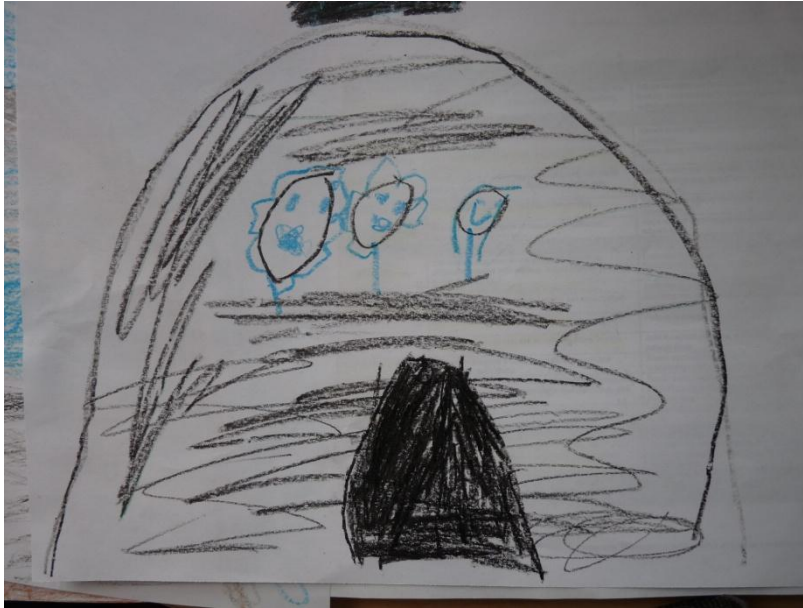


Figure 2 Cave drawing

Unlike group 1 and 2, group 3 did not decide on a common theme for their pictures. Instead, each picture tells a different story, although all four pictures connected to what the students saw and heard at the museum. At one point, Thomas repeated, “I’m riding a horse” six times, interjected with several of his group members’ names and the word *look* as he tried to get their attention. An examination of his drawing shows a picture of a person riding a horse in the bottom left hand corner. As we did not see any horses or horse related activities at the museum, possibly Thomas was drawing on some prior knowledge of First Nations and horseback riding. Thomas was often off topic and seemed to have difficulty grasping the concept of the technology available to the local Aboriginal people before the modern day. At one point he suggested, “They get a big plane” to hunt whales, “or they could just get a helicopter.” Nevertheless, throughout the activity, Thomas demonstrated engagement by continuing to use speaking and listening to exchange ideas on the topic of First Nations.

Due to the background noise and disruption caused by several of the students, it was very difficult to hear any of the other three group members. Nevertheless, when it was Jack’s turn to

explain his drawing he stated, “Um these catch [inaudible] and they have giant [inaudible]. And then, and then these catch [inaudible] and then [inaudible] and then these catch [inaudible]. This is the um, I forget the name but when [inaudible] painted on um [inaudible].” A comparison of the audio recording with Jack’s drawing shows that he drew a picture of the various underwater fishing mechanisms and traps the local First Nations people used to capture fish. He also drew a picture of drying fish around a campfire. Jack demonstrated that he was listening during our tour of the First Peoples Gallery and that he was able to demonstrate comprehension by restating what he learned.

In this group, Olivia also demonstrated comprehension by retelling what she learnt at the museum. She stated:

The First Nations people they used to make their houses out of wood and there used to be this tall piece of wood that went against the house and it had these little bumps on it so you could get out and **when** it snowed you and you needed to be that tall so you could see [inaudible] and they made these baskets out of stuff and they slept on beds with blankets but no pillows.

Olivia demonstrated that she was able to extend her use of oral language by recounting this information and by using more complex connector words, such as *when* (in bold in the quote above). It would appear that both Jack and Olivia were engaged in the activity at the museum and that they were successfully able to recall the information as demonstrated by their ability to recount the experience and give information to their peers.

In group 4, there appeared to be a very different conversation happening between the two boys and the two girls, and this notion is reinforced by their pictures. The two girls, Akala and Emily, both drew pictures of totem poles while the two boys, Nicholas and Noah, both drew

pictures of canoes with paddlers being eaten by a sea monster. Even beyond choosing separate subject matter, this group chose to divide the crayons between the boys and the girls by stating, “how about this is our side of the crayons, and that’s your side of the crayons.”

The girls’ totem poles feature birds on the top. During the beginning of their dialogue, they discussed ravens and eagles, both important birds in First Nations culture. Emily stated, “I should draw a raven.” To which Akala replied, “I know how to draw a raven.” They also made an interchange of “This is an eagle here” and “That’s an eagle.” Both girls named their drawings several times using the words *totem pole*. Use of words such as *raven*, *eagle*, and *totem pole* appear to demonstrate an enhanced vocabulary knowledge and usage, particularly in the inner city location of this study. In my experience, students are sometimes unable to identify a picture of a cow in this context.

When it was Akala’s turn to explain her drawing, she struggled to keep the attention of the boys. Throughout her turn to present her picture, the two boys continued a side dialogue about blood and a sea monster. The phrase, “Look at all the blood” is repeated five times in the transcript. Later, when it was Nicholas’ turn to present, he explained further by stating, “it’s a canoe but there’s people [inaudible] basically there’s a sea monster basically it ate the people.” Nicholas’ was making and sharing a connection he made to a story our guide told the students about a sea monster during our tour of the museum. When it was Noah’s turn to present, he said, “I don’t know what to say.” Akala then made suggestions to try to keep the group on task.

At minute ten, the students noticed the light on the audio recording. Although there were attempts to stay on task, the boys began to make repetitive noises into the audio recorder; they were followed by Emily telling me, by also speaking into the audio recorder, who has just made the noise. The frequency of these interchanges increased for the following minute, so that by

minute 11:25, there was a very humorous exchange of growling into the recorder followed by “ignore it”, then by “just kidding”, then two repeats of “just forget about that.” Clearly, the students were aware of their audience and that I would be listening to the audio recording later. When listening to the audio recordings, this particular piece made me laugh aloud. It also reminded me of how important it is to retain a sense of humour when teaching.

Throughout this literacy activity, I noted in my research journal, that despite some behaviour challenges the children were engaged and animated. They enjoyed their trip to the museum and were able to share their responses to this culturally relevant activity. Moreover, through the small group discussion, the students demonstrated many of the oral language learning outcomes. All of the children completed a drawing and all of the drawings, except Ethan’s, clearly depicted something seen or heard at the museum. I felt this activity had the added benefit of increasing my students’ awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions, and culture.

Second Event: Seasonal Change

The second event took place in November 2013. Elder Clarke visited the classroom and, with the aid of pictures and artefacts, taught the children about the Coast Salish moons and seasons. This session was done as a whole group activity where the students had the opportunity to practice listening for a purpose, demonstrate comprehension by asking questions for clarification and understanding, and by sharing connections made (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006).

This event started with the children seated on the carpet facing Elder Clarke who was seated in a chair. I sat behind the group, so that I could observe, listen, and make notes in my research journal. The presenter started by explaining that she was going to talk about the Coast Salish moons, the seasons, and the significance for the First Nations People who traditionally lived in the same area as the children. She told stories about people’s way of life, making it visible to the

children using pictures and stories presented from a child's perspective. The presenter introduced each of the seasons and the main activities of the Coast Salish people starting with fall. "Mom and dad are so busy that you spend the fall with grandma and grandpa" (Clarke, personal communication, November 2013). She then explained about the wintertime and how this was a time for sharing and acknowledgement. Springtime is about everything coming back to life and planning for the summer. The summer time is when the First Nations people spend lots of time with their children, playing games, canoeing, and camping. Over the course of an hour, Elder Clarke presented each of the thirteen Coast Salish moons using traditional pictures of the moons and oral stories. She concluded her oral lesson by presenting pictures of masks.

Throughout her presentation, Elder Clarke often asked the children to respond by putting up their hands if they had had that experience. For instance, "Who likes to go camping besides me?" Many hands shot up and there was a sharp intake of breath as children made connections to her story. I observed that the majority of the children were able to listen during this activity and respond appropriately by using their hands to demonstrate agreement. After Elder Clarke had asked a question, "who likes clam chowder besides me?" where the expected response would be putting up of hands, Ethan, interrupted by repeating, "Can I tell you something?" several times. He then appeared to be embarking on a long unrelated story but after a moment began talking about catching other sea life such as starfish and whales. It was wonderful to see Ethan making connections to the presentation, as he often appeared very distracted during listening activities and struggled to stay engaged and on task.

Elder Clarke often engaged in a question and response style of dialogue to help the children make connections. For instance, she asked, "What do seagulls eat now?" Hands went up, one child was recognized, and responded, "Garbage." The majority of the children were experienced

in this style of conversation and understood that the expected behaviour was to respond to the question with an answer. Isabella, who had difficulty staying on task, put up her hand to offer a story that was unrelated to the question. She needed direct support to stay on task and to respond appropriately to the ideas being presented. However, later in the presentation, she did make a connection between the story of First Nations fishing and seeing a sea cucumber. Some of the children also demonstrated comprehension by asking questions for clarification and understanding. I noticed that some children used the question and response sequence as an opportunity to tell their own story. They did this by putting up their hand, answering the question, and then launching into their story.

Of interest was the length of time it took for some children to make a connection. Approximately four minutes after Ethan had brought up the topic of starfish, Aiden commented, “my sister killed a starfish.” This was unrelated to where the presentation was at that point. The length of time it took for Aiden to make a connection and contribute made me wonder at his processing speed as I have noticed at other times a delay between what is happening and his response. I would have liked to explore further assessment with this particular student and brought him to our school-based team to discuss his learning needs. Although, in this instance it was possible that the idea of the starfish had captured his attention and he had been recalling the incident when his sister killed the starfish because it was vivid. If this were the case, it could suggest a deep engagement with the subject matter.

Elder Clarke also responded to questions from the students throughout the presentation. Many of the children demonstrated that they were extending their ideas by asking thoughtful questions and by clarifying vocabulary. For instance, one child asked, “What does suffer mean?” when Elder Clarke had used it in the sentence, “We don’t want the animals to suffer.” Many of

the children demonstrated enhanced vocabulary knowledge with words such as *sea cucumber*, *jellyfish*, and *torch*. Another student was able to offer *sap* as a synonym for the word *pitch*.

Observing this presentation and the contributions of my students gave me the opportunity to see which of my students were still unfamiliar with irregular verbs. For example, Hailey often used the word *caught* instead of *caught*. I appreciated having a skilled presenter, one who kept the children engaged, as it gave me an opportunity to take note of the children's' vocabulary and grammar usage.

I observed the children become more interested and engaged when Elder Clarke referred to places or activities they were familiar with, such as Beacon Hill Park or fishing. The children also enjoyed learning new words, such as the SENĆOŦEN word for frog and thank you. A few of the children needed guidance, in the form of verbal reminders from me, to continue actively listening to the presentation. However, as a group, they demonstrated better listening skills than they typically do in similar situations. My instinct is that this was because our guest was so proficient in oral storytelling and because the children were able to access their prior knowledge (the museum fieldtrip) and make connections to the topic. I also felt that this event benefited my Aboriginal students, as I noted in my research journal their ease and familiarity with some of the stories. Moreover, I felt that by inviting Aboriginal Elders into the classroom, I was honouring and improving the relationship between the School District and the Aboriginal community.

Third Event: Guided Drawing Lesson

The third event also took place in November 2013. For this event, an Inuit soapstone carver visited the class. She presented information on how she grew up in the high arctic. She also shared many artefacts with the children. These included soapstone carvings, Inuit snow glasses, a seal pelt, and photographs. Following her presentation, the children engaged in a guided drawing

lesson. During this activity, the children had the opportunity to listen, ask questions, and discuss their artwork.

For the guided drawing lesson, I gave each child a legal (8.5 x 14) size piece of white paper. Each child started their drawing using a pencil, so that they could erase and correct as they went along. To colour their pictures, I gave the children the option of either using pencil crayons or crayons, and I instructed them not to use felts. I told them not to use felts as I have found students have a harder time fixing perceived mistakes. The presenter then used my cart, document camera, and projector to show the children how to draw as she went along.

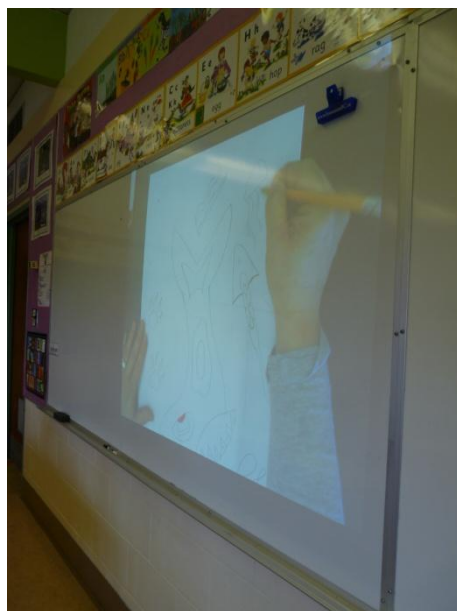


Figure 3 *Guided drawing lesson projected on white board*

During the guided drawing lesson, I modelled listening to the instructions by drawing my own picture on the whiteboard. I also rotated through the desks helping, reassuring, and managing behaviour. Most of the children demonstrated comprehension by following the instructions given by the presenter. Our class proudly displayed the artwork created in the school's front foyer and on the bulletin board outside of our classroom. The following photograph shows the students intently engaged in the guided drawing lesson.



Figure 4 *Children engaged in guided drawing lesson*

Although the guided drawing lesson started out with all the kids engaged, there were a great many interruptions and conduct difficulties. One child repeatedly got up to use the electric sharpener and had to be reminded several times that this was not an appropriate time. The lesson was also interrupted by three grade 5 students dropping of a bag of fruit and a visit from one of the district's computer technicians.

Despite these interruptions, the students were able to follow the instructions given by the presenter. She started by asking, "Is everybody ready?" This was met with a chorus of yeses and nos. Once I had checked to make sure all the "nos" were indeed ready, our drawing lesson began. Throughout the activity, the children often asked questions for clarification, such as, "Like this big?" Alternatively, by repeating, "Like this? Like this?" As the instructions moved along, I interpreted that some of the students became overwhelmed. I made this interpretation because of the increasing frequency of the statements such as, "I don't know how to" or "I'm not ready." At this point, I began to reassure them by stating, "This is good. It's okay, just like the way you did it. It's great." I have found that many children are very concerned with "getting it right" and need

to be reassured that their efforts are worthy. Our presenter had to remind the children that if they spent too much time erasing their work they would not hear the next instruction.

The “getting it right” classroom phenomenon is one that I struggle with as an educator. On the one hand, there are times when I expect or am looking for a specific answer or example. For instance in identifying shapes. If I ask child to name a three-sided shape, I expect them to learn to respond with the term *triangle*. On the other hand, when we are engaged in an activity such as a guided drawing lesson, I have no expectations that the children’s drawings need to look precisely like the example. This difference in expectations is one, I find, difficult to make explicit to my students. For some children, it does not create any conflict, but for others, I find if they cannot recreate precisely what is depicted there are many tears and frustration. It seems a fine balance between teaching children to follow the directions and teaching them ownership over the finished product.

The guided drawing lesson took approximately 30 minutes and it was a struggle for many of the students to stay on task. Throughout the audio recording, there are frequent reminders from me. Many times these reminders are in the form of asking children to “turn around” so that they remained focused on the presenter. There are also times when I say, “shhh,” “that is not listening,” and “sit down.” At around the 11-minute mark, one of the students says, “Mine’s a baby.” This is taken up and repeated by two of the other students. I respond to these interruptions with another iteration of “shhh.” On reflection, I think it would have been more useful to have stopped the activity and allowed the children to discuss their drawings at this point. In that way, I would have been capitalizing on the dialogue that was trying to happen rather than focusing on the dialogues as “behaviour.”

Despite the conduct difficulties during the listening portion of this activity, an examination of the children's drawings shows that they were all successful in following the directions and creating their own versions of an Inuit style whale drawing. The images below show two of the completed drawings, one by Madison who is ELL and in grade 1 and the other by Sachini who is in grade 2 and exceeding expectations in language arts. As is demonstrated by these drawings, despite their different levels and understanding of English, both children were successful in completing their pictures and similar elements can be seen in both images.



Figure 5 *Comparison of whale drawings*

Similar to our two previous culturally relevant events, this event was a positive experience for all of my students. I make this statement based on the level of engagement the children demonstrated while drawing their pictures and the pride they felt in the finished products. All of the students, including those designated as ELL met the learning outcome of listening and demonstrating comprehension by following instructions and asking questions for clarification and understanding. Furthermore, I felt, having an Aboriginal Elder as an honoured guest in our room for a third time increased the Aboriginal students' sense of belonging.

Fourth Event: Talking Sticks

The fourth event was held in December 2013. This event was organised with the help of the Aboriginal educational assistant employed at the school. For this event, the children sang a traditional Aboriginal song accompanied by drumming. Following the song, the children sat in a circle, passed a talking stick, and shared their name, where they were from or to what nation they belonged. The children then had the opportunity to engage in unstructured talk while making their own talking sticks from driftwood, shells, beads, and twine.

During this activity, the students met several of the oral language prescribed learning outcomes. Moreover, this activity allowed Akala to draw on her prior knowledge and share her experiences with the class. There was something particularly powerful about this that I struggle to put into words. Part of this was seeing Akala in the role of the expert in her room, a role she does not normally perform. The children remained engaged throughout the activity and I did not need to manage behaviour nearly as much as in the previous three events. This could be attributed to a number of factors. This event took place in December and thus 4 months into our school year. By this time, the children had learned my expectations and had formed a productive learning community. This was also our fourth event of this nature and the students had an increased awareness and understanding of Aboriginal traditions and culture. We began this event by sitting in a sharing circle, which the students have been doing on a daily basis during our sharing circle. Again, the students knew the expectations in regards to listening, speaking, and turn taking. Finally, the facilitator for this activity was the Aboriginal EA, Ms. Bradly who works twice weekly in our classroom.

After we had sung an Anishinabe song led by Ms. Bradly, Akala had the opportunity to draw on her funds of knowledge and explain how to use a talking stick. “We pass around a feather or a

rock and then when you get it you talk, you tell your name and, and you tell where you are from.” The children then passed a talking stick that Ms. Bradly had made and shared their name and where they were from. During this portion of the activity, the children were all successful at using the oral language strategy of taking turns as both speaker and listener.

The next portion of the activity involved Ms. Bradly and me passing the pieces of driftwood and hemp twine around the circle while the children continued to sit in a circle on the carpet. During this portion, most of the children were successful in following the directions of choosing a special piece of driftwood and taking one piece of twine. Joshua did need some reminders from me, such as “I need you to sit back again in your spot.” This event had much more teacher talk than the previous events and gave me the opportunity to analyse my oral language use with the class.

When transcribing the recordings, I noticed that I often reiterated my instructions using different words. For example I stated, “So the beads are to stay on the table they’re on. They are not to be moved around. You’re sharing with the person sitting beside you and they stay on the desk they are on.” In each of the three sentences, I am explaining that the beads are to stay on the desk. This speech pattern of repeating instructions a number of times is visible in several instances throughout the 27-minute audio recording. Later I stated:

Boys and girls do you remember when we did the drawing with S____. We had to listen very carefully to the instructions. I know you’re not finished. We had to listen very carefully to the instructions. Because otherwise we didn’t know what we were doing. So when we go back to our desks we’re going to have to do the same thing where we listen very carefully too what Ms. Bradly is telling us. Okay, it’s important that we’re good listeners so we know what to do first.

In this portion, I made explicit my expectation that the children listen for the purpose of being able to follow the instructions. I found repeating instructions three times and then rephrasing the same instruction at least once more was much more likely to achieve the outcome I desired than stating instructions one time.

Before moving to the desks to put the beads on their talking sticks, the students needed to attach the twine to the driftwood. This was a complicated process and required fine motor skills with which not all of my early primary students are proficient. During this portion of the activity, many of the students asked questions to clarify how to tie their twine. There were frequent questions such as “like that?” “go under?” and “like this?” For some students this was a very challenging and upsetting portion of the activity as they were unable to tie their twine. Nevertheless, the two EAs and I were able to get all the children set up and to their desks to string the beads in an efficient manner.

Once the children returned to their desks, they had the opportunity to use speaking and listening in an informal, non-structured way as they completed their beading. The beading activity involved a fair bit of concentration on the part of the students and made for a calm classroom environment. As they beaded, they continued to ask questions, such as “does this look like enough beads,” for clarification. Several of the students elected to make patterns with the coloured beads, which was a lovely connection to the pattern making we had been looking at in mathematics. To complete this task, they used oral language for interacting with each other. For example, saying, “You can have this one,” or “I need another red,” or “I finally found a brown one.”



Figure 6 *Attaching feathers to talking stick*

Once each of the children had placed the beads on the twine and had the end tied by one of the EAs or me, they moved to the back table to attach four feathers and glue shells to their piece of driftwood. The children used this section of the activity as an opportunity to discuss their talking sticks, “I’m using brown feathers.” The children worked at different speeds, but by approximately the 40 minute mark, most children had completed the beading and attached their feathers. I asked for the students’ attention by stating, “Boys and girls, we want you listening again, we’re going to tell you what to do after you have your feathers.” When listening to the audio recording, I was pleased to see how quickly the children were able to stop talking and listen for the next instruction. I was pleased because I felt the calm and the easy transition from talking to listening demonstrated that the children were engaged and enjoying the activity.

Ms. Brady explained that there were bowls filled with abalone shells and how to glue the shells to the talking sticks. Some of the children chose not to complete this portion of the activity because they hoped I would let them take the sticks home that same day if they did not have to wait for glue to dry. The talking sticks were then left on the children’s desks to dry. As the

children finished their sticks, I circulated and took a photograph of them with their sticks. The children were proud of their projects and enjoyed holding them up for me to photograph. Below is an image of a student with her finished talking stick. I noticed as we neared the end of the project and lunchtime, the noise level in the classroom escalated; presumably because many of the children were finished, thus no longer engaged, and they were hungry.



Figure 7 Student with her completed talking stick

Through this activity, many of my students were able to meet a number of the oral language learning outcomes successfully. These outcomes included, sharing connections made, listening, and demonstrating comprehension by following directions, and making and clarifying meaning by asking questions. Moreover, I felt, through this activity I was able to increase the sense of caring and belonging for my Aboriginal students, who were able to see their home culture represented in their classroom and use their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). On reflection, I also felt that this activity increased awareness and understanding of Aboriginal traditions and culture by introducing the children to a traditional Aboriginal song and having them create a talking stick to share with their families.

Key Findings

Through the analysis of my data, I confirmed that inviting Elders into the classroom and conducting culturally responsive oral language activities were good pedagogical choices for connecting culturally responsive teaching with oral language development. Throughout the activities, the children demonstrated engagement and enjoyment. Over the course of the study, all of the students measurably improved their oral language skills. Although this gain cannot be attributed solely to the cultural activities, I feel they played a beneficial role. I differentiated the activities, in that each child was able to work independently at their own level. For example, I did not expect the depth of the conversation in each of the groups after the visit to the museum to be alike. Instead, I structured the activity and then listened to see how each group interacted and what they chose to focus on within their group. All of the students were able to complete all of the activities and all of the students were successful in creating the various artefacts from the different activities (talking sticks and drawings). Moreover, the data provided by using a qualitative action research methodology, particularly the audio recordings and my teacher research journal, gave me opportunity reflect on and improve my professional practice. For example, when listening to the audio recordings, I noticed how some children had difficulty following the instructions. After reflecting on how to improve their ability to follow instructions, I adapted my lesson instruction to use a three pronged approach to instructions, the prongs being visual (usually written on the whiteboard), verbal, and a demonstration of what I expect often using a document camera and projector, so that these students have both auditory and visual instructions. I also noted in my research journal how challenging it was for some students to transition from one activity to the next. I have made some adaptations to my lead up to

transitioning and now set a visual timer during each activity and give the children verbal reminders, as we get closer to the end of an activity.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of socially shared cognition highlights the importance of social experiences, such as collaboration with adults and peers, to shift individuals from their current understanding to their potential understanding, within their zone of proximal development. Throughout this study, my students were able to engage with their peers and adults, to make meaning and develop ideas through group interactions and talk. By allowing my students time to talk, they were able to learn and to create meaning out of culturally relevant experiences. Following our visit to the museum, the children had the opportunity to discuss what they had seen and heard in small groups. These group interactions helped the students increase their understanding of their experience at the museum. Over the course of this study, the students had many opportunities to learn about Aboriginal history and culture. Through these opportunities, I believe their understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal history and culture increased. One piece of evidence of this is how calmly, and appropriately, they were able to participate in the sharing circle during our final event.

Oral language is an essential part of the foundation of literacy. To support oral language or oracy in the early primary classroom, children must have many opportunities for talking and listening. Throughout the instructional day, my students had many opportunities to practice and improve their oral language skills. The activities that I developed as part of this study provided more of such opportunities, as well as presented them in a culturally relevant framework; specifically I utilized an Indigenous framework supported by the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* (2005). They were given an opportunity to utilise and develop their

oracy skills in small group and whole group settings. In addition, they had many opportunities to engage in structured and unstructured talk.

In order to maximise oral language development, the B.C. Ministry of Education (2006) states, teachers must build a personal relationship with each student. I made and deepened my relationship with my students over the course of this five-month study. Many of the strategies I used were ones I would have done prior to this study. These included working one on one with each of my students and consciously and explicitly recognized each of their skills and the contributions they each brought to our learning community. An example of a way I did this was by having a daily “special helper.” This child got to bring in an item for our sharing circle. The “special helper” also greeted each of the students once we were seated on carpet, and led our morning carpet routine. Moreover, I worked to create a “sense of place, caring, and of belonging” for our entire classroom community (Aboriginal Nations Education Council, 2005, p. 3). Some of the ways I did this was by teaching a unit on feelings where the students were able to share their feelings in a safe environment and learn that their peers often had similar feelings. I also invited families into the classroom to share in our learning and used student led conferences as one of my formal reporting periods. Finally, I used student artwork to decorate the classroom.

Through the course of this study, the children were able to meet 11 of the 12 prescribed learning outcomes for oral language contained in the English Language Arts Integrated Resource Package (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006). A complete list of the learning outcomes is contained in appendix B. The only outcome that these activities did not satisfy was having the students demonstrate phonological awareness. Not only did the children meet the learning outcomes, they met them in a way that was enjoyable and culturally responsive. The results of

this study demonstrate that incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the classroom using a culturally responsive framework can be a useful tool for teaching oral language.

Researchers (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1995a, 1995b, 2000) and theorists support culturally responsive teaching as an approach that can provide a supportive learning environment for all members of the learning community. The Greater Victoria School District brings together an array of children from a wide variety of socio-economic contexts. Activities, such as a sharing circles, give children the opportunity to express who they are and where they are from. In this activity, it was gratifying to see Akala, an Aboriginal student who the district terms as “at risk,” become the expert and share her knowledge and cultural experience with her peers.

Battiste and Henderson (2009) identified the involvement of Elders in the learning community as a promising practice in mainstream education. It is my belief, as an experienced early primary teacher, that having Elders in our classroom through the course of this study greatly benefited all of my students. One of the benefits I witnessed was the increase in time the children gave each other to share their connections and stories during our sharing circles. I credit this to both the modelling of the Elder and the cultural competency and modelling of some of my Aboriginal students. Another benefit is the enthusiasm and excitement the children developed for Aboriginal art. Finally, through these activities the children’s knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions, and culture increased. I felt this was a benefit to all of my students, as it may help them to understand each other better as they travel through their educational journey.

Summary

Chapter 5 reports the findings from my five-month study of children’s responses to culturally responsive oral language activities. First, I interpreted the data from the oral language emergent

literacy continuum that I had administered at the beginning, mid way through, and at the end of my study. Second, I examined the transcripts and artefacts from the four events. In the first event, the children were able to demonstrate the connections between their visit to the First Peoples Gallery at the Royal British Columbia Museum and their drawings through small group discussion. The children demonstrated what they had learned about First Nations culture, they also showed engagement and pride in the drawing activity. In the second event, the children demonstrated their ability to use language to make connections and to deepen understanding and meaning. In the third event, the children showed that they were able to listen, follow complex directions, and produce beautiful drawings. In the fourth event, the children again participated in a whole group cultural event and then created their own talking sticks. In the final event, the children demonstrated that they could use language for the purpose of sharing experiences, asking questions for clarification, and follow directions. Overall, I found that inviting Aboriginal Elders to participate in our learning community and oral language activities was a pedagogically sound method for incorporating culturally responsive teaching with oral language development.

Chapter 6 summarises the purpose and context of my study. It also discusses the implications for Aboriginal students and for my teaching practice. In addition, it makes pedagogical suggestions for implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in the early primary classroom. Finally, it makes recommendations for future research and discusses the strengths and limitations of this study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this action research study was to discover how students would respond to the implementation of culturally relevant oracy practices in an early primary classroom. Students participated in a five-month study, during which they engaged in four culturally responsive activities structured to incorporate the values held in the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* (2005). Students were provided with talk time both in small groups, as a whole group, structured, and unstructured. Throughout the study, I compared the oral language used by the students with the grade 1, Ministry mandated, oral language outcomes (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006). As part of my qualitative action research, I audiotaped the activities so that I could later transcribe and analyze the talk that took place. I also photographed the participants engaged in the activities and collected the artefacts they created. Finally, I recorded my observations and reflections in a teacher journal. These sources of data were analyzed for my findings. The data also gave me opportunity to reflect on my professional practice. Overall, I found that my students responded to these activities with high levels of engagement and enthusiasm. Moreover, through the course of this study, they were able to demonstrate that they had met the oral language learning outcomes. Finally, I found that including Elders in our classroom community increased my Aboriginal students' sense of place and of belonging, it also improved the relationship between the school district and the Aboriginal community and parents, and it increased my students' and my awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions, and culture.

Implications for Aboriginal students

Not all children experience success at school. Of particular concern is the lack of success experienced by Aboriginal students (Friesen & Krauth, 2010; Ball, 2009a). According to the

British Columbia (B.C.) Ministry of Education (2011b), of the 4,880 Aboriginal students eligible to graduate in British Columbia from the 2010/11 school year, only 2,925 graduated (approximately 60 percent). This is 20 percent less than non-Aboriginal graduates, not including students who are ELL or students with special needs. In 2011, the Greater Victoria District reports revealed that out of a cohort of 98 Aboriginal students only 59 graduated from the 2010/11 school year (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2011a).

By incorporating Indigenous learning activities into the classroom, more children may experience success. By engaging in activities, such as the four undertaken over the course of this study, teachers seek to increase Aboriginal students' sense of place, caring, and of belonging. Moreover, they raise awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions, and culture (Aboriginal Nations Education Council, 2005). Cultural activities such as the ones contained in this study also help teachers commit to the social justice and decolonization principles of the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* (2005) by treating Aboriginal ways of knowing, not as an add on, but as integral part of a good educational program. By incorporating Indigenous knowledge and experience into mainstream education, Aboriginal students are more likely to reach graduation (Ball, 2009; Battiste & Henderson, 2009, Goulet, 2001).

An unexpected benefit of this study was the connection I was able to make with the families of my Aboriginal students. Many of the families, who have had little or no contact with the school, now come to visit me in my classroom to discuss their child. I feel the catalyst of this relationship was the value I placed on Aboriginal ways of knowing within my classroom. As a teacher, I feel a good relationship between home and school is vital for a child's success at school. In my experience, if teachers and families have a good relationship, it is far more likely that children have good attendance, complete assigned homework, and feel pride in their

accomplishments at school. Finally, seeing the home culture of my Aboriginal students reflected in their classroom and “normalized” through the help of Elders fills me with a sense of optimism for their future.

Implications for my Teaching Practice

Due to the nature of this study, I had many opportunities to reflect on my pedagogical practice. Many of these reflections were about the behaviour management strategies I used with my students. Due to the large size and complicated composition of my class, it was very challenging to manage the frequent disruptions and conduct difficulties of many of the students. As I mentioned in chapter 5, I tend to be very explicit in my instructions and repeat them multiple times in multiple ways. This appears to be successful and a practice I plan on continuing. Listening back through the audio recordings, also gave me a chance to reflect on my wait time. For some students, it was apparent that I moved too quickly to the next question or instruction and did not give them adequate time to think about and explain their thoughts. In the future, it is my intention to slow down and make sure that every student has the opportunity to share and engage. In my research journal, I had made note of some students being off topic. When I reviewed the recordings of their talk, I realized that they were on topic and I had not given them adequate time to express their thoughts fully. Managing timed events is a challenge in such a complex class with such diverse learning needs, especially as the time required for each child to complete a task is so vastly different.

Listening back to the audio recordings, I noticed how often I used the names of children who have the most severe conduct difficulties. It saddened me to realize that some of my most successful and capable students get very little of my teaching time. Through this study, my awareness of this factor has been heightened. In the future, I intend to work on making

adjustments to improve the distribution of my teaching time. I believe that every child in my class is entitled to an equitable portion of my time and that every child is entitled to see a year of improvement in their skills, regardless of their level when they enter my classroom in September. Yet, how do I meet the needs of all of these extremely diverse learners? It is a question I believe I will continue to struggle with.

Through the course of this study, I was able to enlist extra support from older students at Saint Michaels University School. Enlisting volunteers, either parental or from other sources, can be very challenging. It is also likely to become more challenging as more school districts are requiring criminal record checks for all volunteers, including parent volunteers. It has become apparent that the best way I can meet the needs of my students, to the level I feel they deserve, is with smaller class sizes and more support for the students with special needs. To accomplish this goal, I find myself entering a political realm I had not anticipated when I entered the teaching profession.

Pedagogical suggestions.

Inviting Elders into the classroom to share their knowledge with my students proved to be an excellent way of incorporating the values held by the *Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement* (2005) and of meeting the B.C. Ministry of Education prescribed learning outcomes for oral language. In the Greater Victoria School District, requests to have Aboriginal guest speakers work with students can go through the Aboriginal Nations Education Division. Teachers can access request forms through the GVSD website (www.sd61.bc.ca) and then fax them to the district office. Through this study, I found that by making my requests early I was able to plan my curriculum in such a way as to incorporate these events in a meaningful and authentic manner. For example, I arranged for Elder Clarke to visit our class and discuss seasonal change and the significance for

the Coast Salish People at the same time as I was teaching my unit on the seasons. Of course, it is always helpful to have a plan B as sometimes scheduling visitors is challenging. I was glad that for this study I had planned so many events, so that having two events cancelled did not severely impact the learning outcomes.

I also found that keeping a large selection of books with Aboriginal themes and contents familiarized the students with the Aboriginal focus of the culturally responsive literacy events. I borrowed books from my local library and would suggest this as a successful and inexpensive way to augment the classroom library. The Greater Victoria Public Library, for example, keeps a large collection of appropriate and useful books and they can be easily reserved through their website (www.gvpl.ca).

I would also suggest that teachers connect with families and enquire into the knowledge held within their learning community. One way to do this, without feeling as though one is targeting the Aboriginal families, is by sending out a blanket request asking for volunteers to share their knowledge with the class. Although not a part of the study, last year, as a response to such a request, I had a student's grandmother share the tradition of cedar weaving with my class. This was a rich and meaningful experience. In addition, the Aboriginal EA who facilitated the talking sticks event with my class is a member of my school community. This event came about because of a conversation regarding my interest in Indigenous knowledge we had in the staff room. I found, through the course of this study, that my curiosity around Aboriginal culture, traditions, and history was positively received by members of the Aboriginal community. I would urge teachers not to be afraid to reach out and to ask questions.

Although the children seemed to build on their knowledge from one cultural event to the next, I did not orchestrate a concluding event where I explicitly questioned the children on how

they felt about these Aboriginal focused cultural events. In reflection, I think this may have been a constructive piece to gain insight into the children's responses. When inviting Aboriginal Elders into the classroom, I think it may be helpful to explore this opportunity, possibly with a culminating piece at the end of the year where student can discuss the events in a sharing circle. In doing this, the teacher must take great care not to portray Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing as the "other," but rather as a ["normal"] way of experiencing the world.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several future research possibilities that could be undertaken to explore the benefits of using culturally responsive oracy practices in the classroom. As suggested by the statistics discussed in Chapter 1, Canadian classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. More research into pedagogy that supports these diverse learners is warranted. Educators and researchers can further explore effective ways of engaging students in oral language activities through culturally responsive teaching methods. I chose to use Aboriginal culture as a way of framing my study because of the growing body of work that validates Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing as valuable for all learners (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). Although beyond the scope of this study, I believe more research into the use of Indigenous knowledge as a tool for teaching mainstream education is warranted. As my research was framed by my history, my experience as a teacher, and by my students, it would be interesting to see if the research could be replicated and whether another teacher would view these cultural events as valuable as I viewed them in my context. I think it would also be interesting to research the reactions to the Aboriginal 'content' of the children from different heritage backgrounds in the class. For example, by asking, does this type of inclusion feel inclusive to them as well or does it further marginalize their culture.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

Qualitative action research studies have both strengths and limitations. One of the strengths of this study was that through the research I was able to reflect upon and improve my personal practice. Although, as noted, being both teacher and researcher requires ethical safeguards, this dual relationship has the advantage of not exposing the children to an unfamiliar adult data collector. In addition, I am quite familiar with the children's interactions and relationships and used this knowledge when analyzing the data. Another strength was that, in my experience of inner city schools in Western Canada, my classroom composition is a reasonably accurate reflection of the inner city, English track classroom. Therefore, my research may be relevant to other classroom teachers facing similar classes and looking for sound instructional oracy strategies and a way to further the success of their Aboriginal students.

One of the limitations of this study is its subjectivity. As it is impossible for me to remove myself from my own worldview and past experiences, they, no doubt, shape my interpretation of the data. Furthermore, evaluating my own practice carries a built in bias to present and interpret my findings in the best possible light. However, by introducing my 'bias' to this research, I feel, I was able to form a more complete picture as I was emotionally involved in the research and its participants. An additional limitation is that this study speaks to one specific class setting and group of students. It is unclear whether another researcher could reproduce this study. An added factor is that this study was limited to four literacy events; prolonged observations over a longer period may have had different results. Finally, the use of audio recordings has its limitations. It was difficult to decipher some of the talking recorded because of either background noise or the children speaking too softly. Therefore, some of the data was possibly lost.

Conclusion

Through this five month qualitative action research study, I was able to investigate how children respond to the implementation of culturally responsive oracy practices. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of socially shared cognition is embedded in the B.C. curriculum and forms the foundation for many educational theories. At the heart of Vygotsky's theory is the notion that children must engage in oral language activities to make meaning. Furthermore, oracy, with reading and writing, form the three cornerstones of literacy. Literacy is one of the fundamental skills children need to acquire through their educational experience. As Greater Victoria School District's classrooms are diverse and complicated places filled with unique and interesting learners, teaching oracy using culturally responsive pedagogy appears to keep children engaged, interested, and motivated. Moreover, culturally responsive teaching can be accomplished by incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and by inviting Aboriginal Elders into the classroom. Both of which are promising practices that appear to benefit all learners and adhere to the *Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement* (2005). The completion of this study has given me an opportunity to reflect on my teaching practice and contribute information to the body of research supporting oracy and Indigenous practices in the classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continuum: Oral Language

Student Name: _____

| Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Continuum: Oral Language | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| Developmental aspects | Emerging With direct support... | Developing With guided support... | Applying With minimal support... | Extending |
| The Child | With direct support may listen to and use language for play and collaborative learning. May not have enough language for conversation to be meaningful. | With guided support listens to and is beginning to use language for play and collaborative learning. Is beginning to participate in conversations. | With minimal support uses conventional language for play and collaborative learning. Is able to contribute to conversations. | Adjusts language use for play and collaborative learning. Uses language for a range of purposes and actively contributes to conversations. |
| Speaking and Listening | | | | |
| Attending | With direct support may attend to informal oral language interactions. | With guided support attends to and participates in informal language interactions. | With minimal support attends to and participates in informal language interactions. | Attends to and participates in informal language interactions. |
| Listening | With direct support may listen during activities (e.g., ignoring distractions). | With guided support listens during activities (e.g., ignoring distractions). | With minimal support listens during activities (e.g., ignoring distractions). | Listens during activities (e.g., ignoring distractions). |
| Speaking | With direct support may speak with adults or peers. May be difficult to understand (e.g., tone of voice, volume, articulation, rate, gesture). | With guided support speaks with adults and peers (e.g., tone of voice, volume, articulation, rate, gesture). | With minimal support speaks clearly and fluently with adults and peers (e.g., tone of voice, volume, articulation, rate, gesture). | Speaks clearly and fluently using appropriate voice and body language (e.g., tone of voice, volume, articulation, rate, gesture). |
| Taking turns in conversation | With direct support may take turns in a conversation. | With guided support takes turns in a conversation. | With minimal support takes turns in a conversation. | Takes turns as a thoughtful listener and speaker in a conversation. |
| Staying on topic | With direct support may sometimes stay on topic in a short conversation. | With guided support stays on topic in a short conversation; responds to ideas. | With minimal support stays on topic in a conversation; responds to and extends ideas. | Stays on topic in conversations; responds to and extends ideas. |
| Knowledge of the Content and Structure of Language | | | | |
| Understanding and participating in language activities | With direct support may understand classroom language activities (e.g., shared reading, role plays, imaginative play, etc.). | With guided support understands and participates in classroom language activities (e.g., shared reading, role plays, imaginative play, etc.). | With minimal support understands and participates in classroom language activities (e.g., shared reading, role plays, imaginative play, etc.). | Understands and actively participates in classroom language activities (e.g., shared reading, role plays, imaginative play, etc.). |
| Understanding vocabulary | With direct support may understand a limited vocabulary. | With guided support understands a basic vocabulary. | With minimal support understands a wide vocabulary. | Understands an extensive vocabulary. |
| Speaking in sentences | With direct support may use single words or short phrases modeled by others. | With guided support uses words or phrases modeled by others. | With minimal support expresses thoughts and ideas in short sentences. | Expresses thoughts and ideas in some detail using a variety of sentences. |
| Understanding and following directions | With direct support may follow directions. | With guided support follows directions. | With minimal support follows directions. | Follows directions. |
| Understanding, asking and responding to questions | With direct support may understand the difference between a question and a comment or response. | With guided support understands questions; asks simple questions and may respond on topic. | With minimal support asks and answers questions on topic. | Asks thoughtful questions; responds on topic and extends ideas. |
| Sharing personal experiences | With direct support may share personal experiences and feelings. | With guided support shares personal experiences and feelings. | With minimal support shares personal experiences and feelings with some clarity. | Shares personal experiences and feelings with clarity; is beginning to adjust language for audience. |
| Retelling/recounting | With direct support may retell something about a story; may recount part of an experience or give one or two simple facts. | With guided support retells a simple story, recounts an experience or gives new information; some sequence errors and omissions. | With minimal support retells a story, recounts an experience or gives new information; may use simple connectors (e.g., and, then). | Retells a story, recounts experiences or gives information; uses more complex connectors (e.g., if, because, when, before, etc.). |
| Problem solving | With direct support may use language to problem solve. | With guided support uses language to problem solve. | With minimal support uses language to problem solve. | Without support uses appropriate language to problem solve. |
| Knowledge of the Sounds of Language | | | | |
| Demonstrating phonological awareness | With direct support may demonstrate emergent skills in a few phonological awareness areas (e.g., awareness of words, syllables, sounds, rhyme). | With guided support demonstrates emergent skills in a few phonological awareness areas (e.g., awareness of words, syllables, sounds, rhyme). | With minimal support demonstrates emergent skills in some phonological awareness areas (e.g., awareness of words, syllables, sounds, rhyme). | Demonstrates emergent skills in most phonological awareness areas (e.g., awareness of words, syllables, sounds, rhyme). |
| The Support/Scaffolding* | The Model: showing, instructing, explaining, directing, making explicit, demonstrating, giving examples | The Coach: structuring, sequencing, focusing, cueing, guiding, organizing, supporting | The Advisor: suggesting, reminding, prompting, monitoring, asking for elaboration | The Mentor: extending, stretching, wondering aloud, exploring, "what if-ing" |

*a variety of supports (teachers, peers, environmental, etc.) can be provided at any stage of development

Date code:

Comments:

Final 03/09

Adapted from SD 69 Kindergarten Assessment Committee 2004

Please note: This continuum is not meant to be used as a performance standard.

Note. From Kindergarten emergent literacy continuum: Oral language, by the B.C. Ministry of Education, 2004, Victoria: Author. Copyright 2004 by the Province of British Columbia.

Appendix B: Prescribed Learning Outcomes: English Language Arts – Oral Language

It is expected that students will:

Oral Language(Speaking and Listening)

Purposes (Oral Language)

A1 use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of

- contributing to a class goal
- exchanging ideas on a topic
- making connections
- completing tasks
- engaging in play

A2 use speaking to explore, express, and present ideas, information, and feelings, by

- generally staying on topic
- using descriptive words about people, places, things, and events
- telling or retelling stories and experiences in a logical sequence
- sharing connections made

A3 listen for a variety of purposes and demonstrate comprehension, by

- retelling or restating
- following two-step instructions
- asking questions for clarification and understanding
- sharing connections made

Strategies (Oral Language)

A4 use strategies when interacting with others, including

- making and sharing connections
- asking questions for clarification and understanding
- taking turns as speaker and listener

A5 use strategies when expressing and presenting ideas, information, and feelings, including

- accessing prior knowledge
- organizing thinking by following a simple framework
- predicting some things the audience needs to know

A6 use strategies when listening to make and clarify meaning, including

- preparing for listening

- focussing on the speaker
- asking questions
- recalling ideas

Thinking (Oral Language)

A7 demonstrate enhanced vocabulary knowledge and usage

A8 engage in speaking and listening activities to develop a deeper understanding of texts (e.g., presenting a personal collection, listening to the telling of a story from an oral tradition)

A9 use speaking and listening in group activities (including creative exploration and play) to develop thinking by identifying relationships and acquiring new ideas

A10 reflect on their speaking and listening to identify their strengths and to discuss attributes of good speakers and listeners

Features (Oral Language)

A11 use the features of oral language to convey and derive meaning, including using most words correctly and expressing ideas clearly

A12 demonstrate phonological awareness, by

- identifying and creating rhyming words
- identifying and creating alliteration
- segmenting the flow of speech into separate words
- using sound segmenting and sound blending of syllables and phonemes in words

Note. From English Language Arts Kindergarten to Grade 7: Integrated Resource Package (p. 51), by the B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006, Victoria: Author. Copyright 2006 by the Province of British Columbia.

Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Children's Responses to Culturally Responsive Oracy Practices

Your child is being invited to participate in a study entitled Children's Responses to Culturally Responsive Oracy Practices that is being conducted by Sarah Winona Waldron.

As a graduate student at the University of Victoria in curriculum and instruction, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Master of Arts. It is being conducted under the supervision of Carmen Rodriguez de France. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8633.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to implement a culturally responsive pedagogy in my classroom and examine students' responses to it through oral language activities. My research objectives are to answer the following question: How do children respond to culturally responsive oracy practices in the early primary classroom?

Research of this type is important because Canadian schools are becoming more ethnically diverse and teachers strive to improve student achievement, student learning and success. I am looking at oral language activities because oral language is fundamental to literacy success.

What is involved?

Your child is being asked to participate in this study because s/he is a member of the inclusive classroom where the research will take place.

As part of our regular classroom instruction, your child will be receiving instruction on speaking and listening. This oral language instructional unit focusing on speaking and listening will continue throughout the school year, but for the purposes of this study, data will be recorded beginning on October 1st, 2013 and ending on February 28th, 2014. If you agree to your child's participation, this means that you and your child are giving me permission to analyze samples of his/her classroom work as part of my research project.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study will not cause any inconvenience to your child.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to your child by participating in this research.

Benefit

The potential benefits of your child's participation in this research include increasing his or her oral language skills, strengthening and supporting our ethnically diverse school community, and adding to the body of knowledge on how to best meet the needs the culturally diverse students in the early primary classroom.

Voluntary Participation

Your child's participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you or s/he decides to participate, you or your child may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. If you or your child withdraws from the study, his/her data will not be used.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

Your permission for your child's work to be used in the research must be voluntary and I want to assure you that there are no consequences that arise from giving or withholding your permission. The instruction in the classroom will be provided to all children regardless of whether or not the results of that instruction are used for my research. In order to avoid any pressure you might feel because I am your child's teacher, I am asking that all returned consent forms be sent to the school secretary, Mrs. Lucy Adams, not to me. The school secretary will not

reveal the names to me until after the study has ended and the second term grades have been entered. I have also informed the principal of my intended research, and should you feel that there are pressures or unanticipated consequences as a result of participating or not, you are free to contact Mrs. Campbell (250-382-8296), my research supervisor, Dr. Rodriguez de France (250-721-8633), or the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545) to have your concerns addressed.

On-going Consent

Further, I will remind you at the end of the second term of my intentions to use your child's work for my research. If you decide to withdraw your consent, you are free to do so at any time by notifying the school secretary, Mrs. Lucy Adams (250-382-8296). If permission is not given or is withdrawn, no examples or notes regarding your child will be used in the written report.

Anonymity & Confidentiality

In terms of protecting your child's anonymity, no names or distinguishing characteristics will be used in the written report.

Your child's confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by locking the data in a filing cabinet and keeping computer documents password protected.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in a published thesis. If you wish, I will supply you with a copy of the results. A copy will also be available online through the University of Victoria's UVicSpace.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of by deleting all computer files and shredding all paper records.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Mrs. Winona Waldron | wwaldron@sd61.bc.ca | 250-382-8296 |
| Dr. Carmen Rodriguez de France | mdcr@uvic.ca | 250-721-8633 |

France

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date