



# Children Come First: The One Doing the Talking is the One Doing the Learning

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September 2022

Educators are currently presented with an urgent call and a unique opportunity to ensure that school policies, practices, and strategies for our youngest learners encompass what research and data tell us is essential to their successful development and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic, for all of its terror, deep sadness, and loss, also provides educators with a unique and essential opportunity to boldly step up and make school a positive and transformative time for children, families, and educators.

Our long-term goal is to increase the number of early childhood programs/early grades with high-quality learning environments that contribute to reducing inequities, closing achievement and opportunity gaps, and supporting young learners.

**Within the context of the cost of the pandemic to education, the lenses of equity, research, data, parallel processes, and aligned practices must be used to ensure the voice of the child is considered essential to optimal learning and development.**

**Instituting equity requires attention and response to the policies, strategies, and practices that contribute to or hinder short- and long-term outcomes for children.** A classroom emphasis on oral language development has been identified as one of the premier instructional strategies for ensuring the success of children, especially those from low socio-economic communities (Mason & Galloway, 2012).

The one doing the talking is the one doing the learning. Student talk promotes learning and student success. It is critically important for children to know that their ideas, thoughts, and feelings are valued by both peers and adults. This promotes an environment where children feel safe and valued, and where their competence and autonomy develop through relationships built on genuine trust and respect. When children are talking, they are developing their

identity, learning the give and take of conversation, articulating their thinking and providing formative assessment information to their teachers.

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Ritchie, 2022

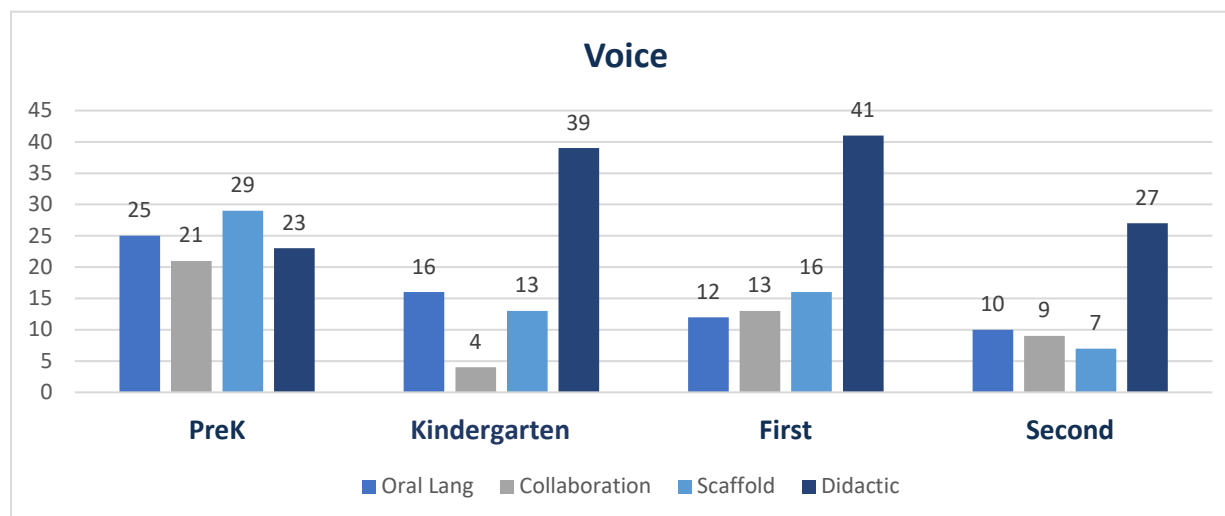
When teachers are talking, children are not. Balanced teaching requires teachers to become adept at a number of pedagogical approaches and choosing the appropriate approach to instruction based on student need and content. Some examples include:

- ✓ Didactic teaching allows teachers to communicate new and review information in the most efficient manner, allows for repetition and practice, and sets the stage for interactive work. Unfortunately, while the amount of information imparted is greatest when teachers lean heavily on didactic teaching, retention is not. (Zull, 2002).
- ✓ Scaffolded instruction helps students to connect to prior knowledge and to deepen their understanding of both new knowledge and the facts and issues to which it connects. It provides teachers with regular formative assessment of children’s abilities in both the content and process of learning, and it actively engages children. African American and Latino/Hispanic children often have fewer scaffolded teaching interactions, thus minimizing opportunities for oral language development and higher-order thinking (Early et al., 2007).
- ✓ Students learn more, are more highly motivated to learn, enjoy learning more, feel more positive towards the subject being studied, and are more accepting of one another when they collaborate with peers as opposed to working competitively or individually (Johnson & Johnson, 2013).
- ✓ Collaborative learning is responsive to the needs of children who come from more collectivist cultures that value interdependence, group success, and group consensus. Therefore, the classroom more closely resembles, and thus honors, their family and community lives (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000).

The figure below shows the percentage of time children in each grade level PreK-Second are having the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation with adults (oral language) and peers (collaboration). It also shows the amount of time that children benefit from interactive instruction (scaffold) versus teachers talking and children listening (didactic), across the day. Each percentage point represents four minutes of their instructional day. For example, In PreK, 25% (100 minutes) of their day provides them the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation with adults; in Kindergarten, children engage in meaningful conversation for four

percent (16 minutes) of their day; in first grade, children engage in interactive instruction with their teacher for 16% (64 minutes) per day while 41% (164 minutes) of their day is spent with the teachers doing the talking.

**Figure 1: Who is doing the talking?**



These data come from nationwide studies using the EduSnap Data Collection Tool. For more information go to <https://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/using-data-create-culture-collaborative-inquiry.html>.

Research and data must illuminate high-quality learning environments that contribute to reducing inequities, closing achievement and opportunity gaps, and supporting young

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learners. Observations in hundreds of classrooms across the nation reveal similar stories. Children in preschool have notably more opportunities to interact in meaningful ways with peers and adults, use their voices to demonstrate their knowledge, ask questions, and express feelings than they will as they progress through elementary school. Everyone needs to know that their voice is important—

that people listen to and care about their ideas, feelings, and opinions. Without a strong voice, used often to convey who they are, it is difficult to become a confident and subsequently powerful person in this world. Children, whose voices are suppressed in a culture of silence, where only the words of the teacher prevail, will not develop that kind of self-efficacy and esteem.



## INQUIRING INTO POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND STRATEGIES

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#### HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO YOUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

- ✓ Who is doing the most talking in your environment? The children or the teachers?
- ✓ Look at daily schedules.
  - How often are children provided opportunities for collaboration with their peers?
- ✓ Are teachers asking open ended questions?
- ✓ Are children given time to think before answering a question?
- ✓ What types of professional development could help to increase the amount of time children experience each of the following?
  - scaffolded instruction
  - collaboration with peers
  - meaningful conversations with their teachers
- ✓ What practices do teachers need to re-examine to ensure that children are having opportunities to articulate their thinking?

For further information see these other briefs in our **Children Come First** series: Mindset: Parallel Process, Continuous Improvement, and Collaborative Inquiry; Linking a Whole Child Approach to the Education and Development of Young Children; and Using Research to Guide Practice: 7 Predictors for Positive 3rd Grade Outcomes at:

<https://region6cc.uncg.edu/resources/>. Or visit the Early Childhood web page at: <https://region6cc.uncg.edu/early-childhood/>.

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Garrett, C., Ritchie, S., Phillips, E.C. (2022). Children Come First: The One Doing the Talking is the One Doing the Learning. [SERVE Center](#) at [UNC Greensboro](#).

**Acknowledgements:** The authors are grateful to the members of the SERVE Early Learning Collaborative for their contributions to, and review of the final document.

A copy of this publication can be downloaded from the Region 6 Comprehensive Center website at: <https://region6cc.uncg.edu/resources/>.

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This brief was prepared by the [Region 6 Comprehensive Center](#) under Award #S283B190055 for the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by the SERVE Center at UNC Greensboro. The content in this document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the PGSS or OESE or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. © 2022 [SERVE Center](#) at [UNC Greensboro](#).