

**Teacher Child Interaction In The Teaching Of Reading:  
A Review Of Research Perspectives Over 25 Years**

**Running head:** Teacher child interaction

**Key words:** Reading, literacy, teaching, interaction, discourse

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## **Teacher Child Interaction In The Teaching Of Reading: A Review Of Research Perspectives Over 25 Years**

### **Abstract**

Taking as a starting point a paper published in 1981, this paper considers the importance of interaction between teacher and pupil in learning to read. Twenty-five years ago, the study of classroom language was relatively new. Research perspectives have moved from describing the process of interaction between teacher and child to considering the outcomes. At the same time a greater awareness of the socio-cultural nature of language and classrooms has developed. An enduring theme in research from a variety of perspectives has been the call for more extended opportunities for exchanges about texts and more reciprocity in teacher child dialogue. Studies of classroom practice, however, evidence a persistence in the use of triadic dialogue in which the teacher controls the interaction and effectively closes down discussion. Despite initiatives calling for high quality interaction, it is argued here that there is still no agreement about what high quality interaction should look like.

## Overview

“To a great extent within classrooms, the language used by teachers and students determines what is learned and how learning takes place. ....

Three decades ago, sociolinguistic studies launched a new direction for enquiry into language and literacy learning: these studies focused on the use of oral language in classrooms.” (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2000, p.337).

The paper I have chosen to consider (“An approach to analysing teacher verbal moves in hearing children read”, Campbell, 1981) was published in the very early days of the *Journal of Research in Reading* – volume 4. I was a classroom teacher at the time teaching the age of children that Campbell researched in his study. Like the teachers Campbell describes, I spent large parts of my day hearing children read. Campbell’s paper is of interest today as it gives us a glimpse of what was happening in classrooms in UK at that time and how this was interpreted by researchers. Although the practice of reading aloud to the teacher either as an individual or as part of a group as the prime means of reading instruction is far less pervasive today than twenty years ago, interaction between teacher and child(ren) continues to be considered a central part of the classroom scene.

The following is a résumé of Campbell’s paper:

“This study has been undertaken to investigate the teacher-child interaction in hearing children read in infant (4-7 year-old) classrooms.

There are many studies which provide systems for analysing classroom

interaction, each having its own perspective (e.g. Flanders, 1970; Bellack et al. (1966) Resnick, 1972; and Bassey & Hatch, 1979) but it has been found necessary to develop a descriptive system which comprehensively explains each verbal move made by the teacher in this specific type of interaction. This paper describes the system that has been developed to describe the teacher's verbal moves.

The sample includes 156 interactions between teachers and pupils in six infant classrooms. Recordings have been collected from naturalistic settings; the teacher chose the time and nature of the interaction. The transcription and subsequent analysis of these recordings suggest that the teacher's verbal moves can be classified into three types of verbal move: pedagogical, feedback and asides.

In this paper, the pedagogic moves have been further subdivided to give six more areas; concerned with welfare, directions, providing words, word recognition, phonics and comprehension. The responses have been divided into positive and negative, even though, in this context, they could equally be of value to the child, (Smith, 1971). The functional nature of the teachers' verbal moves is indicated and specific examples are drawn from the transcriptions.

Listening to children read in infant classrooms is an activity considered, for many reasons, very important (Hughes, 1970; Moyle, 1968). There are also indications that interaction takes up a great deal of teacher time (DES, 1975). But it is only recently that analysis of these interactions in naturalistic conditions and where the role of the teacher is highlighted has taken place (Gulliver, 1979; Hale, 1979).

It is hoped that the application of a descriptive system of the teacher's verbal moves will enable a more analytical evaluation of hearing children read. The preliminary investigations started by the author with trainee teachers and teachers on in-service courses suggest that this may be possible.”

My intention is not to dwell on Campbell's quite brief paper but to explore what this and other papers can tell us about how reading and classroom interaction was viewed twenty-five years ago and how this has changed. The journey from 1981 to 2004 reveals some consistency as well as some significant shifts in emphasis. Campbell's paper provides a starting point for two related threads. The first, and main, thread is the study of interaction between teacher and pupil in the teaching of reading. Here a shift can be seen from examination of the process of the interaction (as Campbell) to concern with the outcome of that interaction and again to some refocusing on the process set within the wider socio-political context. Secondly, Campbell gives us a glimpse into primary reading classrooms of the late seventies and early eighties. The present paper also considers how teaching of reading has changed in English classrooms and what impact this has (and has not) had on patterns of interaction between teacher and pupil.

It is important to recognise that the present paper is written from the perspective of a researcher in literacy education. I am not a linguist, a psychologist, a sociologist or a philosopher – all of whom have contributed to our understanding of speech in the classroom and how it may impact on the teaching of reading. I am drawing on a vast corpus of work with the intention of considering how classroom interaction can be

examined and how the orientation of research into teacher talk in the teaching of reading has developed over the past twenty years.

Our understanding of learning has moved from focus on the learner as recipient of teaching in which the individual and his or her stage of development is all important to an understanding that learning takes place in a social context in which learners are actively constructing meaning from their own experience and the way teachers interact with them. Recent critical perspectives have re-examined the work of Bernstein and Bakhtin to consider how teachers' language use reflects more than the classroom context but the wider social and political power structures of society.

This shift from the behaviour of the learner to the social context of the learning reflects the developing view of literacy as more than a set of skills to be learned to an understanding of literacy as social practice. Thus the interaction in the classroom is seen as less about the transmission of skills from teacher to learner but the joint construction of understandings in which the learner is an active participant. Such a view also acknowledges that interpretation of text is not just about right answers but about the reader's interpretation of the author's intentions. Thus the interest of the researcher is on teacher, child and the interaction between the two. It is not only on how teachers elicit 'correct' answers from children but how they enable children to generate their own meanings from texts. Barnes (1976) proposes that 'a child's participation in lessons does not arise solely from his individual characteristics – his 'intelligence', 'articulateness' or 'confidence' – but includes the effects of his attempts to understand the teacher and the teacher's attempts to understand him' (p33).

## **Teacher talk**

Robin Campbell sets the scene for his paper by arguing that, although there had been considerable attention paid to classroom language in years prior to his paper (Flanders, 1970; Sinclair & Coulter, 1975), this had provided more general descriptions of classroom practice as opposed to the very specific interaction involved in hearing children read. Campbell also claims that the focus in reading research had been more on the child's behaviour than on the role of the teacher. Despite this claim, we do have a more detailed picture of the teacher of reading at the time from the Extending Beginning Reading study (Southgate, Arnold & Johnson, 1981) that was published in the same year as the Campbell article. This looked at older children (7-9 years) than Campbell's but painted a picture of teachers spending a considerable amount of their time 'hearing readers'. The evidence from their study was that this time was not productive as teachers were subject to constant interruptions and were unable to undertake any worthwhile sustained interaction with individuals about their reading. Campbell proposes that analysis of teacher-child interaction is needed in order to support teachers' understanding. He argues that, despite official support for the hearing of readers (DES, 1976), little guidance has been given as to how this should be conducted (Goodacre, 1974). Although Campbell argues that the teacher's role is very complex, subsequent studies have tended to criticise classroom discourse. The theme throughout the literature is the need for teachers to encourage more extended interchanges and to allow more time for children to respond.

Three years after Campbell's paper, Hoffman, O'Neal, Kastler, Clements, Segel & Nash (1984) reported on a larger study of 22 teachers' verbal interactions with 304

second grade pupils during guided oral reading sessions in the USA. This study went beyond the description of the verbal moves to correlate teachers' responses to pupils' achievement. Like Campbell's comment about the amount of time spent hearing readers in UK classrooms, Hoffman et al claim that the 'round robin reading aloud' pattern of teaching was the only model encountered in the classrooms studied. This study focused specifically on the responses teachers made to pupil miscues. They found significant differences in the way that teachers responded to low ability pupils' miscues as opposed to how they responded to high ability pupils. They argue that there seemed to be a reciprocal expectation on the part of teachers and pupils as to how to behave and that this reflected both teachers' and pupils' desire to keep the flow of the lesson. High ability pupils were given significantly more time to correct miscues and low ability pupils not only had less time but were more likely to be given a 'terminal' response that closed down the interaction. It is recommended that teachers should vary the type of reading that pupils engage in; that miscues that do not affect the meaning of the text should go uncorrected; and that teachers' responses should be sustaining rather than terminal.

Gilmore (1978) in the very first volume of the *Journal of Research in Reading* argues that analysis of classroom talk should be drawn from linguistics and he uses Stubbs (1975)'s procedure for segmenting teacher-pupil discourse. Stubbs proposes that utterances should not be looked at as isolated instances of acts but as realisations of an underlying discourse structure. Gilmore investigated 25 pre-service secondary English teachers' use of a three-part discourse structure in the discussion phase of a reading lesson. He found that where teachers had used a more varied and extending repertoire of responses, pupils' comprehension of text improved.

So we have, on both sides of the Atlantic, research focused on the predominant mode of teaching reading: teacher response to oral reading. In these studies the main source of data is the language used in the interaction between teacher and child. The focus is on the *process* of the talk in the classroom context. Campbell drew attention to the importance of establishing ways of categorising and analysing teacher talk. The research examines the pedagogic intent of the teacher but the wider social and cultural context in which the interaction is set is largely ignored. In these studies the researchers still mainly adopt an input/output view of learning ‘based in a traditional psychological paradigm, these studies treat talk as ‘input’ into the child’s language acquisition system. Simple causal models are used to trace the effects of talk on child outcomes,’ (Larson & Peterson, 2003, p302). Nevertheless, both Hoffman and Campbell introduce a notion of reciprocity, reflecting the idea that the nature of the discourse itself may shape responses and that children fall in with the implicit as well as explicit expectations of the teacher.

French and MacLure (1981) point to the way that discourse analysis (Sinclair & Coulter, 1975) moved linguistics beyond the internal organisation of individual sentences to the representation of classroom talk in terms of recurrent patterns of linguistic categories and their hierarchical organisation. Classroom discussion was analysed in terms of its structure and the categories that constrain and predict ordering possibilities. Discourse analysis provides a descriptive and essentially linguistic system for the analysis of teacher-pupil talk.

However, Hammersley (1981) criticises discourse analysis for being part of what he calls the ‘competence approach’ in which

“Particular instances or recurring patterns of human activity are treated as competent displays of cultural membership, and the discovery of rules or procedures by which that activity was, or could have been, produced is taken as the exclusive goal.....[rather than treating] patterns of activity as the product of interaction between groups with different patterns and interests, who define situations in distinctive ways and develop strategies for furthering those interests, often by means of negotiation and bargaining with one another”. (p.47-8)

### **Teacher talk and its impact on pupil response**

Campbell argued that emphasis in research into the teaching of reading had been largely on the child and his/her reading performance: ‘the teacher, although accepted as an integral part of the interaction, has very largely been neglected’ (Campbell, 1984, p. 44-5). In the 80s, two influential studies were underway in the UK that drew further attention to the nature of interaction between adult and child and, placing the focus clearly on the adult, questioned the quality of interaction in the classroom. Both Tizard and Hughes (1984) and Wells (1987) compared the interaction between adults and children in the home to interaction between adults and children at school. Both found that interactions in the home were more extended and more geared to the needs and interests of the child. In school, teachers and other adults tended to adopt a closed question-and -answer routine that was more focused on the development of the topic than on the individual child’s understanding. Wells argues that while his research shows children to be active meaning makers, interaction in the classroom does not

support this and results more in the closing down of meaning making in the pursuit of the teacher's pre-defined goal.

This pattern, that Tharp and Gallimore (1988) call the 'recitation script' is a three part, teacher led interaction consisting of initiation which is usually a teacher question, a response from the child and a follow up move in which the teacher provides some form of feedback (often an evaluation) – otherwise referred to as IRF or triadic discourse. This control of opening and closing moves by the teacher has been shown by many studies to be an enduring pattern of classroom interaction at all ages of schooling (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1994; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Hardman & Mroz, 1999). It is argued that interactions of this kind leave little opportunity for children to explore and develop their own interpretations of text.

Moreover, studies of classroom discourse show that it is teachers who talk most in classrooms. Despite changes in curriculum in the UK over twenty years with the introduction of a national curriculum and a national literacy strategy (NLS), classroom research has shown that classroom discourse is still dominated by teacher talk. In fact both the questions and statements from the teacher seem to be increasing. Moyles, Hargreaves and Merry (2001), using the same observation record and coding system as Galton 20 years earlier and again just before the introduction of the NLS (Galton, 1980, 1999), found that all 'conversation strategies' had increased.

Questioning had almost doubled from 15.6 % to 28.6% as a percentage of all observations, and the distribution of question types had also changed. Higher order closed questions almost doubled, as a percentage of all questions, and silent interaction, including listening to children read and reading stories to them, had more

than halved. Questions about task supervision, i.e. how or where to do a task, have reduced drastically despite overall high levels of task supervision. The research team speculate that, by telling rather than asking children how to do their tasks, teachers may be fostering increased teacher dependency.

### **Teacher talk and the use of scaffolding**

Campbell's paper is set in an era when social constructivist views of learning were gaining momentum. Vygotskian learning theories focused attention on the learner as a social being and on the importance of the adult in learning. The assumption that all learning is socially based played a major role in shaping the research agenda (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2000). In addition, the work of Bruner explored the nature of the adult role and described how the adult can scaffold the learning by building bridges between what the child already knows and what the teacher is teaching. An underlying premise of scaffolding is that the support is only temporary and that, ultimately, responsibility is transferred to the learner. This is what Edwards and Mercer (1987) refer to as the 'handover of independence'. They argue that this rarely occurs.

Both the Campbell and Hoffman papers considered the response, feedback and, when appropriate, further questioning that teachers used when listening to children read. These interchanges provide the opportunities for teachers to provide the scaffolding that will enable the child to build the bridge from what she already knows to what she is learning. Campbell argues that teachers' responses when listening to children read are more complex than had previously been thought. He categorises seven different feedback moves (four positive and three negative) given by teachers in response to

children's reading. Similarly Hoffman examines the nature of the feedback but also acknowledges that feedback is different according to the reading ability of the children. He argues that the closed response often given to less able readers reflects low expectations and could restrict their progress.

Wilkinson and Silliman (1994) identify two different styles of scaffolding: directive and supportive. Directive scaffolding is the most commonly found and reflects the type of classroom discourse described above in which teachers control the discourse and acceptable answers are predetermined in the teacher's mind. They identify the IRF sequence as the most well known and most studied of directive scaffolds and argue that it results in children adopting a passive orientation to learning. In contrast, Wilkinson and Silliman suggest that supportive scaffolds directly mirror Vygotsky's views. These derive from initial work by Palinscar and Brown (1984) on reciprocal teaching: a dialogue based, active learning approach in which an attempt was made to bring about classroom interaction that avoided closing down the interaction. A review of research into reciprocal teaching was published in the *Journal of Research in Reading* (Moore, 1988).

Further studies on instructional conversations as central mechanisms for supporting active engagement in learning to read have been conducted particularly with at-risk students or those who are already failing (Brown & Campione, 1994, Palinscar & Klenk, 1992; Pressley, 1998). Van der Meij (1993) discussed the potential advantages of teaching children to ask questions. He cites Dillon (1988, p. 47), who asserted that 'almost everywhere children are schooled to become masters at answering questions and to remain novices at asking them'. Van der Meij found that children could be

successfully encouraged to ask closed, text based and explicit questions. He argues that in order to bring children to raise questions that search for a deeper understanding specific training may be needed. In retrospect it seems unsurprising that, if this type of questioning is pervasive in classrooms, it will be this type of questioning that children adopt.

In Australia, the work of Brian Cambourne and others has closely analysed the teaching of teachers who use talk to help children think more effectively about specific aspects of literacy. In these interactions, even if only a few minutes in length,

“both teacher and child have their best opportunities to engage in genuine negotiations of meaning. The teacher, by responding contingently to the children, can gain insights into what they know and how they are thinking. And the children not only become aware of the limits of their competence and knowledge but they also develop their competence and fine-tune their knowledge by using the teacher’s competence and consciousness to complement their own” (Geekie, Cambourne & Fitzsimmons, 1999, p.147).

Cambourne argues that this view of teaching reflects Piagetian belief that children learn by actively engaging with their environment but also Vygotskian theory in which learning is a communal activity taking place within a cultural framework.

Many (2002), in a naturalistic study of conversations between teachers and children about literacy and non-fiction texts, proposes that such classroom environments are socio-constructivist in nature and deviate from traditional classroom structures that emphasise teacher talk and the IRF discourse structure. She argues that scaffolded

instruction underscores both the role of the teacher and the role of the child as ‘co-participants in negotiating meaning and in informing the nature of the instructional conversations’ (p379). She quotes Meyer (1993, p.51)

“First, we must maintain the theoretical underpinnings of social constructivism. Scaffolded instruction must reflect the understanding that learners construct knowledge; teachers cannot simply give knowledge to students. Scaffolded instruction also must reflect the understanding that context will influence how and what is learned”.

### **Interaction in ‘effective’ classrooms**

In the studies cited above (Campbell, 1981; Hoffman, 1984), the hearing of children reading as individuals (Campbell) and in groups (Hoffman) was seen to be the most pervasive pattern of interaction around reading in classrooms at the time. One reason Campbell gives for his study is to ‘confirm or reject the view that for many teachers the hearing children read activity is concerned more with supervision of reading progress than with the teaching of reading’ (Campbell, 1981, p44). This view is reflected some years later in England by government inspectors. ‘For many pupils in year 2 (age 7), being heard read was the main teaching technique they experienced. In general, teachers set too much store by this activity and became so involved in the heavy demands it made upon them that they tended to overlook its limitations.’ (Ofsted, 1996, para.37). Now, due to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in England at least, there has been a change to much larger amounts of whole class teaching and considerably less one to one or teacher/group interaction.

Studies of so-called 'effective' teaching have identified direct teaching and whole class interaction as features of effective practice (e.g. Scheerens, 1992; Slavin, 1996). The NLS describes effective teaching of literacy as being both discursive and interactive (DfEE, 1998). However, critics argue that there is no real description of what this would look like in the classroom (English, Hargreaves & Hislam, 2002). This echoes Campbell's quotation (p.55) of Goodacre's complaint that, 'teachers are exhorted to hear children read but indications as to what this might entail in actual teacher verbal behaviour is not stated'. (Goodacre, 1974). Studies into these classroom contexts in both the UK and the USA show that in literacy teaching the recitation script is still prevalent (Myhill, 2002; Marshall, Smagorinsky & Smith, 1995; Nystrand, 1997), with teachers seeking predetermined answers to their questions, particularly about the interpretation of texts.

Research looking specifically at whole class interaction in the literacy hour (the main teaching element of the NLS) have identified the same sorts of criticism that were being made of whole class teaching prior to the NLS. The SPRINT project (Moyle et al, 2001) showed that task focused interactions and 'rapid-fire' closed questions had increased in line with the NLS aims to increase whole class teaching and emphasis on pace. Whereas there was an increase in higher order interactions involving reasoning with 7-11 year olds, there was a heavy emphasis on factual recall with the younger children. Burns and Myhill (2004) support this. They report on a study that investigated interaction with children aged 4-7 and found that interaction mostly consisted of pupils participating only on request. They argue that there was little constructive meaning making observed in such interactions. Similarly, Mroz, Hardman and Smith (2000), who studied 10 teachers' interactions in the literacy hour,

argue that despite the NLS' endorsement of interactive whole class teaching, there are still few opportunities for pupils to question or explore ideas. As yet there seems to be no clear agreement of what constitutes high quality interaction in whole class contexts. The requirement for pre-determined outcomes and a fast pace seems to militate against reflection and exploration of ideas.

Wells, despite his criticism of teacher child interaction, has argued that the IRF formula in classroom dialogue does not have to be repressive or encouraging of passive learning. He argues that the styles of interaction proposed by educators or employed by teachers reflect opposing views of education. The IRF script, where the closing feedback passes judgement and passes on, is advocated by those who see education to be

“for cultural reproduction and for ensuring that students appropriate the artefacts and practices that embody the solutions to problems encountered in the past. Indictments of the pervasiveness of triadic dialogue tend to occur in texts that are more concerned with the responsibility of educational institutions for cultural renewal and for the formation and empowerment of its individual members to deal effectively with future problems.” (Wells, 1999, p.168).

Thus Wells proposes that a form of classroom discourse is needed that points to new understandings and new interpretations of literacy. He argues that teacher child interaction that does not rely on triadic dialogue is indeed possible.

### **Critical perspectives on classroom discourse**

Whereas the work from the last fifteen to twenty years described above has been based on Vygotskian perspectives, the aspect of Vygotsky's theories that has taken precedence is the importance of the role of the adult. Less attention has been paid to Vygotsky's view of communication as a powerful cultural tool. Nevertheless, some researchers have considered the wider implications of classroom interaction and how this reflects the idea of classrooms as sites of power relationships. Mehan (1994) asked whether children who learn to conform through passive participation such as the style of interaction found in many classrooms could ever become active participants in a democratic society. Lemke (1990) argued that this type of interaction served to control pupil behaviour and the dissemination of knowledge.

Luke (1992) studied the classroom discourse in literacy teaching in a first grade classroom in Australia. He describes the IRF discourse patterns as the 'training of the mouth' (p126). He argues that this discourse in literacy teaching does not reflect the literacy practices used in life outside school, but is based in a concern for discipline and the promotion of school literacy practices. In a later study of group reading in classrooms with different ethnic groups, Luke et al (1994) explored how the text and the interaction around the text positioned students in particular cultural identities that did not reflect their own socio-cultural realities.

Bernstein's work on pedagogy is now arousing new interest. He considered the way in which classroom discourse reflected the dominant culture. He argued that pedagogic communication is a crucial medium of symbolic control and that power relations are transformed into discourse and discourse into power relations. Moss and Erben (2000)

propose that Bernstein's work, for many years misinterpreted as being more about social class differences, now looks different and is seen as more about

“the fundamental relations between forms of knowledge, the social and institutional processes through which they are disseminated, their links to the formation of differentiated subject identities, and the reproduction and distribution of social power.” (p.2).

Thus, interaction between teacher and pupils is seen not only as an activity in which both parties interpret each other's intentions but a discourse set within a broader context. The discourse patterns not only reflect the dominant position of the teacher over the child but the dominant conception of literacy over other interpretations: schooled literacy over literacy as social practice (Street, 1984). Furthermore Bernstein (2000) argues that the strong classification and framing of literacy in classrooms today can be seen as a control mechanism that has implications well beyond the classroom.

Recent papers examining the discourse of interaction between teachers and children about reading have drawn on the work of Bakhtin (see Brandst , 2004, Holquist, 1990). Bakhtin, like Vygotsky before him, saw language as a cultural tool. The forces of power in society try to posit a single discourse as the norm. This monologic discourse implies an authoritative stance towards other types of discourse. Bakhtin (1981) argued that linguistic production is essentially dialogic, formed in the process of social interaction in which different social values interact in speech.

Haworth (1999) analysed the language of groups of children in primary classrooms as they talked about texts. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, she identifies both

monologic and dialogic features in the children's discourse. She proposes that children's use of monologic discourse, in which there is a tendency for an authoritative speaker to close up the dialogue, has its origins in whole class interaction as the dominant genre of classroom discourse and reflects learners who see the teacher rather than their peers as their natural audience. She argues that those children who were able to adopt a more dialogic form of discourse were better able to enter into exploratory talk around text and that this type of discourse was more appropriate 'in any classroom based on neo-Vygotskian and social constructivist principles of learning' (p. 114).

Skidmore (2003) draws on Bakhtin to analyse two examples of classroom discourse between a teacher and a small group of children in a guided group reading session. He starts from the premise that

“At any historical moment, the totality which we call language is made up of many different, mutually contradictory languages, refracting the different socio-ideological positions of various social groups.” (p.284).

He too compares styles of teacher pupil discourse and argues that one exemplifies what Bakhtin calls 'pedagogical dialogue' in which someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error, as opposed to 'internally persuasive discourse'. In internally persuasive dialogue, the dialogue is all-important and no word can ever be final. As quoted in Alexander (2004, p.19) 'if an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue'. Skidmore argues that, where children are encouraged to take on a wider range of speaking roles, classroom interaction and dialogue between and among pupils and teacher can enable the development of individual powers of reflection about texts as

opposed to ‘the ability to reproduce a canonical interpretation of the text’ (Skidmore, 2003, p.289).

### **Concluding thoughts**

This meander through the past twenty-three years has reflected a widening of the lens through which classroom interaction, especially in the teaching of reading, is studied.

The selection of themes and research studies used to illustrate this has been necessarily eclectic. These studies reflect a growing understanding that

- literacy is more than a static series of skills to be mastered but a social practice that changes and develops through use;
- learning to read requires active engagement on the part of the learner and that how the teacher interacts with the learner affects how active that engagement can be;
- learning takes place within a wider context in which the definition of literacy as well as teachers’ and learners’ contributions reflect the norms and values of that society.

High quality interaction has become the new dogma. However, as Wells points out, different views of the purposes of education lead to different interpretations of what is meant by ‘quality interaction’. There is evidence in literature of a conflict between dialogue that is intended to engage pupils and lead them to an often predetermined outcome, and dialogue in which meanings are less fixed and that is intended to empower. From a theoretical perspective, there may be a conflict between the Vygotskian role of the teacher providing the cultural scaffolding to guide the reader to an understanding of today’s texts, and the agency of the pupils to go beyond the teacher’s stance to an interpretation that is located in their own experience and

futures. From a practical perspective, teachers have to decide whether their interaction in teaching reading reflects an authoritative stance well suited to cultural reproduction and the meeting of pre-set targets, or whether they adopt a dialogic form of interaction that allows for a more fluid and open interpretation of text and less prescribed outcomes.

The research agenda for the *next* twenty-five years is challenging. Researchers will continue to examine closely the dialogue that takes place between teacher and child in the teaching of reading. These studies will make contributions to theory by the way the dialogue is interpreted and the lens through which it is viewed. However, different epistemologies give rise to different research studies with different outcomes, which makes the evaluation of different styles of interaction difficult. Research must also make a contribution to practice by examining the benefits (both immediate and long-term) of different kinds of dialogue for children and their development as readers. In addition, we need to look again at patterns of interaction in the home and consider how different styles of interaction reflect or conflict with the home. Eve Gregory's work in London has shown not only how teaching styles in school differ considerably from some community schools, but also how children 'syncretise' their understandings of literacy from the different contexts. In an analysis of older and younger siblings' interactions about reading it was found that 'older siblings employed a series of intricate and finely tuned strategies to support the young readers as they struggled with the text' (Kelly, Gregory & Williams, 2002, p.75.). They effectively grafted strategies from their Bengali and Arabic classes onto strategies experienced in their mainstream school. Such evidence clearly shows us that, whilst

what teachers do is important, it is interpreted and transformed by the learner and the larger social and cultural context in which the learner exists.

Bernstein (1993) asked for,

“the development of languages of description which will facilitate a *multi-level* understanding of pedagogic discourse, the varieties of its practice and contexts of its realisation and production.” (Bernstein, 1993, p.xxiii).

The past twenty-five years have seen a growth in our understanding of the complexity of the interaction between teachers and those learning to read. It is to be hoped that over the *next 25* years, research can gain further insight into the nature of the relationship between styles of interaction and the development readers’ skills and attitudes.

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