

The Dynamics of Classroom Talk in Moroccan Primary School: Towards Dialogic Pedagogy

**My Essaid Chafi (corresponding author), Elmostapha Elkhouzai and
Abdelkarim Arhlam**

saidchafi@yahoo.com

+212 0678506040

**Univ Hassan I, FSTS, Laboratory IDDS, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science,
26000 Settat, Morocco**

Abstract : This study reports on the nature of classroom talk and the dynamics of interaction within dominant pedagogical practices in Moroccan primary classrooms, namely the patterns of engagement between teachers and pupils. The main purpose is the identification of key issues impacting on classroom talk and patterns of teacher-pupil interaction as research suggests effectual management of the quality of classroom interaction is likely to result in promoting the quality of teaching and learning. The theoretical framework underpinning this research is embedded within the sociocultural perspective that accentuates the social nature of development and conceptualizes learning as a matter of participation in a social process of knowledge construction. The design of the study was observational, applying focused-whole class observation. Analysis of interaction was predicated upon audio-recordings and classroom observation of twelve classrooms in four primary schools. The outcomes unraveled the preponderance of teacher talk, providing scarce opportunities for pupils learning, and operating in highly conventional discourse patterns. Moroccan primary classroom practices are still heavily oriented towards a transmission model of teaching and largely curriculum-driven. The wider implications of the findings for enhancing the quality of classroom interaction through fostering learner's agency and active participation are taken into account. Dialogic teaching, as a teaching framework where meanings are jointly explored, negotiated and constructed, is proposed to assist teachers upgrade their classroom practices by capitalizing on talk as a powerful pedagogic instrument to engage pupils cognitively.

Keywords: classroom talk, Teacher talk, interaction, dialogic teaching, Public Primary School Teachers

1. Introduction

Although learners' performance may not be a simple direct consequence of the teaching act, the dynamics of teaching largely determine how much children learn (Grouws, 1981). Teachers establish patterns of general conduct during lessons while on their part students develop certain types of behavior that correspond to these patterns. These combined instructional patterns and learners' participation generate a particular classroom environment marked by specific interaction patterns that promote or impede learning. Teacher talk and teacher-student interaction constitute a primary source of information input. Language mediates the processes and interactions involved in

the construction of meaning. Classroom talk and interaction have been a subject of interest for numerous researchers given the fundamental position of verbal discourse in meaning making by learners and its centrality for teaching and learning (e.g. Edwards and Mercer, 1987; Cazden, 2001; Alexander, 2004). These researchers, among others, argue that the pervasive ‘triadic dialogue’-initiation, response, feedback- (Lemke, 1990) in classroom has restrictive effects on learners’ cognitive engagement in the sense that learners’ responses remain short and teacher-framed and hence hamper learners’ contributions in the construction of meaning.

It is noteworthy that among the objectives of primary education in Morocco as enshrined in the National Charter for Education and Training (2000) are the acquisition of basic skills and abilities that develop learner autonomy and the inculcation of the attitude and ability to think critically in Moroccan learners. The essence is to develop in learners active participation in the solution of societal problems both at the individual and collective levels, and therefore become functional and effective members of Moroccan society. Unfortunately, however, as the results of this study indicate, classroom practices in Moroccan primary classrooms do not push towards fulfilling above stated objectives. The reality of classroom practice does not correspond to the highly advocated educational ideal set by the National Charter for Education and Training. Monologic teaching still prevails in classrooms. The emphasis is on recalling information rather than genuine exploration of a topic. Teachers transmit knowledge to be regurgitated by learners who are expected to passively and unselectively copy and reproduce the conveyed information in its original, objective form. Horizontal information flow is quasi-absent under the pressure of teacher-fronted interaction. Teacher dominance supports the traditional power relationships of the classroom and conventional norms of social behavior that sustain pedagogical practices geared towards transmitting pre-packaged knowledge.

There seems to be a dearth of data into how Moroccan primary school teachers instruct in the classroom. Hence the need for fieldwork upon which to base decisions and formulate policies in order to bridge the gap between the rhetoric and educational reality. This current study provides an analysis of classroom talk and interactive practices prevalent in primary school classroom, and explores utility of such analysis for improving pedagogic practices in Moroccan primary classrooms.

2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is embedded within the sociocultural perspective that conceptualizes the classroom as a cultural location of meaning in which relationships, functions, regulations, values and norms are socially constructed (Cole, 1996; Castanheira, et al, 2001) into being the local interactions of the community. Researchers within this tradition treat education and cognitive development as cultural processes whereby knowledge is not possessed individually but also shared amongst members of communities; and understandings are jointly constructed through their involvement in events which are shaped by cultural and historical factors. Education is viewed as occurring through dialogue whereby “the interactions between students and teachers” echo “the historical development, cultural values and social practices of the societies and communities in which educational institutions exist” (Rojas-Drummond and Mercer, 2003). The socially established cultural practices of the classroom become evident and repeatedly reconstructed in the pedagogical and social life of the classroom, mirrored in the customary ways of participation and communication (Wenger, 1998; Wells, 1999). The interaction patterns in the classroom community can be seen as both fostering and also impeding opportunities for learning to classroom members (Nathan and Knuth, 2003; Castanheira et al., 2001). Sociocultural views of learning hinge

on theories that underscore the social nature of development. The most influential of these theories is based on the works of Vygotsky and his followers (e.g. Wertsch, 1991; Davydov, 1995). The sociocultural perspective has also been influenced by sociological theories about the social construction of reality (e.g. Mead, 1934; Berger and Luckmann, 1996) and by anthropological studies on the relationship between culture and learning (e.g. Spindler and Spindler, 1955). Human activities in the sociocultural tradition are socially mediated and thus learning is seen as a matter of participation in a social process of knowledge construction rather than an individual endeavor (Vygotsky, 1978). Knowledge emerges through the network of interaction and is distributed among interactants. Learning is a process that, as stated by Lave and Wenger (1991), takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. Education is seen as a dialogic process with intellectual development being shared to a large extent through interaction. In educational settings, teacher-student and student-teacher interaction are grounded as being of significance and consequence.

Language, from a socio-cultural perspective, is deemed a pivotal instrument for constructing knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) argued that the acquisition and use of language transform children's thinking. He depicted language as a cultural tool for the development and sharing of knowledge and as a psychological tool for structuring the processes and content of individual thought. Vygotsky suggested that there is a close relationship between these two kinds of use which can be briefed in the claim that 'intermental' (social, interactional) activity shapes some of the most 'intramental' (individual, cognitive) capabilities, with children's participation in joint activities forming new personal understandings and ways of thinking. Language acquisition and use, from a sociocultural perspective, are seen, then, as having a deep effect on the development of thinking (Mercer, 2000, 2008; Wells, 1999). As a result, the study of talk in educational settings has acquired broader significance, and researchers have investigated varied ways to make effective use of it in classrooms.

3. Classroom Talk

Talk mediates learning; we learn in and through language (Vygotsky, 1994). The patterns of talk we generate and pursue in the classroom mold the kind of learning likely to take place. Theory, research and practice seem to conclude that emerged, elaborated student talk in the classroom fosters learning. Such articulate students talk upholds inquiry, collaborative learning, high order thinking and making knowledge personally meaningful (Johnson, 1995; Nystrand, 1997).

If students cannot voice out their minds at school, they lose the component of interaction. The role that articulate learner talk can undertake as a path to literacy (Rubin, 1990) and as a vehicle for developing communicative practices (Hymes, 1972; Canale and Swain, 1980) is well documented. Nevertheless, for talk to sustain literacy, communication competencies, high level thinking skills and academic achievement, it is prerequisite that students engage in a broad array of classroom activities that go beyond presentational or recitation-type student talk. Students need to be involved in meaningful and authentic conversational and instructional exchanges between and among students and teachers (Nassaji and Wells, 2000; Kamberelis, 2001).

Alexander (2008) suggests that talk remains, of all the tools for cultural and pedagogical intervention in human development and learning, the most pervasive in its use and powerful in its possibilities. Talk vitally mediates "the cognitive and cultural spaces between teacher and learner, between society and the individual, between what the child knows and understands and he or she has yet to know and understand" (Alexander, 2008, p. 92). In this way language structures thinking

and speech molds the higher mental process sine qua non for learning to materialize. Talk is central to most what happens in classrooms. By dint of talk, concepts are explained, tasks demonstrated, questions posed, and ideas discussed. Talk is pervasive in any significant school activity. Vygotsky asserts the centrality of social interaction in human development and ties talk to children thinking, learning and development:

Every function in the child's central development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)... All the higher mental functions originate as actual relations between people (1978, p. 57).

Vygotsky (1978) contends that thinking originates in social interaction-that discourse used in interaction is internalized in an individual cognition. Thinking can be promoted through internalized talk on different ways. Initially, language is a cognitive resource: one becomes 'fluent speaker' of language and able to use its key concepts and expressions (Lemke, 1990) by exposition to and participation in certain ways of making of language. Besides, participation in talk allows individuals exposition to alternative views and dimensions that challenge, broaden and elaborate their world-view. Furthermore, habitual interactional patterns are internalized as habitual ways of thinking. The cognitive tools at our disposal and the habits of mind by which we utilize those tools are shaped by the ways of talking into which we are socialized. Numerous studies have supported this relationship between talk and pupil learning (e.g., Mercer, 2008; Alexander, 2001, 2008; Edwards and Mercer, 1987).

Interest in researching classroom talk has blossomed with the mounting recognition of its centrality in the process of learning and its value as evidence of how relationships and meanings are organized. What linguists call 'the primacy of speech' has gained respect for talk that has been granted large academic backing in psychology, child development, sociolinguistics, and sociology (Edwards and Westgate, 1994). The emphasis on talk in classroom research stems from the fact that it is largely through talk that we build and crystallize our concept of self "as members of various social 'worlds' which can be brought into focus and in which we can locate ourselves and recognize the values, rights and obligations which permeate them"(Edwards and Westgate, 1994).

Any enhancement of the role of talk in shaping and improving learning entails interaction patterns which are geared to minimize the teacher's role as orchestrator of classroom talk, and instead reposition the teacher as facilitator for learning. The belief that language is fundamental to the process of learning (Vygotsky, 1972) and upon the intricate nexus of thought and language in giving shape to meaning is deemed essential to any consideration of how classroom talk fosters learning. In a similar vein, Mercer (1987, p. 20) confirms that talk is both "a medium for teaching and learning "and "one of the materials from which a child constructs meaning": put differently: talk is a process, a tool for learning and a product which can be formally evaluated. This potential has been summed up (Howe, 1992) under four headings: formulation-the way talk can crystallize thought and shape ideas; reformulation-the way talk clarifies and focuses idea; communication-the way talk can be used to interact with others and gain feedback; and reflection-the way talk can be used to reflect upon learning.

Teachers' excessive control of classroom talk results in 'non-productive' interactions which are detrimental as they limit pupils input through preventing them from engaging in the kinds of open dialogue necessary for appropriating the tools of learning and originating ownership of meaning. One-sided and cognitively undemanding character of classroom talk engenders three consequences

(Alexander, 2005): (1) children may not learn, in classrooms at least, as quickly or as efficiently as they might ; (2) children may not sufficiently develop the narrative, explanatory and questioning power necessary to demonstrate to their teachers what they know and understand, or do not know and understand and to engage in decisions about how and they should learn; (3) teachers in these situations may remain ill-informed about learners' current understanding, and therefore lose the diagnostic element which is essential if their teaching is to be other than hit-or-miss.

4. Methodology

There is a paucity of data into how teachers actually teach in Moroccan primary classrooms. There is a need for field data on which to base decisions and formulate policies so as to bridge the gap between the rhetoric and reality of educational development. The design of this research was observational. Service teachers were observed in classes and recordings were made following aspects of classroom interaction. Applying "focused whole-class observation" (Marriott, 2001, p. 12) enabled the researcher to be 'covert': not to reveal exactly what he was looking for in the observation to reduce 'participants bias' when they try to accommodate to what they assume the researcher was looking for. Additionally, having a checklist of entire criteria to observe helped the researcher to stay focused on aspects he wanted to investigate in the study.

Data were collected in four primary schools in Marrakech, including rural, urban, and suburban sites. All of them were public schools. They were selected to be as representative as possible – geographically, economically, and culturally. The schools operate from grade 1 to 6. The language of instruction is Standard Arabic and French. In practice the language of instruction turned out to be a blending of standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic. Even the teaching of French is heavily punctuated by the use of Moroccan Arabic. The numbers of pupils in classrooms ranged from 30 to 45. Most classrooms have relatively impoverished resource settings, in which the "raw materials" of information and ideas were constrained to those found in texts. And the main teaching aids in most classrooms were the chalkboard and textbooks.

Data collection took five weeks. Methods included eight to ten hours per week of classroom observation and around three to four hours of audio-taping. The focus was upon patterns of talk in the narrow context of classrooms. During classroom observation, I participated most through listening to what was going on in the classroom. In order to identify the types and patterns of interaction in classroom talk, the researcher tracked the questions posed, the answers that they generated and how the teacher followed up on these answers. I specifically focused on the effect of preceding utterances on subsequent ones, and to what extent teachers' questions influenced what pupils contributed and whether they triggered further thinking. Analysis thus centered on systematically investigating what was observable in terms of turns or moves and then on whether any emerging patterns in the forms and functions of the discourse could be discerned, mainly in association with the teachers' input (Westgate and Hughes, 1997). The discourse analysis system chiefly focused on the three-part Initiation–Response–Evaluation/Feedback (IRE/F) structure.

5. Findings and Discussion

This study indicates that, in general, classrooms are full of talk, but little of that talk is used to promote genuine interaction. The dominant form of classroom practices emphasizes whole class monologic interaction, which constructs pupils as respondents only and limits their talk. Instruction is largely didactic by way of "teaching by telling", "questioning to evaluate", and the intention is to convey information as efficiently as possible. Such practices institute normative patterns of

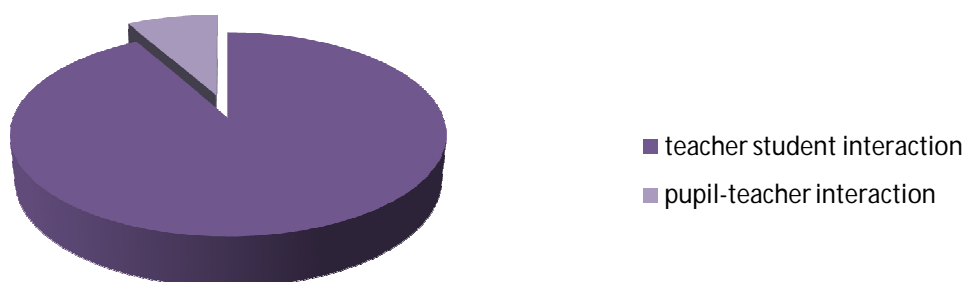
interaction, which have been likened to a script followed by teacher and pupils. Teacher talk in the observed classrooms provides limited opportunities for pupils learning. Teacher talk dominates, and teacher-pupil interaction operates in highly conventional discourse patterns. The 'IRE/F' interaction pattern is rarely disrupted. Teacher-pupil interaction often takes the form of lengthy recitations of questions (by the teacher) and brief answers (by individual pupils or the whole class). The teacher's evaluation or feedback serves to draw an interaction sequence to a close.

There is very little talk initiated by pupils. Classroom talk seems to be predominantly structured upon a framework of teacher initiation and single and short pupil answer. Teacher orchestration of classroom talk and interaction patterns that maintain her control over talk is preponderant. Teacher talk is heavily curriculum-driven and strongly oriented towards a transmission model of teaching. Teacher talk is largely predicated on the drilling of facts and routines through, sometimes, tedious repetition, piling up knowledge and 'understanding' mainly through low level questions designed to assess recall of previously taught material, or to cue pupils strongly to figure out the answer from the clues provided in the question.

6. Interaction Patterns

Figure: 1

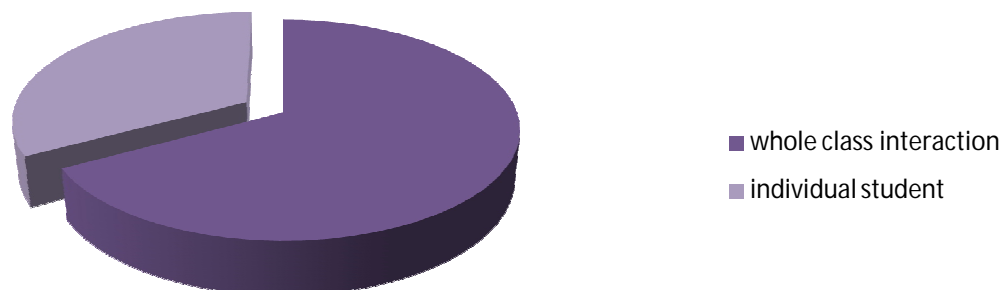
Teacher-initiated interaction constituted over 92% of total interactions that occurred over the lessons observed, covering different subjects. Pupils initiated interactions, by contrast, comprised only 8% of all interactions (figure 1). Pupil-teacher interactions were mostly related to procedure, of low level and reflect pupils' 'shallow understanding' of the material presented.



The analysis shows that the teachers' level of involvement in the interaction is very high. They ask questions, initiate interactions and evaluate responses. However, the students' level of involvement in the interaction is very low. They are almost restricted to the responding moves. Teacher dominance supported the traditional power relationships of the classroom that reproduced a type of pedagogy meant to transmit pre-packaged knowledge. Such practices established normative patterns of interaction linked to a script abided by both teachers and pupils. The teacher elected pupil speakers: there was little or no acknowledgement of pupil self-selection; pupil responses tended to be short, and the teacher did not support expansion of responses; and used many 'test' questions where the implied task of the pupil was to contribute a pre-determined 'right' answer in response.

Figure: 2

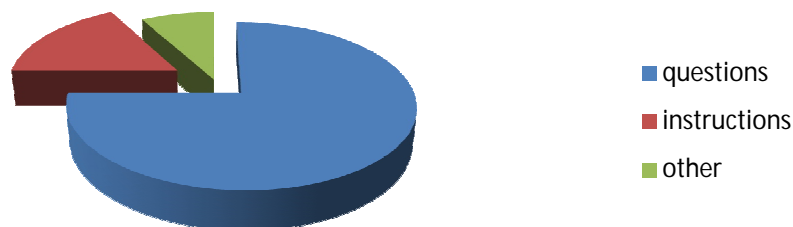
Teacher-student interactions were largely addressed to the whole class. This pattern (figure 2) made up around 67%. The rest, 33%, targeted individual pupils.



The dominant form of classroom practice emphasized whole class monologic interaction, which constructs pupils as respondents only with limited discourse. Teacher's use of whole class teaching excessively contributes to a controlled environment that typifies the traditional view that focuses on information transmitting and has a fixed intent and outcome. Teachers are concerned with 'pace' at the expense of discussion and extended pupils 'contributions. This style of interactivity imposes discursive patterns and functions which detract from authentic dialogue. Pupils have fewer opportunities to question or explore ideas to help them regulate their own thinking. With this practice, Classrooms remain a platform where the significance of teaching as discussion and dialogue is underemphasized and where an exchange with the intent to share information and solve problems as well as achieve common understanding through structured and cumulative questioning, guided discussion and understanding are unfulfilled (Alexander, 2004). Watkins (2005) argues that the shortage of above strategies has reduced the agency of teachers as well as that of pupils who are conceptualized as vessels into which a curriculum is poured.

Figure: 3

In terms of categorizing teacher-student interactions, teacher questioning is a prominent feature of classroom talk. Teacher-student questions comprised over seventy-five per cent of overall teacher-student interactions. The remaining interactions functioned as instructions to students or organizational or social exchanges. Questions were mainly factual, of low level category, lacking scope, depth and mainly check whether knowledge has been conveyed rather than challenge and engage pupils cognitively in the organization of their own learning.



Instructions involved the teacher telling the class what to do next, or instructing the class to follow certain procedures collectively or to copy worked examples and summaries of lessons from the blackboard into their copybooks. Non-learning instructions included organizational and behavioral instructions.

Interactions were brief rather than sustained. To maximize pupils' participation teachers moved from one pupil to another and from one question to another in rapid succession in the interest of maintaining pace rather than developing and sustaining incremental lines of understanding and thinking. Instances of speculative talk were of very low frequency. Classroom talk rarely used language effectively as a tool for thinking collectively and making explicit learners' thought processes.

The majority of teachers' time was spent either explaining or using structure questions and answer sequences, far from encouraging and extending pupils' contributions to foster high level of classroom interaction and cognitive engagement. Questions were mainly geared to funnel pupils' responses towards prescribed answers (Alexander, 2001).

Current feedback practices are not fit for purpose. Teacher feedback is still traditional in the sense that it is often minimal and judgmental rather than informative, and in such cases the cognitive potential of exchanges is squandered. Right answers were publicly praised and 'wrong' answers were ignored and sometimes denounced. Improving feedback processes entails viewing feedback not as information transmission, but more as an interactive exchange in which elucidation is shared, meanings discussed and expectations shed light on.

The three-part exchange structure known a 'triadic dialogue' (Lemke, 1990) or 'recitation script' described by Goodwin (2001, p. 11), is pervasive in the observed classrooms. This discourse format typically consists of three moves: initiation (often via teacher questions), student response, and teacher evaluation/feedback, and has been widely referred to as 'IRE/F' (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 2001). The teacher poses a closed question that is basically information seeking that requires a prescribed short and closed answer that is often pitched at the recall or lower-order cognitive level. Following that the teacher praises right answers and rectifies or reprimands 'wrong' ones. The triadic dialogue, which is typical of traditional teaching, is often perceived to have restrictive effects on pupils thinking as their responses remain brief and teacher-framed, thus minimizing their role in the co-construction of meaning (Alexander, 2008). However, Wells (1993) argued that "it is this third step in the co-construction of meaning that the next cycle of the learning-and-teaching spiral has its point of departure" (p.35). Hence, the triadic dialogue can acquire educational level if teachers can scaffold pupils' extension of knowledge through further supportive dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the IRE/F modes that reflect patterns of interactions in Moroccan classrooms, teachers undertake the role of the expert whose primary instructional task is to elicit information from pupils to verify to what extent they know the material. Teachers serve as gatekeepers to learning opportunities. Cazden (1988) revealed how the use of this pattern facilitates teacher control of the interaction going on rather than pupils learning of the content of the lesson. Nystrand (1997) found that pupils in classrooms whose interaction was limited primarily to IRE script were less able to recall and understand the topical content than others who were involved in more topically-related, participatory discussions during which teachers affirmed pupils participation in the process of knowledge building, challenged pupils to extend their thinking and engagement with the subject

matter, and provided opportunities for them to take ownership of the ideas. These strategies in turn, Nystrand argued, helped to create an inclusive classroom culture that valued participation and learning and ultimately fostered pupils' academic performance.

The pattern of classroom interaction varied a little between lessons or across subjects. Most of classroom talk comprised of teacher explanation and question and answer sequences. The lessons appeared strongly reiterative rather than developmental in nature to ensure progression in learning. Learning tasks across subjects mostly lay emphasis on factual; propositional knowledge rather than procedural knowledge, and opportunities for individual children to respond were scarce. The problem of how participation was further aggravated by large size classrooms as well as by the number of children competing for the teacher's attention to respond to elicitation. Even when pupils responded to teacher's questions or statements, their answers remained brief and did not exceed few words in most cases. The analysis of the brevity of responses suggests that pupils had limited occasions to interact at length with teacher's initiations

The following extract, taken from Grade 3 (aged 10 approximately), a reading lesson typical of the discourse style used by many observed teachers. The teacher writes the lesson topic, 'MAILMAN', up on the board. She then proceeds with a verbal explanation that takes a question-and-answer format and most of the class chorally answer questions or raise their hands to offer answers to questions.

1. T what jobs did we talk about before?...put everything down and listen...ah...
2. P1 (chorus) firefighters.
3. T excellent. What else?
4. P2 (chorus) teachers
5. T don't answer collectively. Raise your hands and wait for your turn.
6. T today we are going to read about the mailman's job.
7. T what does the mailman do?
8. P3 distributes letters
9. T Just letters....what else.....par.....parc...
10. P4 (chorus) parcels
11. T that's what we are going to see today.
12. T why don't we see the mailman very often these days?
13. T what's the reason? ah.... because of what...because of tech....
14. P5 technology
15. T very good. Phones have facilitated communication. They are time-saving. Technology can help you know about everything you need in a very short time. New technology has made people kind of lazy as to writing letters.
16. T understood?
17. PPP (chorus) yes
18. T Now open your books (they were already open). Read the text and pay attention to pronunciation and intonation
19. PPP Read the text. Each reads a paragraph.
20. T interrupts pupils to ask them to provide explanation for some key words in the text.
21. PPP read explanation offered in their textbook verbatim
22. T praises answers
23. T asks a series of display questions about the content of the text

24. PPP chorally offer answer to most obvious ones and individually to less obvious ones.
25. T asks about some grammatical points and their functions in the context, strongly cueing most of the answers
26. T concludes the lesson by assigning homework related to the reading text, threatening the pupils to extract some points from their marks if they fail to do their homework.

The first thing to be pointed out in this extract is that the teacher's participation falls within the structural pattern frame (IRF) described earlier. Firstly, she initiates the exchange by asking students, what jobs did we talk about before? (L1) Students reply to her question in chorus (firefighters L2). Then she evaluates the answer (L 3 excellent) and starts another sequence of IRF format. In the above extract, the teacher-student exchanges clearly follow the IRF sequence, which allows the teacher to maintain control over the structure of the classroom talk. Students seem to recognize the structure and learn to speak within it. In almost every exchange, the teacher provides an initiating move (L1,3,,7,13, 16, 18), then the students responds individually or in chorus to it(L2,4,8,10,14,17), and the teacher finally evaluates the student's response (L3,15). The teacher confines pupils to answering her questions, their responses are assessed for their proximity of fit with ideas she desires them to take account of.

The extract discloses the extent to which the classroom discourse is constituted of teacher explanation and question and answer sequences. Choral responses to questions are frequent and are often used to strengthen information provided by the teacher or elicited from the pupils. Sometimes the teacher poses a question to test out the children's 'understanding' (16), again eliciting a single word choral response from the pupils (17). Pupils often make out from the intonation of the first move of an exchange whether it calls for an individual answer or a choral response. Because the discourse structure is often made up of a teacher initiation and pupil response, the lack of effective feedback normally rules out any methodical building upon pupil answers. The teacher did not seize the opportunity to probe the pupil's response. The structure of the interaction appears highly ritualized and the repertoire is clearly understood by the pupils.

The use of participation strategies through the completion of sentences; the repetition of words, choral pronouncement of 'understanding', and strongly cued answers appeared to impede engagement of pupils in higher level of thinking. It often led to the perpetuation of a restrictive, often repetitive model of teaching and learning with little exposure to different functions of classroom talk. The most prevalent methods of teaching were teacher explanation punctuated by a question and answer approach, pupils copying from the chalkboard, written exercises, whole class correction and teacher marking pupils' work. Black and William (1998) identified this pattern of classroom talk as wholly counter-productive to the enterprise of learning:

So the teacher, by lowering the level of questions and by accepting answers from a few, can keep the lesson going but is actually out of touch with the understanding of most of the class-the question-answer dialogue becomes a ritual, one in which all connive and thoughtful involvement suffer (p.8).

Classroom pedagogic practice exhibits characteristics of teacher-centered classrooms; teachers have a propensity to do most of the talking, usually ask text-based questions, appoint students to answer, and then assess their answers minimally. In such a learning setting, students are expected to reproduce information or knowledge. In other words, they remain passive in learning.

Knowledge reproduction seems to be the most preponderant form of interaction in Moroccan primary classroom. Analysis gives evidence of the ways in which learners' habituated patterns of

practice generally replicate traditional school learning in which value is positioned on individual 'products' and 'achievement'. Classroom pedagogic practice needs to be geared towards effective interaction that situates learners in a favorable position to question, to argue, to reason, to listen to others, and to contribute to problem solving. These practices are likely to equip Moroccan young learners with the prerequisite tools conducive to transformative thinking and learning in the information society.

7. Towards dialogic teaching

Moroccan primary school conventional pedagogical practices based on recitation and memorization of facts are now deemed inadequate to build up critical and creative thinking and communicative skills that students are likely to need in order to face the complex problem-solving circumstances of today's society. As regards changing teachers' interaction patterns and discourse practices as unraveled in this study, current research into classroom pedagogy proposes that teachers can upgrade their practices by using classroom talk as a powerful pedagogic instrument to engage pupils, stimulate, extend their thinking and enhance their learning and understanding in whole class, group and individual work (Nystrand et al., 1997; Nassaji and Wells, 2000). Dialogic pedagogy can substitute teacher-dominated IRF mode of interaction with more equitable structures in which participants freely exchange ideas (rather than teachers mediating all communication), discursive rights and responsibilities are more evenly distributed, all voices are offered the chance to be heard out, and questions, answers and follow-up progressively build a thematically coherent stretch of discourse (Alexander, 2006). While acquainted with that the fact teaching is a cultural activity and admitting the weight of contextual aspects on the teaching and learning course of action, it has been disputed that universal principles based on a dialogic pedagogy can enlighten and make over the learning and teaching process.

There is evidently a pressing need for the promotion of Moroccan primary school pedagogical approaches that permit learners to link formal and informal settings of learning. This is likely to foster learner's agency and active engagement in learning that stretches beyond settings and contexts. Dialogic inquiry stands out as a potential pedagogical approach for productive classroom interaction that develops learners' agency and active participation. Advocates of the idea of teaching and learning as dialogic inquiry have been motivated by attempts to reengineer the culture of formal education into "authentic communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where meanings are jointly explored and negotiated (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). An essential meaning of dialogic inquiry is that classroom members build openly and freely on each other's knowledge and experiences, and in so doing, further extend their collective thinking about the issues in questions (Ibid.). In this regard, the objective of schooling exceeds the acquisition of established facts to the internalization of intellectual competencies that allows developing independent thinkers capable of formulating, defending, scrutinizing each other's stance, negotiating and constructing new meanings.

Alexander (2004) advocated the use of dialogic teaching with aims to be "more consistently searching and more genuinely reciprocal and cumulative" than the "question-answer-tell routines of so called 'interactive teaching' teaching" (p.1). Skidmore (2000) distinguishes two types of teacher-pupil classroom discourse: 'pedagogical discourse' which is a transmission model of teaching in which a knowledgeable expert instructs someone who is ignorant, and 'internally persuasive discourse', where it is the process of dialogue and discussion which is which is vital, and where learners are emboldened to adopt a range of speaking and listening roles.

In the context of socio-constructivist framework for learning, the objective of classroom talk should be to scaffold pupils learning sensitively so that they are supported in meaning making and understanding for themselves. The outcome should be what Edwards and Mercer (1987) call “principled understanding”, where pupils understand underlying principles and generalizations rather than merely grasping superficial understanding of specific experience. This manner of talk fosters genuine learning rather than recalls what has been previously presented by the teacher.

Dialogically structured teaching can be the antidote to formulaic, monotonous and fragmented talk in classrooms. Proponents of dialogic instruction (e.g. Nystrand , 1997; Alexander, 2006; Wells, 1999) believe that it (a) promotes students engagement and learning,(b) involves fewer teacher questions and more conversational turns, and (c) is relatively unpredictable because it is negotiated as teachers and students “pick up on, elaborate and question what students say” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 7).

8. Implications

The findings of this paper have significant implications for those in charge of improving the quality of teaching and learning in Moroccan primary classrooms. The practices of teachers in classrooms reflect limited understanding of how best to support children’s learning. The traditionally didactic teacher-pupil interaction style is still dominant. Henceforth, more effective teacher education programmes are needed to address the realities of the classroom context and the need of pupils. Teachers need extended opportunities to think through new ideas and to try out new practices. Observation, coaching and talk analysis feedback can provide golden opportunities for professional development through which sympathetic discussion by groups of teacher observation data collected from their classrooms act as an effective starting point for critical reflection. Moreover, teachers’ identification of the dominant patterns of teacher-student talk in their classrooms is an essential step in the direction of evaluating those patterns and altering them. By taking notes of what is taking place in the classroom, teachers can start to ponder over what effects this has on students’ participation.

Teacher preparation programmes are encouraged to underscore the value of dialogic teaching and that the quality of classroom talk is the key to learning, and to highlight the centrality of language as a culture’s tool for mediating and shaping action. Talk in classroom is significant for pupils’ psychological development and educational progress. For this curriculum designers should allow teachers leeway in pursuing the need of their learners. Teachers should ask children to give reasons to support their views, engage them in extended discussions of topics and encourage them to see that responding need not simply be providing the ‘right’ answer. Stress should be placed on multiple positions of authority and identity, promoting negotiation and dialogue for the social construction of knowledge and understanding.

Quality talk in classrooms is contingent upon the types of questions posed. Pedagogical interaction can have greater power to provoke cognitive engagement and understanding if teachers ask challenging and high order questions that equip pupils with skill and habits of mind that permit pupils to participate effectively in the wider communicative practices to which they have increasing access. Although questioning forms only one part of good teaching. It is also the most used instructional strategy in the classroom. Therefore, for students to reap the maximum benefit from their teachers’ questioning, teachers are required to develop awareness of ways of enhancing their current techniques of posing questions to meet the needs of their students and the curriculum. Teaching should rely, to a certain extent, on questions that are “fundamentally open or

divergent...in terms of allowing a broader degree of uncertainty in what would constitute an adequate answer” (Burbules, 1993, p. 97). Divergent questions are not meant to test learners nor lead them to a narrow range of answers considered acceptable by the teacher. Rather, these questions target new understandings through meaningful inquiry. Accordingly, teachers are expected to work strategically with learner answer, prompting for justification, challenging assumptions and broadening pupil horizon. Teachers should realize that a good lesson should have a balance incorporation of both low and high level questions and select questions that emphasize major points and stimulate cognitive engagement. The implication is that to attain the most favorable results, teachers are called upon to balance ‘authoritative’ talk which dominates classroom talk with ‘dialogue’ which does not normally occur often(Mortimer and Scott , 2008; Scott, 2008) .

These suggestions are by no means a panacea to the ills of Moroccan primary classroom interaction deficiencies. However, the quality of the teacher is pivotal in raising standards in classrooms. Professional development programmes can enhance teachers’ sense of professionalism and help to raise their status in the community. More research needs to be carried out to investigate the strong cultural and linguistic influences shaping traditional classroom practices and suggests ways to go beyond them and upend the status quo towards a pedagogy that captivates pupils’ interest and establish high order thinking skills.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, R. J. (2001). *Culture and pedagogy: International comparisons in primary education*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Alexander, R. J. (2004). *Towards dialogic teaching. Rethinking classroom talk*. (1st ed.). York: Dialogos.
- Alexander, R. J. (2005). *Teaching through dialogue: the first year*, London: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.
- Alexander, R. J. (2006). *Education as dialogue: moral and pedagogical choices for a runaway world*. York: The Hong Kong Institute of Education in conjunction with Dialogos UK.
- Alexander, R. J. (2008). *Essays on pedagogy*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1996). *Social construction of Reality*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.
- Burbules, N. (1993). *Dialogue in teaching: Theory and practice*. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1–47.
- Caram, C.A., & Davis, P. B. (2005). Inviting student engagement with questioning. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 19-23.
- Castanheira, M. L.; Crawford, T.; Dixon, C., & Green, J. L. (2001). Interactional ethnography: An approach to studying the social construction of literate practices. *Linguistics and Education*, 11(4), 353–400.

- Cazden, C. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cazden, C. B. (1988). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Culture in mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Davydov, V.V. (1995). The influence of L.S. Vygotsky on education theory, research, and practice, *Educational Researcher*, 24(3), 12-21
- Edwards, A. D., & Westgate, D. P. G. (1994). *Investigating classroom talk* (Rev. and extended 2nd ed.). London: Falmer.
- Edwards, D. & Mercer, N. (1987). *Common knowledge*. London: Methuen.
- Goodwin, P. (ed.). (2001). *The Articulate Classroom*. London: David Fulton.
- Grouws, D. (1981). An approach to improving teacher effectiveness. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 11 (1), 2 - 14.
- Howe, A. (1992). *Making talk work*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: Selected readings* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.
- Johnson, K. (1995). *Understanding communication in second language classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kamberelis, G. (2001). Producing heteroglossic classroom (micro) cultures through hybrid discourse practice. *Linguistics and Education*, 12, 85–125.
- Lemke, J. L. (1990). *Talking science: Language, learning and values*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Marriott, G. (2001). *Observing teachers at work*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational
- Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, self and society: From the standpoint of social behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mercer, N. & Littleton, K. (2007). *Dialogue and the development of children's thinking: a sociocultural approach*, London: Routledge.
- Mercer, N. (2000). *Words and minds: How we use language to think together*. London : Routledge.
- Mercer, N. (1992). Talk for teaching and learning. In K. Norman (Ed.), *Thinking voices: The work of the National Oracy Project*. (pp. 215–223). London: Hodder and Stoughton for the National Curriculum Council.
- Mercer, N. (2008). Talk and the development of reasoning and understanding. *Human Development*, 51(1), 90-100.

Mortimer, E., & Scott, P. (2003). *Meaning making in secondary science classrooms*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Nassaji, H., & Wells, G. (2000). What's the use of 'Triadic Dialogue'? an investigation of teacher-student interaction. *Applied Linguistics* 21 (3), 376-406.

Nathan, M. J., & Knuth, E. J. (2003). A study of whole classroom mathematical discourse and teacher change. *Cognition and Instruction*, 21(2), 175-207.

National Charter for Education and Training. 2000. Morocco. Retrieved June 15, 2013, from planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/.../Morocco/Morocco%20Charte%20nationale...

Newman, D., Griffin, P., & Cole, M. (1989). *The construction zone: Working for cognitive change in school*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nystrand, M.; Gamoran, A.; Kachur, R.; & Prendergast, C. (1997). *Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning in the English Classroom*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rojas-Drummond, S. & Mercer, N. (2003). Scaffolding the development of effective collaboration and learning. *International Journal of Educational Research* 39, 99-111

Rubin, D. (1990). Introduction: Ways of talking about talking and learning. In Hynds, S. & Rubin D. (Eds.), *Perspectives on talk and learning* (pp. 1-20). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Scott, P. (2008). Talking a way to understanding in science classrooms. In Mercer, N. & Hodgkinson, S. (Eds.), *Exploring talk in school* (pp. 17-36). London: Sage.

Sinclair, J. McH., & Coulthard, M. C. (1975). *Towards an analysis of discourse: The English used by teachers and pupils*. London: Oxford University Press.

Skidmore, D. (2000). From pedagogical dialogue to dialogic pedagogy, *Language & Education*, 14(4), 283-296.

Spindler, G.A. & Spindler, L. (eds.). (1995). *Anthropology and Education*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Vogler, K.E. (2005). Improve your verbal questioning. *The Clearing House*, November/December, 79 (2), 98-103.

Watkins, C. (2005). *Classrooms as learning communities: What's in it for schools?* London: Routledge.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, G. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Towards a sociocultural practice and theory of education*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Wells, G. (1993). Working with a teacher in the zone of proximal development: Action research on the learning and teaching of science. *Journal of the Society for Accelerative Learning and Teaching*, 18, 127–222.

Wertsch, J. (1991). *Voices of the Mind: A Sociological Approach to Mediated Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Westgate, D. & Hughes, M. (1997). Identifying “quality” in classroom talk: An enduring research task. *Language and Education*, 11(2), 125–139.

Vygotsky, L. (1972). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1994). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1986)