SEARCHING FOR PATTERNS IN THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN’S ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

BACKGROUND

PROBLEM DEFINITION

In today’s schools, oral communicative competence (OCC) is important as a qualification supporting children’s social participation and as a condition for school-based learning. To date, however, little attention has been devoted to the development of OCC in young children and ways in which teachers can purposefully and systematically stimulate this competence. In schools, the development of OCC is largely left to children’s spontaneous development. Goal oriented and systematic support happens infrequently.

ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

We conceive of OCC as the ability of children to reach common understanding and coordinate their communicative actions by valid arguments, shared understanding and collaboration (Habermas, 1984).

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Three innovative teachers from three schools were purposefully selected. All observed classes involved children aged 4-6 years. During three mornings, classroom conversations were observed and video recorded for each of the three teachers (see figure 1).

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to distinguish teaching patterns in the education of young children’s OCC, we focused our analysis on the level of utterance. In doing so, we could distinguish what type of talk moves teachers deployed in the context of classroom conversations. We were mainly interested in talk moves that focus on recitation and give little room for children to participate, elaborate or reason (cf. IRE sequences).

RESULTS

Our coding scheme was tested and refined using data from one classroom conversation consisting of 225 teacher utterances (138 pupil utterances). In this conversation, the teacher only used 17 (8%) productive talk moves and 28 non-productive talk moves (12%). All other talk moves (80%) are neutral, meaning that they do not explicitly invite children to participate in the conversation (see figure 2 and 3).

CONCLUSION

In this study we searched for patterns in the education of young children’s OCC. Teachers play an essential role in promoting children’s OCC by orchestrating productive classroom conversations, in which children are invited to participate, reason, clarify their thoughts, etc. We developed, tested and refined a coding scheme that we evaluated as a helpful tool to search for teacher talk moves that invite children explicitly to participate in classroom conversations. Preliminary results show that teachers only marginally use productive talk moves. As a result, children only receive little opportunities to actively participate in classroom conversations. In future research we will study how to promote the use of productive talk moves in classroom conversations.

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