Children’s Peer Talk

Inside and outside the classroom, children of all ages spend time interacting with their peers. Through these early interactions, children make sense of the world and co-construct their childhood culture, while simultaneously engaging in interactional activities which provide the stepping stones for discursive, social and cognitive development.

This collection brings together an international team of researchers to document how children’s peer talk can contribute to their socialization and demonstrates that if we are to understand how children learn in everyday interactions we must take into account peer group cultures, talk, and activities.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers in the fields of language acquisition, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis, and related disciplines. It examines naturally occurring talk of children aged from three to twelve years from a range of language communities, and includes ten studies documenting children’s interactions and a comprehensive overview of relevant research.

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Children’s Peer Talk

Learning from Each Other

Edited by

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It was with deep sorrow we received the news that Shoshana Blum-Kulka died in Jerusalem on June 10, 2013, just when this book had been completed and was ready to be sent off to the publisher. Shoshana was crucially important to the production of this book and we are saddened that she never saw it published. The idea for a book on children’s peer talk and its importance to learning was hers, and throughout the editorial process she played a significant role in conceptualizing the book, recruiting authors, co-authoring chapters, and reviewing contributions. This book would never have appeared without Shoshana’s contribution.

At the time of her death, Shoshana was Professor Emerita at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. With a background in linguistics, she published numerous books and articles on translation, cross-cultural communication, family discourse and media discourse. To understand the phenomena that she explored, she built on both micro- and macro-oriented disciplines, understanding human interaction within power relations and societal theories. Particularly important was her work on pragmatic language development in children, drawing on and contributing to linguistic anthropology, cross-cultural and developmental psychology and education. Examples of her work include Dinner Talk: Cultural Patterns of Sociability and Socialization in Family Discourse (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997) and Talking to Adults: The Contribution of Multiparty Discourse to Language Acquisition with Catherine Snow (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002). By directing attention to the significance of naturally occurring multi-party, intergenerational talk, these books were major contributions to the study of children’s pragmatic socialization. Through her teaching and her supportive guidance of students she built a pioneering interdisciplinary research agenda on discursive pragmatics.

In all her writing Shoshana demonstrated sensitive understanding of young children and their way of communicating and expressing themselves. She was always fascinated by the fine nuances of human interaction, such as the way we direct others, formulate requests, and express politeness. When examining the impact of young children’s peer talk on their learning and thinking, she demonstrated ways in which peer talk offers opportunities for children’s construction.
of childhood cultures as well as for individual development; both perspectives were captured in her conceptualization of the “double opportunity space.”

What stands out is the originality of her thinking, her creativity, and her willingness to cross disciplinary borders. Up to the very last days of her life she continued to wonder at children’s peer cultures and how children learn from each other through talking. She was a rare mixture of intellectual power and integrity, of commitment and involvement in social-educational issues. Shoshana displayed a unique human and academic generosity and willingness to acknowledge the contribution of others. We feel deeply privileged to have collaborated with her and give thanks for her life and work.

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