Listening in Classrooms

The Flag of Japan

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LISTENING
IN
CLASSROOMS

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Listening in Classrooms, First Edition

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our parents and friends,
James A. McCaslin and Shirley A. McCaslin

PREFACE

The relationships among teacher, students, and the opportunities available to them are complicated, challenging, and fundamental. Relationships, in our view, are the stuff of classrooms; relationships bond the aspirations with the realizations of schooling. In this book we develop one model that illuminates the relationship between teacher and student, and how opportunities—other persons and objects—directly (e.g., classmates, tasks) and less directly (e.g., family, nonschool events) influence that relationship. We term our model of teacher-student relationship "co-regulation" to emphasize the supportive, scaffolding role that teachers engage with students, who are themselves actively mediating their experiences.

The ultimate goal of co-regulation may well be student self-regulation; however, it is our position that students and teachers learn in classrooms together and, together, share responsibility for that learning. Students do not learn alone; they are not solely responsible for their learning, nor should they be required to "self-regulate" or "self-motivate" to compensate for or overcome inadequate instruction, materials, or opportunity. And teachers need to be more than subject-matter specialists or presenters of subject matter who teach particular content rather than students. Although an intellectual focus is important and knowledge of the subject matter basic, teachers must have the ability to care about students in ways that *demonstrate* their care.

Co-regulation is one means for demonstrating care. This text describes ways for teachers to communicate systematically and knowledgeably with students and to create structures that are supportive and transitional. We term these transitional structures "scaffolds." These scaffolds enable students to learn about learning—social and academic—so that they might get better at it and come to understand and value who they are as learners, social beings, and human beings.

Our model of co-regulation provides one way to think about how and when teachers might set specific goals to influence particular student processes (e.g., motivation, self-evaluation). The book is rich with examples and illustrations of goals that teachers may have when they listen to students.

Co-regulated learning first distinguishes teacher scaffolding from student processes. In this way specific linkages can be considered between what a teacher wishes to discuss (and influence) and how students might mediate that conversation. Second, co-regulated learning differentiates among motivation, enactment, and evaluation, as processes within students and as features of classroom learning and teacher supportive scaffolding. Although motivation (e.g., goal setting), enactment strategies (e.g., seeing through and following through), and self-evaluation (of progress that informs the achievement and viability of goals), are clearly interdependent and mutually informative processes, we believe that distinguishing among them helps identify and influence student dynamics.

We titled this book *Listening in Classrooms* because we believe that listening is basic to the teacher-student relationship. It is our thesis that understanding co-regulation dynamics leads to meaningful conversation between teachers and students wherein teachers talk with students as well as listen, support, and teach them. We believe that listening conveys and promotes more than trust, although trust is certainly a critical feature of healthy and helpful relationships. Within a model of co-regulation, listening is also a powerful instructional tool that can deepen and strengthen student motivation, enactment, and evaluation. Listening is strategic; listening is learned. One aspect of learning to listen to students is learning what it is like to be a student. Chapters 2 and 4 explore the experience of being a student and being in the company of students in small group work.

The text presents ways in which teachers can structure conversations and interviews with students to support students' academic and social learning. The focus of the text is on conversations with students about their experiences in the classroom. Classroom walls, however, do not block non-classroom experiences. Students can and will bring the non-school with them to the classroom. It is all part of being a student. We address this reality specifically in two chapters: Chapter 5 covers the ethical considerations of listening to students, and Chapter 6 focuses on listening to parents.

In short, our goals for this book are interdependent. We hope to provide one useful way for thinking about the relationship among teacher, student, and opportunity—co-regulation—and to illustrate one useful instructional tool—meaningful, deliberate listening—to promote and empower that relationship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BRIEF CONTENTS

A MODEL FOR TEACHER–STUDENT CONVERSATIONS: CO–REGULATED LEARNING

Conversation, Co-Regulation, and the Informal Curriculum
Questions and Suggested Activities for Chapter 1

In this book we explore the potential of talking with and listening to students when teachers want to better assess student *learning* (a task of the "formal" curriculum) and when teachers want to better understand student *experience* of the classroom (a task of the "informal" curriculum). In this chapter we introduce our argument for the value of having conversations and interviews with students. We suggest that teachers listen to students as learners, individuals, and as social beings. Classroom events are inherently complex, ambiguous, and subject to different perspectives and multiple interpretations. Interviews and conversations between teachers and students (and teachers and parents) can promote the realization of both academic and personal goals that teachers hold for the students in their classrooms.

We illustrate the potential power of teacher-student conversations to enhance student learning (the attainment of formal curriculum expectations) through a proposed model of *co-regulation*. Our model of co-regulation, which we examine at length, is based on the concept of *relationship*. Relationships connect teacher, students, and opportunities. Co-regulation is the process by which teachers, through their relationships with students and the opportunities they provide them, support and "scaffold" adaptive student learning. Just as teachers learn more about student learning and motivation by discussing it with them, so too do students learn more about their own learning and motivation when they try to articulate their understanding within the context of teacher structure (questions) and support.

Students negotiate more than the intended, formal curriculum of subject-matter expectations when they learn in classrooms. They also navigate the often unintended (and unattended) informal curriculum of "things that matter" other than mastery of assigned subjects: Am I a good friend? an honest student? Students more and less learn this informal curriculum; the nature of their learning has important consequences for students themselves and those with whom they interact. Negotiating the informal curriculum affects not only academic performance (and, thus, attainment of formal curriculum goals) but also students' general dispositions and coping strategies, which in turn affect a wide arena of interpersonal action and intrapersonal (inner) dynamics (e.g., willingness to cooperate, respect for diversity in people and ideas, response to conflict).

Students confront multiple and competing goals within and between the formal and informal curricula. They need to learn how to identify and coordinate among them if they are to resolve conflicts and make progress. We will argue that the informal curriculum needs to become explicit and include the deliberate recognition of goal conflict and teaching of what we call "goal coor-

dination" (Dodge, Asher, & Parkhurst, 1989; McCaslin & Good, 1996). We think mindful conversation and planned interviews with students are important ways to model, teach, and learn these goal identification and coordination strategies. We also illustrate the importance of conversations and interviews so that teachers and students simply better understand themselves and one another.

In summary, we maintain that listening to students is important for academic, affective, and social reasons. Our intent in writing this book is to provide useful tools that teachers might use to help them attain the goals they hold for students in their classrooms. Our "tool kit" contains an array of instruments and models that we hope will have general power and service. We judge a tool's value by its usefulness in the everydayness of classrooms and its place within the existing teacher role. However, a tool must be selected in order for it to be potentially useful, and selection rests on perceived need and appropriateness. This, then, is where we begin.

We focus on why we think listening to students is a feasible and worthy goal in the first place. Teachers are nearly overwhelmed by multiple and competing expectations for their time, talents, and energy. We certainly are asking teachers to stretch if not strain their own arsenal of goal-coordination strategies. In this chapter we make our case for listening to students. We describe how listening to students fits within the teacher role and provide a model of co-regulation that connects student mediation and teacher listening. We suggest that listening to and discussing concerns with students aid their attainment of formal curriculum standards *and* personal/social growth. Distinctions between the formal and informal curriculum are necessarily difficult to make because they mutually influence and inform each other. Indeed, our model of co-regulation illustrates just this point.

Finally, although there are other tools available to obtain information about student knowledge and affect in general (e.g., questionnaires), we think classroom conversations with individual students (or small groups of students) are uniquely suited to understanding and supporting students' intellectual progress and affective world. We also believe that, through deliberate conversation, student self-knowledge is enhanced as teachers actively mediate and influence students' experiences and their interpretation of them. In short, conversations with students, in our perspective, serve a purpose larger than the conversation itself. Conversations, like questions, help *structure and mediate* student self-knowledge even as they enhance teacher understanding of student experience. In our view, then, conversations are deliberate and fundamental learning opportunities for teachers and students. We return to this point in Chapter 3, especially.

◆ AMBIGUITY OF PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOR

Classroom events are inherently ambiguous; thus, they are open to multiple and competing interpretations. One way to organize these events is to impose

a framework that might lend predictability—or at least interpretability—to the stream of complex and ambiguous activity that characterizes "life in classrooms" (Jackson, 1968; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993). We find a three-part framework useful to differentiate the "presses" of teaching and learning that confront teachers *and* students: instruction, management, and assessment. These three presses are interdependent. For example, one way that a teacher might minimize management concerns is by controlling the delivery and increasing the pace of instruction. Indeed, this type of "managed instruction" has been advocated for the less-advantaged, presumed nonmotivated learner. Basically, the idea is to keep things moving so these students don't have time to get off track or "off task." (See Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986, for more complete discussion.)

Weinert and Helmke (1987), noting the management advantages of fast-paced instruction, however, also found that students in these classrooms experienced *increased performance anxiety* when required to demonstrate their learning. Increased student anxiety clearly interferes with both teachers and students attaining their goals. Importantly, these dynamics are not apparent. Based on observation alone, teachers are likely to draw inappropriate conclusions about and, thus, respond inappropriately to students. That is, teachers are likely to infer that students' low performance is due to students' lack of motivation (one of the rationales for this form of managed instruction in the first place), rather than due to the students' very desire to demonstrate learning. Without knowledge of student anxiety, teachers' potential strategies (e.g., increase the pace, strengthen accountability) with these students likely exacerbate the situation.

Instruction, management, and assessment, then, are interdependent features of the formal curriculum that affect student experience in classrooms, teachers' beliefs about and perceptions of those experiences, and teachers' subsequent strategies with students. Teacher strategies with students directly and indirectly affect student beliefs and performance. It would be nice if these dynamics were straightforward, but they are not. Ambiguity is one key reason for engaging students in conversations and interviews. Teachers confront ambiguity and need to decipher student behavior in order to respond strategically in even the most routine and well-patterned classroom procedures.

Consider, for example, student hand raising. Which students raise their hands frequently because they are unsure and are trying to clarify their understanding? Which ones raise their hands because they are confident and want to show teacher and peers how they have mastered material? Who just wants to participate? avoid surprises? One of the authors learned early that in some classes she was less likely to be called on if her hand was raised than if it was not. Careful observation and record keeping over time might help the teacher to make these decisions; however, a simple conversation might be an easier, more efficient, and efficacious way to interpret student actions. Discussions can also help students articulate and better understand their own motivation and interests as well as communicate with their teacher.

◆ DEMANDS OF THE TEACHER ROLE

Teachers are not dispassionate researchers; they have the responsibility of designing and maintaining interactions in the pursuit of student learning. Consider that even researchers, who can sit in classrooms and reflect upon what is happening (without such responsibility), often have difficulty in understanding and determining the significance of particular actions. (For extensive coverage of this concern, see Good & Brophy, 1994.) If researchers have difficulty, it seems apparent that teachers, who have many responsibilities other than observing and interpreting student behavior, might have difficulty in understanding classroom events without additional information.

Jackson, Boostram, and Hansen (1993), a group of university researchers, describe the problem in their work this way:

> But what we were discovering as classroom observers was that often, the more we looked, the more puzzling the situation became and, consequently, the more unreliable were our conclusions about the situation in general. Contrary to what we had previously learned, repeated observations seemed to breed doubt rather than certainty. (pp. 235–236)

Jackson and colleagues stressed that the more they looked and reflected upon what they had seen and heard, they became both more aware of the difficult complexity of classroom life and more respectful of teachers and their ability to deal with such difficult complexity.

Furthermore, although a viable research goal may be to (merely) *interpret* classroom events, teachers are not allowed the distance and relative passivity of bystanders. Teachers *influence* classroom events, and through the opportunities they design and the interactions they have with students, teachers actively participate in student learning and experience. We maintain that *teachers are coparticipants in and co-regulators of student learning and experience*. Thus, resolving ambiguity is no small matter.

The role of teacher, then, requires teachers to actively seek and act on information about student learning of the formal curriculum. Student learning and motivation to learn are ambiguous phenomena that we infer from student activity and performance. Students and teachers judge and are judged by student performance. Indeed, there are times when judgment of teachers and students based on student test performance seems like a national sport (Good, 1996; McCaslin & Good, 1992). Thus, student performance seems an especially important facet of the formal curriculum for teachers to get smarter about. We suggest that a model of co-regulation, which we now present, informs: 1) how students' motivational and learning processes might mediate their performance, and 2) how teachers might influence those mediational processes through their relationships with students and the kinds of opportunities and supportive structures they provide them.

First, we describe the proposed student mediational processes. Second, we suggest how teachers might influence them with specific examples of

teacher scaffolding conversations with students. Co-regulation is all about student mediation and teacher scaffolding, *taken together* (this model and discussion is adapted from McCaslin & Good, 1996).

❖ A MODEL OF CO-REGULATED LEARNING

We suggest that students seek a certain standard of excellence in their negotiation of the formal curriculum. Standards include setting, pursuing, and evaluating goals and their attainment. We may set standards for students, but as any teacher will remind us, students do not necessarily accept them. It also is not unusual for students to set goals for themselves that differ from what we might wish for them. For example, some students set unrealistically high goals, given their present capabilities. Others may select unchallenging, readily attainable goals—perhaps because they fear failure, believe *fast* means *smart*, or just don't care. Others may remain passive; they will work on what is required (to avoid trouble) with little personal investment, one way or another (see, for example, Brantlinger, 1993).

In our view, how students negotiate classroom standards—the accountability demands of the formal curriculum—is open to teacher influence through modeling, instruction, and instructional opportunities like tasks and tests. One way teachers can influence how students set, pursue, and evaluate goals is through conversations around student engagement of informative tasks. Deliberate conversation about task performance is one way to enhance the *co-regulation*, or mutual influence, between teacher and students in the setting and attainment of a standard of excellence.

Conversations (versus monologues, sermons, or lectures) convey a sense of "we-ness." Student learning is not an individual struggle, goals are not set in isolation, persistence is not only about "how long" but about "in what way" and "for what purpose." Negotiation of standards, in this perspective, is a responsibility that teachers and students share. Co-regulated learning replaces an exclusive focus on the teacher *or* students (or their parents) who are more or less willing and/or able to learn. Co-regulated learning integrates the social supports of the classroom with the opportunities it affords.

Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 depict three broadly defined interdependent domains of co-regulation—motivation, enactment, and evaluation—and how teachers might scaffold student mediation within each domain through the design of instruction and opportunity. Taken together, we think the full model of co-regulated learning (see Figure 1.4) meaningfully organizes how students negotiate standards, that is, how they transform the expectations and supports of the formal curriculum as represented by teacher, tasks, and tests. We define what we mean by each mediational domain.
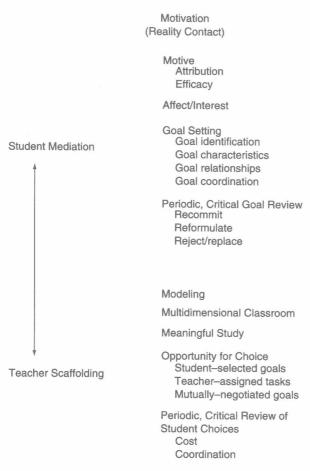
Motivation
(Reality Contact)

Motive
   Attribution
   Efficacy

Affect/Interest

Goal Setting
   Goal identification
   Goal characteristics
   Goal relationships
   Goal coordination

Periodic, Critical Goal Review
   Recommit
   Reformulate
   Reject/replace

Student Mediation

Modeling

Multidimensional Classroom

Meaningful Study

Opportunity for Choice
   Student–selected goals
   Teacher–assigned tasks
   Mutually–negotiated goals

Teacher Scaffolding

Periodic, Critical Review of
Student Choices
   Cost
   Coordination

FIGURE 1.1 A Partial Model of Co-Regulated Learning: Motivation

◆ MOTIVATION

Motivation, as we mean it here, refers to motives and goal setting, coordination, and review. *Motive* includes both the looking back, the "why" behind our own or another's performance, and the looking forward, the "what next" that influences how we understand ourselves in relation to a future task. Thus, motive incorporates both the attributions we make for—the reasons behind— our performance (e.g., because of ability, anxiety, effort, fear, help, hindrance, interest, luck, task difficulty) and our sense of efficacy—our expectations— about how we will perform in the future (see Weiner, 1992, for extended discussion of attribution theory; Bandura, 1986, for extended discussion of social learning theory and the enhancement of self-efficacy).

Goal setting includes individual goal(s), their interrelation, and their coordination (see Dodge et al., 1989; McCaslin & Good, 1996, for extended discus-

sion). Individual goals can be considered by features like their difficulty (e.g., moderately difficult versus easy), specificity (e.g., finish first versus do well), and psychological distance (e.g., do well today versus be a physician when I grow up).

Relationships among goals need consideration. For example, multiple goals can be compatible in that they complement each other (e.g., you can go to class and to the pep rally), are instrumental to each other (e.g., your ticket to the pep rally is to do well in class; doing well today promotes being a physician later), or compensate for each other (e.g., you participate in the pep rally to offset minimal participation during small group in class). And, of course, goals can be incompatible. Attainment of one goal can interfere with another (e.g., working swing shift to maintain employment and completing daily homework assignments). Goals can negate each other (e.g., attending a late-night party with friends the day before a morning exam). Finally, goals can be independent of each other; thus, they neither interfere nor overlap. Each takes up psychological space, personal time, and energy.

Students have multiple goals. Multiple goals call for identification of individual goals and the relationships among them, and *goal-coordination* strategies. Students learn goal-coordination strategies when they learn, for example, to prioritize, modify, substitute, abandon, or defer goals. Thus, students learn to get the homework done before television, decide to "do well enough" or "satisfice" (Simon, 1969) on an assignment to allow time with friends, join a research project to combine school work with social life, or quit the team because there is not enough time for practice *and* work—but maybe next year.

In short, motivation is all about knowledge of oneself and one's goals: considering where one is in relation to where one wants to be, knowing how hard it is to be in more than one place at a time, and coping with the stress of choice. We include personal interest, affect, and desires in motivation, and note that personal goals can reflect both "intrinsic" (because I want to learn more) and "extrinsic" (so I can go out to recess with my friends) motives. *We do not claim*, as others have (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Harter, 1981; Nolen, 1988), that one is inherently better than another (i.e., that intrinsic motivation is, by definition, better than extrinsic motivation). Rather, we would hope that classrooms are designed so that students can enjoy and optimize multiple sources of motivation. For example, multipli-motivated students complete assignments because they want to learn *and* they want what results—to go to recess with their friends. Uni-motivated students might only value the learning or only engage in learning because it is required in order to be with valued friends.

Just as we do not consider a single source of motivation optimal or promote an absolute hierarchy of goodness among sources of motivation, we do not believe that classrooms should be only about compatible goals. Indeed, we think learning how to coordinate goals requires the opportunity—the need—to coordinate among them. Neither "having it all" nor "having none" is particularly useful preparation for coping with the reality of choice, and the

conflicts of choice, that are part of life. Nor do we think a classroom designed for the single-minded pursuit of a single goal is an optimal situation. We think this is one of the more important lessons of biology: organisms can be singularly oversuited to a particular environment such that even minor changes in context bring about their demise. The world is simply too interdependent and changing for singlemindedness to be a realistic, productive, or mentally healthy model (see also Dodge et al., 1989).

We believe that teachers should promote students' *periodic, critical goal review*. Periodic, critical goal review both teaches and allows students to reassess the value and feasibility of their goals, in their own terms and in relation to the stated goals or standards of the curriculum. Goal review should also promote and teach students how to decide to recommit, reformulate, or reject (and replace) their goals.

This constellation of context, self, and other in students' setting, pursuit, and coordination of their goals, then, is what we mean by *student motivation*. We do not consider motivation a personal variable, one that resides only in the student. Nor do we look solely to the environment. In our conception, motivation is a shared, co-regulated variable which emerges through the integration of the student with the personal and task resources within the context of the classroom. Students clearly bring more than their physical selves to this formulation. Just how students integrate messages from family and friends about who and what they are and want will be explored in Chapters 2 and 6.

◆ ENACTMENT

Enactment is not about choice, it is about the seeing through and following through on choices that have been made (or, as we will see, required). The enactment phase protects and promotes the goals set in the motivation phase. If motivation is a sort of "reality contact" (that is, the setting of reasonable goals given capabilities and the situation), enactment is the arena of "reality testing." Enactment is all about *resource management*; resources are to be found within oneself and within the classroom setting (Corno & Mandinach, 1983; Corno & Rohrkemper, 1985).

Enactment strategies include control over the self and control over the persons (e.g., teachers, peers) and physical resources of the classroom. Control over the self refers to self-modification that might alter or mediate affect, volitional, and cognitive strategies. For example, a student can take a deep breath when feeling anxious; try harder on a difficult task; recognize frustration and change detrimental inner speech before tears; review procedures, revise expectations, and approach a task with a different plan.

Control over other resources—interpersonal and physical—in classrooms includes such modifications as asking teacher or peers for help, changing seats to avoid distraction, and checking a different book if the current explanation is unclear (see Corno, 1992; Corno & Rohrkemper, 1985; Rohrkemper & Corno, 1988, for more complete examples). In our view, enactment strate-