

CHILDREN'S CONVERSATIONS:
A DISCOURSAL ANALYSIS OF PATTERNS
THAT DEVELOP AS DYADS CO-CONSTRUCT MEANING
IN A TASK-CENTERED ACTIVITY

A Dissertation

by

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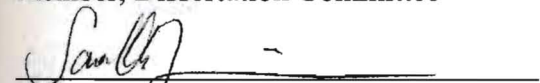
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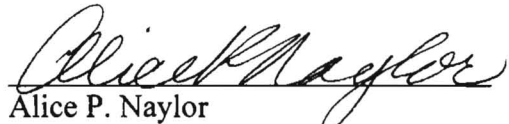
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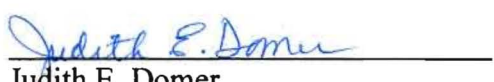
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ABSTRACT

CHILDREN'S CONVERSATIONS: A DISCOURSAL ANALYSIS OF PATTERNS THAT DEVELOP AS DYADS CO-CONSTRUCT MEANING IN A TASK-CENTERED ACTIVITY

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In this study patterns of interaction that developed between children grouped in peer dyads and assigned a goal-driven task were examined. Sixteen dyads of third - fifth grade students were divided into four categories of dyads including male expert-male novice, male expert-female novice, female expert-female novice, and female expert-male novice. Participants played a computer simulation game, Oregon Trail, until they reached the criterion set for the study. The selection of a goal-centered activity was to provide a task which would encourage rich interaction between the participants. The focus of the study was interactions between the participants rather than their success in reaching criterion in the game.

Verbatim transcriptions provided the basis for a discorsal analysis which determined that the participants' interactions could be categorized into levels of relationship including coordination, cooperation, and communication. During coordinating activities, the participants' negotiations were related to structuring their activity. Next, members of the dyads coordinated their task by refining individual conceptions of the activity and exhibiting the beginning of shared decision-making. The final level of relationship was reflective communication. At this

level, the participants were equals in the activity and used past strategies to develop joint activity.

Since coordination, cooperation, and communication appeared to be important elements in negotiations within each dyad, there are implications for educators as they design learning activities that foster communication. Activities that encourage questioning provide opportunities for students to interact. Pre-set goals for an activity are necessary, but student goals that emerge in the process are also important. Prior knowledge that may not seem directly related to the activity may be involved in the co-construction of meaning necessary to complete the task. Tasks which require students to make choices enhance and promote interaction. In conclusion, this study challenges teachers to view student success not only as the completion of an assigned activity with its stated goals but also as the relationship that develops as students engage in joint activity.