Social Conversation and Social Skills: Finding Colour in Student Interactions

Jennifer B. Onderwater

A RESEARCH PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

NANAIMO, BRITISH COLUMBIA

JANUARY, 2017
Abstract

Communication is a large part of relationships within and outside of school. The purpose of this study is to explore oral language development. The focus of this study is on how social conversation impacts the social interactions of students. Using the program, *Color My Conversation (CMC)* (Delmonico, 2013) the foci of this study are to discover the influence of the program on the following educational outcomes: 1) Review the participation in the *CMC (2013)* and its relationship to social conversation skills in my classroom. 2) Consider how this increase in social conversation will influence social skills; 3) The program *CMC (2013)* is interpreted through the new British Columbia (BC) Curriculum, *Building Student Success (2015)*, to determine its educational effectiveness in a BC context. This qualitative descriptive, single case study design includes the following instruments: researcher’s journal, student assessment using a *Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale (2008)* and the *Color My Conversation Rubric (2013)*. The students’ social conversation and social interactions throughout the school are interpreted to determine a significant growth in communication and personal and social competency. There is a strong alignment between *CMC (2013)* and *Building Student Success (2015)* in the area of core competencies. Two additional outcomes that occurred in the use of this *CMC (2013)* program in this study – a strong sense of student enthusiasm and confidence in their learning of related curriculum, as well as a greater knowledge and integration of the BC curriculum by the teacher.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Shelley Robinson, my thesis advisor, for all the help and guidance that she provided on this paper. Thank you for keeping me on the right page. I would like to express my appreciation to Paige Fisher who guided me as I started this research. As well, thank you to all my colleagues in my university cohort who shared your stories. You have encouraged me in more ways than you will ever know.

Thank you to Rosslyn Delmonico. I love your program and know it was providential that we met. Your generosity is exceptional. I am very grateful to this class. They are an amazing group of five-year olds. Thanks to my colleagues at the school. Your professionalism, deep love for children and friendship are a true blessing.

Thank you to my loving husband Jim and my supportive children: Alek, Katelyn, Jolena Esther and Lauren. You know I could not have done this without your encouragement. You kept me going when I wanted to quit. I love you! If I have not told you often enough, I am truly sorry. Your support is priceless.

Finally, I thank my God who gives me life and breath. Thank you! To him be all praise.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................ii

Acknowledgments ...................................................................................................iii

Table of Contents ....................................................................................................iv

List of Charts ..........................................................................................................ix

List of Graphics ......................................................................................................x

List of Tables .........................................................................................................xi

Chapter 1: Starting to Sketch My Understanding of Oral Language Development .......1

  Broad Strokes: Research Context ........................................................................1

  Colours of Friendship: Rationale for Research ....................................................3

  Framing Research Questions ................................................................................5

  School Context .....................................................................................................9

  Classroom Context ............................................................................................10

  Research Questions ...........................................................................................11

  Terminology .......................................................................................................13

Chapter 2: Literature Review in Black and White ....................................................20

  Action Research ................................................................................................20

  Zooming in and Setting Parameters in Oral Language ......................................22

  Speaking and Listening Competency: Priceless ...............................................23

  Attention to Oral Language: Rare .....................................................................25

    Teachers’ lack of training in oral language instruction ...................................25

    Assumptions about student proficiency in oral language ..............................26

    Increased curricular demands for teachers ....................................................27

    Lack of appreciation for the importance of oral language ..............................28
SOCIAL CONVERSATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Rubric ...........................................................................................................49
Rating scale ..................................................................................................52
Mixed Methods and Triangulation.................................................................55
The Context of the Classroom .....................................................................56
Participants ..................................................................................................56
Procedures ....................................................................................................56
Data analysis ................................................................................................58
Discussion of Validity and Truthfulness.........................................................59
External validity ............................................................................................59
Internal validity .............................................................................................59

Credibility .....................................................................................................61
Transferability ...............................................................................................62
Dependability ...............................................................................................62
Confirmability ...............................................................................................62

Conclusion ....................................................................................................63

Chapter 4: Adding Some Colour ...................................................................64

Overview of this Chapter: Starting to Paint ..................................................64

The Mixing of Color My Conversation and Building Student Success ........65

Communication competency .........................................................................66
Personal and social competency ....................................................................67

Paint by Number: One Lesson at a Time .......................................................72

Lesson one: the yellow conversation ............................................................72
Lesson two: the short conversation ...............................................................77
Lesson three: the long conversation .............................................................80
Lesson four: who, what, when, where and why........................................84
Lesson five: yes! no! maybe so!.................................................................89
Lesson six: making comments count ......................................................93
Lesson seven: topic changer pro ............................................................98
Lesson eight: speaking loud and clear ...................................................103
Lesson nine through twelve observations ..............................................108
Lesson nine: beading ............................................................................108
Lesson ten: topics of conversation .........................................................110
Lesson eleven and twelve: carrying over and customize ......................111
Conclusion .............................................................................................113

Chapter 5: Fine Lines and Deeper Colour ...............................................115
Overview .................................................................................................115
Discussion ...............................................................................................116
Green means go: Implications ...............................................................116

The importance of a blue print ............................................................116

Oral language as a lens for school success ...........................................121

Social conversation colours friendships ..............................................122

Yellow Means Caution: Limitations .....................................................124

Drawing on the Future: Suggestions for Future Research and Practice ....125

Conclusion .............................................................................................126

References .............................................................................................128

Appendices .............................................................................................141

Appendix A: SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2013) Findings .......................141

Appendix B: Color My Conversation Rubric (2013) .............................145
Appendix C: Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale (2008)…148
Appendix D: Research Journal Sample Page ........................................................152
Appendix E: Vancouver Island University Application for Ethical Review ..............154
Appendix F: Vancouver Island University Ethical Approval .....................................166
Appendix G: Letter to the Board of Directors of the Independent School Seeking
Research Approval ..................................................................................................167
Appendix H: Letter from the Board of Directors of the Independent School Granting
Research Approval ..................................................................................................169
Appendix I: Parental Recruitment Script .................................................................170
Appendix J: Research Consent Form to Parents of Participants ..............................172
List of Charts


Chart 4.5:  *SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008)*. Before and After *CMC* (2013) Scores of Male Participants .................................................................Appendix A

Chart 4.6:  *SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008)*. Before and After *CMC* (2013) Scores of Female Participants .................................................................Appendix A

Chart 4.7:  *SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008)* for Assertion. Before and After *CMC* (2013) Scores of all Participants .................................................................Appendix A


List of Graphics

Graphic 2.1: Image of Multi-Sensory Aids for *Color My Conversation* (2013) .................. 36
Graphic 3.1: Sample of Research Journal, September, 2015...........................................49
Graphic 3.2: *Color My Conversation Rubric* (2013) Sample ........................................50
Graphic 4.1: Communication Competency Profiles .........................................................75
Graphic 4.2: Social Responsibility Competency Profiles .................................................78
Graphic 4.3: Facet Four of Social Responsibility Profiles ..............................................82
Graphic 4.4: Facet Three of Social Responsibility Profiles ..............................................83
Graphic 4.5: Facet One of Communication Competency Profiles ..................................88
Graphic 4.6: Facet Two of Communication Competency Profiles ................................101
Graphic 4.7: Facet Four of Communication Competency Profiles .................................102
List of Tables

Table 3.1: Color My Conversation Rubric (2013) of Scores Before CMC (2013) ..........51
Table 4.1: Color My Conversation Rubric (2013) of Scores After CMC (2013) ...........73
Table 4.2: Communication Competency Profiles 1 and 2 ...........................................76
Table 4.3: Social Responsibility Competency Profiles 1 and 2 .......................................79
Table 4.4: Social Responsibility Competency Profiles 3, 4 and 5.................................97
Table 4.5: Communication Competency Profiles 3 through 8 .....................................106
Chapter 1: Starting to Sketch My Understanding of Oral Language Development

Broad Strokes: Research Context

The topic of oral language development and its importance in schooling is a significant one. This study will endeavour to explore, observe, record, and reflect on the experiences of my kindergarten class, (students who are predominately five years-old), as they are taught to improve their oral language skills. My intention is to develop positive peer relationships within the classroom and larger school community by focusing on social conversation skills. Through the use of the program, Color My Conversation (CMC) (Delmonico, 2013), I will teach my students social language skills and explore how social conversation is central to the core competencies of communication and personal and social development as presented in the new British Columbia (BC) curriculum, Building Student Success (2015).

My interest in oral language development has been a life-long one. I was born with Ankyloglossia, also known as being ‘tongue-tied’. This is oral anomaly is a congenital one that decreases the mobility of the tongue tip and is caused by an unusually short, thick lingual frenulum, which is the membrane connecting the underside of the tongue to the floor of the mouth (Evans, Genna, Martin, Coryllos, Abel, Ente, & Schwartz, 2008). Ankyloglossia varies in degree of severity and restricts the tongues’ range of motion. For me, I had a moderate to severe case which required a surgical clipping of the frenulum. Following this surgery, I was required to do daily exercises for a number of years to stretch the frenulum and to teach me tongue control and speech improvement.

As a result of my Ankyloglossia, I talked “funny”. When I started to attend kindergarten, I was frequently the recipient of teasing and name-calling. I had a difficult time making friends since I talked “funny” and could not make myself understood to the other children. My poor oral
language skills affected my peer interactions. Prior to kindergarten, my parents understood me and my little brother imitated me. Once I started school, my world expanded and it quickly became evident to my teacher and my parents that I was struggling to make friends and be understood. I began to see a speech pathologist, who assessed and diagnosed me. It was determined that I would need an operation to clip the frenulum and give my tongue a greater range of motion.

I was involved in speech therapy for seven years to strengthen my tongue, and teach me better tongue control. I had to learn to form each letter sound and then combine the sounds to make words. This was a long process. As my speech became clearer, my growing ability to communicate allowed me to interact better with my peers. I became more confident and was able to form friendships. This situation was a long developmental process that eventually afforded me more confidence.

As I grew up and began to consider a career choice, I seriously looked into being a speech pathologist because of her influence on my childhood journey. However, I was drawn, instead, to teaching young children and considering their wider growth and development. I first acquired an Early Childhood Education Diploma before going on to get a Bachelor of Education degree. When I became a parent, I was again interested in speech development since two of my children had difficulty speaking and required extensive speech therapy. Both of my children who struggled with speech also had Ankyloglossia. Once again, I was involved in speech development and speech therapy. My children were able to use tongue exercises to increase tongue movement and stretch the frenulum. As their speech improved, I also saw their confidence increase, just as mine had done in my early years. Their ability to communicate
allowed them to have better peer interactions. Speech was a large part of my childhood and now became a large part of my mothering.

My teaching career eventually brought me to teaching kindergarten. Here I have seen my training in early childhood development; my experience with speech development; and my interest in children’s growth all come together. While I have a great interest in oral development, or speaking and listening, my teaching practice and my preparation time have not always reflected this interest. In light of my experience as a child and then a parent of children who demonstrated the positive results of a strong oral language program, I believe that this is an aspect of language arts that I need to focus on in my program.

In my twelve years as kindergarten teacher, I have spent much time planning and learning about reading and writing. Most of my preparation and teaching time in language arts has been focused on reading and writing with considerably less attention paid to oral language development. There is a pressure for kindergarten teachers to get their learners to know the alphabet and start reading and writing (Constantin-Lane, 2013; Kirkland & Peterson, 2005). The skills of reading and writing are seen as academically more valuable. Oral language is less visible and tends to be left to more spontaneous and sporadic teaching and learning. Circle times and show and tell are the common ways teachers in kindergarten try to offer some oral language opportunities to students, but they rarely developmentally assess oral language in a systematic or informed way. I also have not been systematic in my teaching of oral language. I have been even less systematic and consistent in my assessing of oral language.

**Colours of Friendship: Rationale for Research**

Social development is an important aspect of primary school. For many students, kindergarten is their first experience with formal schooling. It is their first opportunity to learn in
a group, and interact with peers outside of their small social and family setting. School offers
them a new opportunity to form friendships, to find common interests, and to learn together.
However, this social development is not a smooth process for students. It truly is a learning
experience with all the ups and downs that learning can have. I have observed that for some
students, their social interactions and peer relationships are a serious struggle. Often when
students find it difficult to interact with their peers and “get along” with classmates at school,
there is a communication component. It is interesting to note that “the amount of oral language
that children have is an indicator of their success or struggle in school” (Kirkland & Patterson,
2005, p. 391). It has been my informal observation that students who have difficulty
communicating can often also have difficulty learning, making friends, and working with others
at school. My experience as a child was also to have difficulties making friends and working
with other children. It stands to reason that the ability to communicate successfully in social
conversation has some bearing on being able to interact successfully with peers and adults in a
variety of settings, including school.

The new BC curriculum, Building Student Success (2015), also acknowledges the link
between social interactions and communication by selecting these two aspects, along with
thinking, as core competencies. The writers of the curriculum support document, Building
Student Success (2015), use current research to emphasize the importance of these core
competencies as essential for learning throughout the grades. The core competencies are cross-
curricular.

They are the set of intellectual, personal, and social skills that all students need to
develop in order to engage in deeper learning—learning that encourages students to look
at things from different perspectives, to see the relationships between their learning in
different subjects, and to make connections to their previous learning and to their own experiences, as members of their families, communities, and the larger society. The conceptual framework described here envisions three broad cross-curricular competencies: thinking competency; personal and social competency; and communication competency. Thinking competency, which encompasses critical, creative, and reflective thinking, represents the cognitive abilities that students develop through their studies. Personal and social competency represents the personal, social and cultural abilities that students develop as individuals and members of society. Communication competency represents the abilities students need to interact and learn effectively in their world. Together, these three cross-curricular competencies represent a holistic and unifying approach to learning, spanning all courses and grades in the common purpose of enriching students’ learning experience and preparing students for the future. These cross-curricular competencies are interconnected; and they are not three linear and discrete entities. (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3)

I am excited to see a clearly articulated link between communication skills and social development in Building Student Success (2015). The authors of this curriculum document recognize that communication competency and personal and social competency are connected. These competencies unify skills across the grades and subject areas and are important for deeper learning.

Framing Research Questions

Given that I believe communication is central to learning, school, and life, I set out to find an approach, resources, or a program that would meet the needs of students at the primary level. I also want an approach that will satisfy the broad goals and aspirations of the new BC
There is extensive research to support the importance of communication skills (Catts, Fey, Proctor-Williams, 2000; Huang & Millunix, 2002; Preston, Frost, Memel, Fulbright, Landi, Grigorenko, & Pugh, 2010; Sticht, 2002). Beron and Farkas (2004) state in their study, “Oral language skills and habits may serve as important resources for success or failure in school-related tasks such as learning to read” (p. 110). I hope to grow in my knowledge of this research-based program, and have it impact my practice in meaningful ways. I am looking forward to furthering my teaching in this area, and as a result making progress with my students in this regard.

I examine a number of different approaches to communication skills. Communication is a broad term which means: “The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium” (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). A search for good educational communication programs and approaches tends to produce research and resources in three broad categories: 1) communication tools or strategies to aid reading skills; 2) public communication help such as public speaking and presenting, and finally; 3) communication deficits in students who struggle with learning disabilities or mental delays. There are very few communication programs which address social conversation for the “average” student. The lack of social conversation programs may be due to a lack of awareness of the importance of social conversation skills.

I believe there is a strong link between reading skills and oral language skills. Research shows there is a tight relationship between oral language proficiency and reading competence (Catts et al., 2000; Preston et al., 2010; Sticht, 2002). My interest in improving oral language skills is not to improve reading skills; it is to improve oral language skills so that students are better and more confident communicators. Programs that aim to address pre-reading skills
through phonemic awareness, letter sounds, syllables or rhyming are not helpful when it comes to social conversation. These programs address communication skills but they do not address the specific skills needed for social conversation.

Public speaking or presenting is another avenue of communication that often receives attention in many classrooms. Public speaking is an aspect of communication that can be incorporated into a variety of subject areas. Teachers can teach on a topic and meet the public speaking goals of their curriculum at the same time. Within my own classroom sharing, show and tell, and circle time have all been ways to encourage students to speak in a group and meet some of the speaking and listening objectives of past curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2012). Helping my students to speak to a group, albeit important, is not the skill I want to develop in my students when I think about oral language and social conversation. Informal conversations have a less obvious organization and structure than public speaking, and require a discreet understanding of the oral language involved. “Conversations can wander and meander without ever coming to a point. Speeches are deliberately structured and organized, whereas conversations are not” (Boundless, 2016). The rules for public speaking seem to be more controlled and articulated than the flexible social conventions of our daily conversations. Social conversations have their own set of rules which can be difficult to express concisely. The expectations for social conversations can change across situations and cultures adding to the complexity of this type of communication.

As I look beyond pre-reading skills and beyond public speaking exercises and strategies, I encounter some excellent approaches and programs for students who are challenged by learning disabilities or disorders; for example, Children’s Friendship Training (CFT) (Frankel & Myatt, 2003). The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) (Laugeson,
Frankel, Mogil & Dillon, 2009) designed to help teens with autism better communicate is another widely known and researched program. I am excited about these approaches and the extensive research that has been conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of CFT and PEERS. However, both of these programs are designed to be used with children with specialized needs. They are not designed to offer the foundational social conversation skills required when starting with young students, although some of their principles of communication definitely apply. CFT and PEERS do not directly address social situations and contexts that are relevant to kindergarten students.

While looking at ways to adapt PEERS or the book, *The Science of Making Friends*, published by Laugeson (2013), which takes the research and skills of PEERS and applies it to the teen population, to a younger population, Rosslyn Delmonico happens to be in my school and is just beginning to work with some students who struggle with learning disabilities. Our special education teacher is also excited about Delmonico’s work and program. She knows about my interest in social conversation and my interest in speech. It is a turning point in my research because I begin to wonder if Delmonico’s research and program could meet the social conversation needs of my students. I decide to have a thorough look at Delmonico’s program: *Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013). This program might effectively meet the needs of my students in the most optimum way possible.

I find that teaching can never be a “one size fits all” approach. It is better when the students’ needs must be carefully considered as I move forward developing social conversation skills. In this research project, I choose to use the first half of the school year to get to know my students, familiarize myself with oral language and social development research while becoming comfortable with *CMC* (2013). I also spend time interacting with my colleagues and sharing my
thoughts about my research with them. The professionals working in the room beside me are an amazing source of encouragement, and interest. While I am doing this research on my own, other teachers are certainly supportive and offer their expertise.

School Context

Working in an independent school means that new BC curriculum is approached in a unique way. Independent schools have more flexibility in timelines for implementing new curriculum, although they must still meet the goals and objectives of new BC curriculum. In doing so, they must interpret it within the context of the mandate of their independent school. Even though there is flexibility working within an independent school, there are still rigorous expectations.

It has been my experience, that there can sometimes be less resources for implementing new curriculum than some public schools and school districts might have. Often there are no specialty teachers or curriculum experts to help teachers interpret and implement new curriculum. Any curriculum work that teachers do is often done in their “spare time”. Rarely is there preparation time or professional development days dedicated to working with curriculum. It has been my experience in the independent school I teach at, that most teachers work on their own trying to grasp and incorporate new curriculum into their programs. It can be challenging to find the time and the resources needed to become familiar with new curriculum. Teachers are challenged to make curriculum a priority when much of their time is spent meeting the daily needs of their students.

As I become familiar with Color My Conversation (2013) and get to know my students in my kindergarten classroom, I am also becoming very interested in the new BC curriculum. It is exciting to learn more about this curriculum and how it will promote learning for my students.
The concept of core competencies, foundational skills in communication, thinking and social/personal skills, is interesting to me. The belief that there are life-long skills that students and teachers can develop throughout their school career, (and beyond), is something I want to know more about. I feel privileged to work with children who are just beginning their schooling, and I feel that I can help make a difference by offering them a solid start in these core competencies that will assist students throughout their schooling.

The blending of Color My Conversation (2013) and the new BC curriculum, Building Student Success (2015) develops into a strong goal for me. I want to use my research to see how these two approaches, (one a program and one a curriculum), will complement each other. However, neither one of these programs or approaches will matter much to me if they do not bring about real change for my students and have some real-life application. I begin to think that through the utilization CMC (2013), I can improve social conversation skills for my students. I am wondering if these social conversation skills will transfer to an improvement in general social skills for my students. I believe that the CMC (2013) program will promote students’ social skills and peer interactions both within and outside of school. Furthermore I believe that my students, and myself as their teacher, will benefit from a systematic and deliberate approach to social conversation skills and the development of the core competency of communication and social responsibility as outlined in Building Student Success (2015). I will be giving social conversation the attention I feel it needs to help ensure communication success for my students.

**Classroom Context**

This research involves my five and six-year old kindergarten students in my classroom in an independent school in British Columbia, Canada. There are 26 students that I work with in two different groups. I am implementing CMC (2013) for eight weeks in May and June of the
school year. I will have the dual role of researcher and teacher. At first, I was concerned about my cross purposed, but discovered that this is okay. Mills (2014) writes, “Teacher researchers studying their own practices differ from traditional educational researchers because they are committed to taking action effecting positive educational change in their own classrooms and schools based on their findings” (p. 5). I want to bring about change in my classroom, with my students using this type of practice-based qualitative research.

I will do qualitative research using three sources of data in this mixed-methods research. I will triangulate my data from my reflections in a research’s journal, the numbers generated through the use of the Color My Conversation Rubric (Delmonico, 2013) and the teacher rating scale from the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The use of a variety of methods will give me rich data to analyze and interpret. My research will be relevant to my current teaching situation and the present needs of my students. This action research needs to be a way for me to “critically examine one’s teaching in order to improve or enhance it.” (Mills, 2014, p. 13).

I have been a part of this community for most of my life, and, as well, a part of this school for over a decade. I am committed to this community and am an active member of it. I know my students and their families well. I respect and trust this community and know that I belong here. I recognize that I am not a distanced researcher, but rather, I am a part of the process. As a result, I am deeply invested in what happens in this community and in my classroom. I want my students to succeed on every level. The qualitative mixed data I collect from this research study will help the students of this community and inform my future teaching practices. I am committed to improving my own practice and my students’ learning through this research.
Research Questions

My own experiences with speech challenges and social difficulties shape me. My own children’s speech and social hurdles impact my mothering. The observations I make in my teaching career of students who struggle with conversation skills and peer interactions have led me to a deep interest in social conversation. Working towards my Master’s degree affords me the opportunity to explore the connection between social conversation and the social interactions of my students. My experiences all work together to lead me to my current study that will try to answer the following questions: If I teach social conversation skills to my students, through the program *Color My Conversation* (2013), will I notice a difference in the social skills and interactions of my students in my classroom and school? Is there an alignment between *Color My Conversation* (2013) and the new BC curriculum, *Building Student Success* (2015) and how can I use both to support my program in a BC context? Through this research study, will my own knowledge of oral language be extended? Will this research translate to mean that by developing their oral language skills and receiving these types of program opportunities, will they become more socially competent? Through qualitative research using a mixed methods approach of employing my research journal, *the Color My Conversation Rubric* (2013) and the *Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) I hope to find the answers to these questions.
Terminology

The following terminology informs this research project. I chose these specific terms as important because they are central to the programs I am working with: *Building Student Success* (2015) and *Color My Conversation* (2013). I also chose to define terminology that is relevant to the mixed methods qualitative research I am doing.

1. **Action Research**: Action research is research that is initiated to solve a problem. Action research is a reflective process of an individual, or a team to address an issue or find a solution to a problem. Another term for action research can be practice-based research. In action research, teacher researchers study their own practices and are “committed to taking action and effecting positive educational change in their own classrooms and schools based on their findings” (Mills, 2014, p. 5).

2. **Core Competencies**: Core Competencies are defined as “sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning.” (Ministry of Education, 2015, Core Competencies, p. 1). This term is of utmost importance to the new BC curriculum, *Building Student Success* (2015). This term is introduced into BC curriculum to emphasize the importance of foundational communication; personal and social identity; and thinking skills.

3. **Inquiry-Based Research (IBR)**: Inquiry-based research starts by asking questions. The goal of inquiry-based research is to examine problems and identify questions in order to develop knowledge and generate solutions. “Inquiry demands that educators actively scan their environment, generate questions, try new approaches, observe and collect evidence, synthesize information from a variety of sources, draw conclusions and generate new questions” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p.11). There are numerous approaches to IBR,
however, I am using the framework of the *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) to organize my practice-based research. This *Spiral of Inquiry* involves the following steps: 1) scanning; 2) focusing; 3) developing a hunch; 4) new professional learning; 5) taking action; and 6) checking (Halbert & Kaser, 2013).

4. Mixed-methods research design: Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are not mutually exclusive. I am conducting qualitative research, however, I am incorporating both qualitative data (my researcher’s journal) and quantitative data (a rubric and rating scale). The numbers generated from my rating scale and rubric will be considered but will not be subject to rigours of statistical analysis as in quantitative research. I am seeking to triangulate the data I collect from multiple sources and interpret my findings.

5. Rating System: A rating system is a scale for classifying categories. A rating scale provides a system for establishing value to behaviours being observed. Rating scales are particularly well suited to recording specific and observable behaviours. In this research, the *Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS)* *Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) is used. This rating system allows a teacher to use a consistent and straightforward form to rate the behaviours of the students in the class. The items on this rating scale were carefully developed to provide a broad sampling of key behaviours and to assess these behaviours efficiently, reliably and without redundancy. A sample of the SSiS *Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) can be found in Appendix C. The terms used in the *Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS)* (2008) are referred to throughout this research. It is recognized that many of these terms have far broader and complex definitions, however, within the scope of this SSiS *Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) these terms are used and defined the following way:
a. Assertion is defined as “initiating behaviours, such as asking others for information, introducing oneself, and responding to the actions of others.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 1).

b. Autism Spectrum is defined in a very concise and simple way as “interacting poorly, not taking part in conversations, or not making eye contact; making odd gestures; becoming upset at changes in routine or having non-functional routines.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 2).

c. Bullying is the “forcing others to do something, hurting people physically or emotionally, and not letting others join an activity.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 2).

d. Communication is “taking turns and making eye contact during a conversation, using appropriate tone of voice and gestures, and being polite by saying “thank you” and “please”” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 1).

e. Cooperation on the SSiS Teacher Rating Scale has the simple definition of “helping others, sharing materials, and complying with rules and directions.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 1).

f. Empathy is defined as “showing concern and respect for others’ feelings and viewpoints.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 2).

g. The term engagement is defined as “joining activities in progress and inviting others to join, initiating conversations, making friends, and interacting well with others.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 2).

h. Externalizing is defined in by Gresham & Elliot (2008) as “being verbally or physically aggressive, failing to control temper and arguing.” (p. 2).
i. Hyperactivity/Inattention is “moving about excessively, having impulsive reactions, and becoming easily distracted.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 2).

j. Internalizing is “feeling anxious, sad, and lonely; exhibiting poor self-esteem.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 2).

k. Responsibility is “showing regard for the property or work and demonstrating the ability to communicate with adults.” (Gresham & Elliot, 2008, p. 1).

l. Self-Control is defined by Gresham & Elliot, (2008) as responding appropriately in conflict (e.g., disagreeing, teasing) and non-conflict situations (e.g., taking turns and compromising) (p. 2).

6. Rubric: A rubric from Color My Conversation (CMC) (2013) is used before and after the research. A rubric is a chart that articulates standards for students and for assessment. A rubric is a document that clearly outlines expectations by listing the criteria and describing levels of quality from approaching to exceeding. The rubric provided by CMC (2013) assesses students in 14 categories on a Likert scale of one to four (see Appendix B).

7. Social Conversation: Social Conversation is the act of talking in an informal way. It is relating to other people by spending time talking to each other. This experience of social conversation is foundational to our interactions with each other. The category of social conversation is part of the broader idea of communicating. The informal exchanging of thoughts, ideas and feelings is crucial to our interactions with each other in a wide variety of social and work settings.

8. Speaking and Listening is one of six learning strands of the English Language Arts curriculum presented by the BC Ministry of Education (2012). This category refers to the
skills students need to effectively speak and listen within and beyond a classroom setting. This category of “speaking and listening” has been replaced by the category of core competencies in communication in the new BC curriculum. This shows a shift in thinking.

9. The communication terms used in the program *Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013) and referred to throughout this study are defined below. These terms are important to this study since this program is used extensively with my students. Again, it is recognized that some of these terms could have a broader definition, however, within the *CMC* (2013) program these terms are defined in the following way:

a. “Body language” is defined as movements or positions of the body that express a person's thoughts or feelings (Delmonico, 2013, p. 20).

b. A “conversation coach” is a term used for the adult who is administering the *CMC* (2013) program. Their “role is to provide the support required to help the child find success with his/her social conversation skills” (Delmonico, 2013, p. 20). The conversation coach can be a teacher or parent.

c. A “conversation partner” is defined as the person we are having a conversation with (Delmonico, 2013, p. 20).

d. A “conversation recipe” is compared to the “directions section” of a cooking recipe. “It answers the following questions: Who might have the conversation? Where might it take place? When might it take place? Why might it take place?” (Delmonico, 2013, p. 20). In some lessons of *CMC* (2013) students are taught to determine what the conversation recipe is for a particular social situation.
e. “Conversation scripts” are like the “ingredients section” of a cooking recipe. “It describes the actual words/phrases that a child might be expected to say in any give situation” (Delmonico, 2013, p.20).

f. A “conversation starter” is defined as “the questions or comments that we use to engage in conversations after our initial greeting” (Delmonico, 2013, p. 20). These are the words we use to start the conversation in the direction we want it to go.

g. A “conversation stopper” is “the comments that we use to close the conversation before we give the final greeting” (Delmonico, 2013, p. 21). These are the words we use to indicate the conversation is coming to a close.

h. “Meaningful eye contact” is “the intentional look that attempts to gain information from or offer information to another individual or it an awareness of presence that we have between the listener and the speaker” (Delmonico, 2013, p. 22).

i. “Shared topics” are defined by Delmonico (2013) as “the conversation that travels back and forth between you and your conversation partner on common topics of interest” (p. 22).

j. “Surrendering the conversation” is a phrase used in CMC (2013) to refer to the concept that when two people are talking at the same time. One person in the conversation will need to surrender so that the other can speak. This term may also be used for the child who has difficulty with topic closure. It acts as a reminder that we need to allow others an opportunity to participate in the conversation (Delmonico, 2013, p. 23).
k. “Topic changers” are “words and phrases that we use in our conversations to inform our conversation partner that we intend to shift the topic of conversation” (Delmonico, 2013, p. 23).

This research study will examine the use of social conversation to impact the social interactions of the students in a kindergarten classroom. The social conversation program, *Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013), will be implemented. The impact of this program on the 26 participants in this study will be explored through a researcher’s journal, a rubric and a rating scale. This qualitative mixed-methods research will involve triangulating the data collected to ensure I have rich information for my research. *Color My Conversation* (2013) and its alignment with *Building Student Success* (2015) will be examined. Chapter Two will provide an in depth literature review about: 1) the value of oral language skills within an educational context; 2) the reality of oral language in many schools; 3) the impact oral language has on student success; and 4) ways to promote social conversation with primary students. Chapter Three will examine the facets of methodology (action research, inquiry-based research, mixed-methods and triangulation) that inform this research study and provide more information about the participants, data collection tools, procedures, data analysis, validity, and trustworthiness. Chapter Four is an account of how the research process took place during this study and an examination of the data collected. The research generated through the use of the social conversation program, *Color My Conversation* (2013), will be compared to the British Columbia curriculum, *Building Student Success* (2015). Chapter Five is a discussion about the findings and the conclusions that are made in response to the questions that this study is trying to answer, and in turn make suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review in Black and White

Oral language is a broad term which can mean many things to different people. It can refer to the subject area of language arts, speech pathology or just basic speaking skills. As an educator, I want to examine the link between oral language skills and the social development of my learners. My goal with this study is to ascertain how a teacher can effectively teach oral language or social conversation to enhance children’s social relationships within and beyond the classroom. A second goal is to examine the alignment between *Color My Conversation* (2013) and the new British Columbia curriculum, *Building Student Success* (2015).

**Action Research**

As I implement *Color My Conversation* (2013) in my classroom, I have chosen an action-based research methodology since it is well-suited to my study. Action-based research is a well-supported approach to research (Mills, 2014) because it has been shown to be a powerful agent of educational change. The term “action research” was coined by Lewin (1946) and has grown as an extensive approach to educational research because it works well as an over-arching methodology for teachers interested in formalizing some of their practice-based research. There are numerous approaches and schools of thought about action-based research, (Mills, 2014) however, they all share the primary focus of improving the teaching and learning of teachers and students through this research methodology.

Action researchers choose the questions that they plan to investigate based on their own concerns and professional areas of interest. The results of their studies are immediately relevant to the improvement of their practice (Marzano, 2013). Marzano explores the impact that teachers have on their students’ learning. He states, “Researchers agree that the impact of decisions made by individual teachers is far greater than the impact of decisions made at the
school level” (p. 71). The research I am conducting is important to my teaching and my students’ learning. I want the results to have an immediate impact on my students’ lives. I know my students and I know the community in which I am teaching. I want my action-based research to improve my students’ interactions with each other. “Much of the literature on action research emphasizes the practical nature of this type of research. It deals with the practices of people, quite often within their settings. Its main purpose is to improve practice - either one’s own practice or the effectiveness of an institution” (Koshy, 2005).

I want to bring about change in my classroom through my research but I also need to be able to adjust my research to suit my students. Action-based research offers a naturalistic approach, or inquiry, which is preferable over other methods because of its open nature; however, it also has some tried and true constructs that encourage a degree of academic and practice-based rigour. I welcome a flexible methodology because I am dealing with children and I seek to complement their unique perspectives, experiences, and behaviours within the school setting (Stringer, 2008). It would have been difficult to collect information if the participants had to fit within too tight of a, regimented framework. Stringer (2008) describes action-based research as “a naturalistic approach to research that engages teachers in reflective processes that illuminate significant features of their classroom practice” (p. 11). Through this type of research process, a teacher may discover new areas that need attention or a different direction to go with the research. The goal of action research is to examine practices and better meet the needs of the participants or students.

The action research process can generally be described as a series of four steps: 1) planning; 2) action; 3) observing; and 4) reflecting on the results of the action (ATA, 2000, p. 12). A single teacher or a team of educators can collaborate and work through this process
together. I am seeking to do action research within my own classroom. This process works well for me in my classroom since it is flexible. There is an openness and fluidity to action research. This process of inquiry within action research is systematic and flows easily from one stage to the next, allowing the researcher time to reflect and to discuss. Stringer (2008) defined this as a “systematic process of inquiry” (p. 5) where participants and the researcher participate in an action research cycle. I do not know what to expect when I begin working with my young students so I need to have the freedom to adjust as situations change. Stringers’ cycle follows a simple repeated pattern of look-think-act or gather data, analyze data, report findings (pp. 5-6); His cycle provides a tested framework that guides with some simple structure and supports my participants’ needs while still valuing my own research process.

Action research provides teachers with a systematic process to reflect, consider options, implement and evaluate potential solutions. Action research differs from the day-to-day decision making that teachers do (ATA, 2000, p. 2). Action-based research allows me to “investigate a problem or area of interest specific to my professional context” (ATA, 2000, p.4). I have the structure to engage in a planned, systematic and documented process of professional growth while meeting the needs of my learners.

**Zooming In and Setting Parameters on Oral Language**

The field of oral language is extensive. It can encompass robust schools of thought from education to speech pathology to language arts. In this literature review I am exploring research that is educational with a focus on oral language. I will not examine research that focusses on reading skills, or that encompasses all of the language arts. I will also not approach literature from a speech pathologist perspective since this is not my area of expertise or experience. I will choose to use research that has a North American context since I am working with the new
British Columbia (BC) curriculum. I am also particularly interested in research and literature that is focused on primary school-aged children given the demographic of my study.

The literature I refer to throughout this chapter will examine: 1) the value of oral language skills within an educational context; 2) the reality of oral language in many schools; 3) the impact oral language has on student success; and 4) ways to promote social conversation with primary students.

**Speaking and Listening Competency: Priceless**

There is evidence to suggest that oral language is foundational to the success of all learners (Huang & Millunix, 2002), and it typically receives little attention from teachers (Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson, 2006; Tompkins, Bright, Pollard, & Winsor, 2005). Many teachers feel that they have received little to no training in teaching oral language (Hunter, Gambell & Randhawa, 2005) and tend to incorporate oral language into other subject areas rather than specifically teaching oral language skills as its own program. For example, the subject of science can sometimes become a forum for students to do an oral presentation or the subject of music is used as a way to assess students’ listening skills.

A review of the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) in the previous curriculum for British Columbia (BC) (2012) reveals that the number of outcomes devoted to oral language equalled or outnumbered those dedicated to reading or writing in every grade at the elementary level (BC Ministry of Education, 2012). As the BC Ministry of Education developed a new BC education plan, entitled *Building Student Success* (2015), oral language, and communication are emphasized even more than the previous BC curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2012). This increase in oral language shows the curriculum designers understand the importance of oral
language. They are articulating outcomes that require discreet understanding that was not previously addressed in the BC curriculum (2012).

The BC education plan (2015) outlines three core competencies: communication, thinking, and personal and social. “The core competencies, along with literacy and numeracy foundations and essential content and concepts, are at the centre of the redesign of curriculum and assessment. Core competencies are sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning” (Ministry of Education, 2015, *Core Competencies*, p. 1). The BC education plan goes on to explain the importance of the competency of communication:

Communication competency encompasses the set of abilities that students use to impart and exchange information, experiences, and ideas, to explore the world around them, and to understand and effectively engage in the use of digital media. Communication competency provides a bridge between students’ learning, their personal and social identity and relationships, and the world in which they interact (Ministry of Education, 2015, *Communication Competency Profiles*, p. 2).

Despite the increased emphasis on oral language and communication in the *BC Education Plan* (2015), there is also evidence that curricular programs; along with professional development and resource materials devoted to reading and writing education greatly outnumber those designed to support oral language education. The instruction and assessment of oral language skills have also received considerably less attention than reading and writing (Doak, 2012, Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson, 2006; Tompkins, et al., 2005). Therefore, while educators, curriculum, and research recognizes the importance of oral language for school success, the amount of classroom time and teacher training devoted to oral language does not reflect this.
Attention to Oral Language: Rare

I think it is important to not just identify that oral language is not receiving as much time and attention as reading and writing, but to ask why this is the case. I will explore four reasons why educators might not be attending to oral language development in their students. The factors that may impact the time and attention that oral language instruction receives in a classroom are: 1) teachers’ lack of training in oral language instruction; 2) teachers’ assumptions about their students’ proficiency in oral language; 3) increased curricular demands for teachers; and the 4) lack of appreciation for the importance of oral language.

**Teachers’ lack of training in oral language instruction.** The reason teachers may pay less attention to oral language than reading or writing in the classroom may be due to a number of influences. One factor may be the teachers’ lack of training resulting in inadequate instructional skill in this area (Doak, 2012, Yellin & Blake, 1994). Some educators feel ill-prepared to teach and assess oral language skills (Yellin & Blake, 1994). It stands to reason, if an educator does not feel competent or prepared to do the task, they are not likely to teach the area they are apprehensive or unprepared for. “Research supports the fact, that mainstream classroom teachers need more training when working with students with speech, language, and communication needs” (Kohler, 2016, p. 30). What teachers believe about their own skills and abilities will affect how and what they focus on within their classroom (Costantino-Lane, 2013; Kohler, 2016; Wellington & Stackhouse, 2011). Teachers who feel they are competent to teach oral language are more likely to do so. Through my research in oral language programs and the communication competencies of the new BC curriculum, I am looking to address ways teachers can receive programs and tools to become more competent and confident in assessing and meeting the oral language needs of their students. I am seeking a better understanding for myself
and for my students also. I think teachers need to become better equipped to increase the communication proficiency of their students so that they can have greater success in school.

**Assumptions about student proficiency in oral language.** The second reason teachers may not make oral language instruction a priority in their classrooms could be due to teachers’ assumptions about student proficiency (Costantino-Lane, 2013; Jones, 2007; Tompkins et al., 2005). If students are able to speak and listen, teachers may assume that these skills provide enough evidence that students have mastered oral language skills. Costantino-Lane (2013) states: “Perhaps the underlying assumption is that kindergarten students were already competent in oral language” (p.6). Students who come into the classroom talking, are seen as competent in oral language. Teachers may not understand or acknowledge that all students do not “naturally” learn to talk. Language is complex. While many teachers may be aware of this complexity of language, they may still believe that learning to talk is “natural” to their students. Nativism is the belief that “the capacity to develop language is innate, with language knowledge coming to fruition as the child matures biologically” (Vinson, 2007, p. 7). Many teachers seem to believe their students have easily and completely become proficient in oral language. There is a “lack of awareness among many practitioners of what communicative competence is, and that not only can it be taught but it does not necessarily occur ‘naturally’” (Wilde & Sage, 2007, p. 679).

Even if teachers are unsure of their students’ oral language, and would like to verify the competence of their students in oral language skills, reading is much easier to assess than oral language, an therefore it receives the attention (Biemiller, 1999). Oral language assessment is not routine in kindergarten, and a reliable instrument is difficult to find for this age group (Pearson, 2008). Teachers do not always have a good knowledge of where their students should be in oral language and they do not have a way of measuring their students’ oral language
development. “Understanding the stages and where a child needs to be can impact teachers’ approach to instruction. For this reason, it is important for teachers to have a deep understanding of language development in children and provide specific language interventions” (Kohler, 2016, p. 21). If teachers are assuming their students are proficient in oral language or there are not readily available instruments to verify this assumption, the underdeveloped oral language of many students may not be noticed (Costantino-Lane, 2013). Through my research, I hope to have better tools to determine my students’ oral language proficiency. Being able to determine if students need to develop a certain skill is the first step towards moving them forward in that skill.

**Increased curricular demands for teachers.** Thirdly, schools in general, and teachers in particular, are experiencing an increase in work demands which include greater curriculum expectations (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008; Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006). There has been a trend over the last number of decades to teach more and to teach it earlier. Graue (2009) noted that the emphasis on student achievement can distort the kindergarten curriculum so that the focus is no longer on the developmental needs of the children. There is a push to focus on reading and writing which can override the development of students’ oral language progression (Thornton, 2002). The shift to more academics at a younger age can make teachers feel they do not have the time or the support to focus on oral language (Ravich, 2010; Trelease, 2008).

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) state, “The number of tasks [that teachers] are expected to deal with is growing, and complaints about increased workload are common” (p. 1150). Research shows that as curricular demands increase, teachers struggle to meet the new demands in their classrooms (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2008). Other researchers observed that certain areas of the curriculum are being ignored, or they are not thoroughly covered, and have been a
consequence of greater work demands. Reeves (2002) notes that some areas of curriculum are not sufficiently covered or were are covered at all. Apple & Jungck, (1996) notes that there is a growing external pressure, due to the fact that teachers must perform an increasing number of tasks for which they have insufficient time and resources.

The development of oral language, which ultimately impacts all aspects of curriculum, has been relegated to a more incidental by-product of many classrooms, in order to allow time to teach children about topics that might be on a test. “Additionally, as curriculum is pushed down into the primary grades, teachers feel the need to spend time on academic content, rather than allowing children opportunities to build language” (Kirkland & Peterson, 2005, p. 391). Teachers tend to focus on the areas that they are convinced are important or areas where they have expertise. For me, oral language is one of the areas that is not receiving my full attention. An aspect of this research is to correct my attention to oral language in my classroom.

**Lack of appreciation for the importance of oral language.** Research (Doak, 2012, Yellin & Blake, 1994) suggests that there may be a number of reasons that teachers are not actually teaching oral language skills in their classrooms, at least not with the same emphasis and attention that curriculum documents suggest. Perhaps the importance of oral language, as it relates to academic and social success in school and life beyond, needs to be considered. I am suggesting that a fourth reason teachers may not be teaching oral language skills, is that there is not a true understanding or belief that these skills deeply matter. Teachers will not spend the time on oral language if they do not view it is foundationally important to the students. As we have already noted, there are many demands on our teacher’s time. If teachers are to give oral language more than the fleeting attention that I believe that it gets, they must believe it matters to their students in a crucial way. Teachers need to believe their students lack the oral language
competence they require to succeed in school. Teachers need to be convinced that students’ communication abilities will impact their overall learning.

**Oral Language Colours Cross-Curricular School Success**

**Reading.** There are cross-curricular benefits to students who have strong oral language skills. Oral language abilities and habits may serve as important resources for success or failure in school-related tasks such as learning to read (Beron & Farkas, 2004). Wilde and Sage (2007) found that children’s communicative competence on entering school predicted later learning success. The ability to converse was found to be a reliable determining factor in students’ ability to read (Foorman, Herrera, Petscher, Mitchell, & Truckenmiller, 2015). Foster & Miller (2007) conducted a longitudinal study on the gap in literacy achievement in students from kindergarten to grade three. They write: “There is a large and growing body of evidence to support the notion that many students enter school significantly behind their more advantaged and typically developing peers, and that over the course of elementary school, the academic performance gap widens” (p. 173). A study of preschool children conducted by Puranik and Lonigan (2012) showed that even at this young age, children with weaker oral language skills lagged behind their peers with stronger oral language skills in terms of their writing-related skills. They conclude that: “the findings of this study raise questions about the need for early screening and assessment of emergent writing skills especially for children with weaker oral language skills” (p. 187). A reciprocal relationship between language and reading is acknowledged by many (Catts et al., 2000; Preston et al., 2010; Sticht, 2002). In 2001, the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) increased the role and responsibility of speech-language pathologists to include the ability to assess and identify interventions for reading disorders in children (Lance, Beverly, Evans & McCullough, 2003). Findings show that “early targeted (language)
intervention reduces the number of students struggling in reading by the end of elementary school” (Kohler, 2016, p. 8). Strong and early language interventions helped students succeed in other subject areas.

**Mathematics.** Oral language is also found to be directly linked to students’ ability to succeed in math. General language skills and early numeracy are found to have a significant mutual relationship (Toll, 2014). By focusing on oral language, a gap in math skills can also be filled. Giving students better communication skills will also improve their ability to talk about their math processes and articulate their math solutions. The importance of communication, a diligent teaching of oral language and symbolism, directly improved students’ math education (Molina, 2012). It is also found that those who already possess strong math skills tend to also have strong language skills (Fiano, 2014).

**Communication.** Beyond the deep impact oral language skills have on the academic performance of children in school, there is also the importance of children’s social and emotional development. The ability to communicate, form friendships and interact positively with others affects students ability to learn (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong & Gomby, 2005). The ability to stay on task, engage in listening, manage emotions, follow directions, work cooperatively and manage conflicts are all aspects of social emotional skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2013). These skills can be developed and built on through oral language, in particular through social conversation. It is this aspect of my school programming that is the focus of this research. Through the teaching of social conversation I am also seeking to improve my students’ social interactions.

When students struggle in the areas of listening, managing emotions, working cooperatively and addressing conflict, situations can arise which result in learning time being reduced - not only for the child but for the rest of the children in the classroom setting. Students
who are more socially aware, are also more capable of staying on task and engaging in a positive manner with their peers and teachers (Wentzel, Baker & Russell, 2009). Stan (2012) conducted research on six-year-olds entering grade one and found that students who were socially aware and confident did better in school. “At the level of social competence, assertion and responsibility represent predictors of school performances (Stan, 2012, p. 809). Better academic outcomes result when students are experiencing positive relationships with their peers and their teachers. These students receive more praise and less criticism. They also receive more opportunities to contribute to the learning environment (Zins, Weissbert, Wang & Walberg, 2004). Baker (2006) conducted a study of 1320 elementary school-aged students, it was discovered that teacher–child relationship contributed to school adjustment. The results suggest a consistent and comparable effect for children across grades, gender, and types of school outcomes. Children experiencing behavioural or learning problems showed poorer school outcomes and were less able to benefit from a close teacher relationship when compared to peers without such problems. The conclusion was that students who receive positive interactions from the teacher and their peers outperform those who receive negative attention.

Many children enter the school system with limited social skills including the ability to engage in social conversation (Ryan, Fauth & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). If teachers do not feel they have the skills or resources to address this educational need in students, or if they do not understand the great impact the lack of social skills and social conversation have on students’ academic performance, then they will not address this communication need across subject areas.

Communicative competence is defined as the ability to listen, follow directions, think, work, and play cooperatively, and form friendships. Communication skills were a predictor of cooperation and play. If a teacher is able to improve a student’s communication skills, they will
also increase their ability to form friendships and have positive interactions with peers. Communication competence or social conversation skills benefit a child’s ability to achieve academic success and allows for the development of healthy relationships. It can contribute to long-term success in school and in life (Eddy, Reid, & Curry, 2002). This link between communication competence and social skills is what I explore in my research. Will improving social conversation skills also improve general relationship skills and competence in a cross-curriculum learning environment?

**The Quest: Programs that Promote Social Conversation**

The most well-known program in oral language development and in particular social and relational skills is the PEERS (2009) program. PEERS is a Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2009). This program was designed to help teens on the autism spectrum develop relational skills of which social conversation is a large piece. There has been extensive research in the effectiveness of this program (Karst, VanHecke, Carson, Stevens, Schohl, & Dolan, 2015; Laugeson, E. A., & Park, M. N., 2014; O’Connor, Frankel, Paley, Schonfeld, Carpenter, Langeson, & Marquardt, 2006). Karst, et al., (2015) conducted research with 110 teens with autism. The adolescents who completed the PEERS (2009) friendship-development intervention showed fewer symptoms of autism, more social contacts, and more knowledge of intervention concepts. It was suggested that it may be that adolescent neural function responds to the development of friendships and the remediation of social isolation during the critical developmental period of adolescence.

The lesson format and many of the rules regarding social etiquette in the PEERS (2009) were adapted from an evidence-based parent-assisted social skills training program known as the Children’s Friendship Training (CFT) (Frankel & Myatt, 2003). The effectiveness of CFT
(2003) has been demonstrated for children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD), and for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (Frankel, Myatt, & Cantwell, 1995; Frankel, Myatt, Cantwell, & Feinberg, 1997; Frankel, Myatt, & Feinberg, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2006). Results of these studies revealed that the social skills generalized outside of the treatment situation and were maintained for three months after ending treatment. The PEERS (2009) intervention adapted the methods and curriculum of the CFT (2003) to better accommodate instruction and content that were relevant to teenagers with ASD (Laugeson et al., 2009). The PEERS (2009) intervention has three key features: 1) Instruction was conducted in a safe, small group format, which included brief didactic instruction, modelling, role playing, coaching with performance feedback, behavioural rehearsal, and weekly socialization assignments including a homework review; 2) parents were included in the program within separate concurrent sessions. As pointed out by Frankel and Myatt (2003), parents can have significant effect on their children’s friendships and can support the development of a peer group when provided with direct instruction and supervision; 3) the content of the PEERS (2009) intervention focused on teaching rules of social etiquette to teenagers, while their parents were given instructions regarding the supervision and implementation of their child’s newly-learned skills (Laugeson et al., 2009).

The social skill training program CFT (2003) and PEERS (2009) have both been developed and widely used with pre-teen and teen children. They have especially been developed, implemented and researched with children who struggle with a variety of disorders such as ASD, FASD, and ADHD. Recently Laugeson (2013) has published a book titled: The Science of Making Friends (2013). This publication takes the skills and research of PEERS (2009) and applies it to a more general population of teens. “This book gives parents a step-by-
step guide for helping teens and young adults struggling with social skills learn to make and keep friends” (Laugeson, 2013, p. 2). The clear and detailed approach to social skills including social conversation is effective. However, the age group it is designed for is well beyond the primary years of school. My class of kindergarten students would find many of the approaches and activities of *The Science of Making Friends* (2013) to be out of their reach.

Programs that are designed for the “average” student, students without learning disabilities or a special education diagnosis, in the classroom are difficult to find. Many oral language programs are designed to develop pre-reading skills such as phonetic awareness, letter sounds, syllables and rhyming. *Road to the Code* (Blachman, Ball, Black & Tangel, 2000) or *The Intensive Phonological Awareness Program (IPA)* (Schuele, & Murphy, 2014) are two programs that are being used and promoted extensively. However, these programs only look at oral language skills as they relate to pre-reading and reading skills. A program that addresses oral language skills in a social language context is more difficult to locate.

Another aspect of oral language that is often focused on is public speaking. Especially as students move beyond the early years, teachers tend to focus on public speaking as the key oral language skill. *Public Speaking Program for Kids* (2014) is one popular approach. The Dale Carnegie institute also offers extensive programs for children and teens to master their fear and be able to speak effectively in public (Carnegie, 2015). While this aspect of oral language is important, it is not the social conversation skills of everyday life that are addressed through these programs.

*Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013) started to be developed in 2006 to support children who struggle with a delay or lack of social language skills. However, it was found to have a much broader application than just students with a delay or disorder (Delmonico, 2013).
Besides the broader application of *CMC* (2013), it also is designed to work with very young children from preschool age up into the teen years. This program seems to meet the application and context I am looking for: 1) it teaches the communication skill of social conversation; 2) it is intended for young children; and 3) it is designed to be used in the context of a classroom with all students.

**Color My Conversation Strategies**

*Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013) uses four foundational strategies. The overarching strategies are: 1) errorless learning; 2) multi-sensory teaching; 3) modelling; and 4) curiosity. Each of these four areas are incorporated into the lessons of *CMC* (2013). These four strategies work together to provide success for a variety of children in a wide range of classroom and learning situations. The incorporation of these aspects of learning also allows teachers to tailor the lessons to meet the needs of their students. For example I have a student who is very tactile in her learning. She needs to move and touch things in order to learn. *CMC* (2013) gives her opportunities to sing, move, interact, and participate. *CMC* (2013) is designed to meet the needs of students who have different learning styles, backgrounds and challenges.

**Errorless learning.** Errorless learning is a type of training where errors are limited. Support and answers are given right up front. Support is then faded as the targeted skills are established. Errorless learning creates a low stress, high success learning environment. This low stress environment is important when working with students who struggle with anxiety, failure, or memory issues. Many students, even in the “average” classroom fall into these categories. A review of research in the area of errorless learning reveals that there is a great benefit to this approach for children in a variety of populations including those who have language learning
deficits and for those who struggle with reading and memory (Randle, Maher & Gonzales, 2007).

More recently, a comparison of trial and error learning and errorless learning strategies for word learning with eight-year-old children was conducted (Warmington, Hitch & Gathercole, 2013). The children learned the words better with errorless learning methods than through trial and error. These errorless learning strategies are employed throughout the CMC (2013) program, but especially in the beginning lessons. This allows children to realize immediate success in a low stress environment, which enhances the ease with which the children can learn as they grow in skill and confidence. Students will quickly have success and be encouraged to continue developing their social conversation skills.

**Multi-sensory teaching.** Multi-sensory teaching is another strategy that can positively affect instruction with young students. Multi-sensory learning and teaching integrates visual, auditory, tactile (touch) and kinesthetic (movement) learning elements.
Different teaching methods activate different parts of the brain. This type of teaching helps learners discover their learning style and the techniques best for them. A study using multi-sensory (i.e. use of song and movement) and traditional (i.e. desk, paper/pencil) techniques is used to teach students. The results find that participants who are taught with a multi-sensory approach make greater improvements than the control group who are taught with a traditional approach (Obaid, 2013). CMC (2013) weaves a variety of multi-sensory activities throughout the lessons. One multi-sensory activity is singing and rhymes to help with memory. It has been found that singing is an effective tool to support the retention of information (Rainey & Larsen, 2002) and has been positively linked to one’s ability to bond socially (Zoller, 1991).

Besides singing and rhymes, CMC (2013) uses numerous visuals to assist students with learning. “The ability to look at the visuals boosts the child’s comprehension, especially when auditory difficulties exist . . . that affects their ability to communicate.” (Spears, C. L., Turner, V., & Diaz, P., 2011, p. 66). CMC (2013) introduces the visual of a conversation path with colored “stones”. It also uses a ball to indicate when each person in a conversation needs to talk. These are a few examples of how visuals assist in the learning of social conversation skills.

**Modelling.** Modelling is another powerful multi-sensory tool that is used by CMC (2013). Bandura (1961) developed the social learning theory which states that human behaviour is learned through the process of observing and modelling others. Research confirms that learners do learn from modelling. (Williams, Whiten, Suddendorf, & Perrett, 2001). The use of modelling through the use of a video has also been found to be an effective teaching tool (Charlop, Dennis, Carpenter & Greenberg, 2010). Both modelling and video modelling are used in CMC, and are found to be powerful for reinforcing and capturing the attention of the participants. Modelling is done throughout CMC (2013) by the teacher “self talking” as he/she is
demonstrating the lesson. In this way the students can hear the teacher’s thinking as well as view the teacher’s words and actions.

**Curiosity.** Curiosity is natural to most learners. When someone wants to know something their attention is focused. People will try strategies to learn and will reflect on what they are doing which allows their comprehension to go deeper because they are engaged (Engel, 2006). Children who are curious about a topic demonstrate a greater sense of purpose when learning about the topic and indicate higher levels of satisfaction and well-being than children who are not (Engel, 2011). Jovanvich & Brdaric, 2012 conclude, “the importance of encouraging young people’s natural curiosity that should result in the growth of independence and learning new behavior patterns “(p. 383). CMC (2013) tries to inspire curiosity in learners and engage them in a variety of ways using music, signing and gestures to emphasize and build on the topics taught. Each lesson offers a wide variety of activities and approaches so the teacher can match the lesson to the interests and skills of the students. Keeping the learners engaged and curious is one of the goals of this program.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the central themes this research study will examine are the use of social conversation to promote social skills and interactions within my classroom and school, and the alignment between *Color My Conversation* (2013) and the new BC curriculum *Building Student Success* (2015). The research I have examined in this literature review supports the need for teachers to have a greater knowledge of oral language development. Research (Huang & Constatino-Lane, 2013; Millunix, 2002) also shows oral language is crucial for academic and social success. I will be challenging myself to broaden my own knowledge of oral language through this research, the program I am using and my thorough work with *Building Student*
Success (2015). My action-based research will translate into my students also developing their oral language skills and receiving opportunities to become more socially competent. “Action research is a powerful strategy for enhancing educators’ professionalism and improving the quality of their students’ learning, thereby empowering educators to become active partners in leading school change and powerful agents of educational renewal” (Efron, Sara & Ravid, R., 2013, p. v). I will use this research to bring about change in my approach to social conversation and change in my students’ lives through improved interactions with each other.
Chapter 3: Mixing Methods

“Inquiry isn’t about the pursuit of the perfect question or the next exciting strategy. It is about being open to new learning and taking informed action” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 9).

At the beginning of the school year, as I started to teach my kindergarten students, I had a very broad idea of what my research will look like. I know I have a strong interest in oral language and social interactions. I know that I want to bring about change for my students and for myself. I have learned about action research and realize the cycle of research, action and reflection fits well with my desire to shape my students’ learning and my own practice.

Methodologies

**Action-based Research.** I designed this project out of a realization that I do not give social conversation the attention it needs and I did not initially have the knowledge I needed to promote communication development in my classroom. It was out of my recognition of the gaps in my knowledge and my practice that this research began to take shape. I initially observed my students and saw a lack of competence in social conversation and social interactions. To facilitate my students’ learning process, this classroom-based inquiry grew into an action research project. This methodology was most appropriate to my research question, because my entire focus has been about engaging my students in social language development and thus improving their peer interactions. Action-based research is a systematic approach to investigation which enables teachers to find effective solutions to problems they encounter in their everyday lives.

Change, the desired outcome of community-based action research … The products of research are not only written reports but also “practice scripts”—plans, procedures, models, maps, and so on—that provide the basis for reformulating practices, policies,
programs, and services related to people’s occupational or community life (Stringer, 2007, p. 212).

Action-based research provides the means by which teachers in schools may increase the effectiveness of the work in which they are engaged. This process is a continuous cycle of research, action, and reflection (Stringer, 2007, McMillan, 2008). An advantage of this type of approach is that it “allows close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories. . . through these stories the participants are able to describe their views of reality and this enables the researcher to better understand the participants “actions” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). This type of research, according to Baxter and Jack (2008), describes an “intervention” (Color My Conversation, 2013) and the “real-life” context in which it has occurred (the classroom).

**Spiral of Inquiry.** As part of my Master’s program I have learned about an inquiry model. This model or framework is the *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) as developed by Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser in partnership with Helen Timperley. This research-based *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) was designed to assist school teams and individuals to “create greater quality and equity for their learners” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 48). This model speaks to me since it allows room for me to get to know my students and develop my research as the school year progresses.

The action research process lends itself to a spiral of cycles, with the researcher reflecting on each stage of the process. When the results of the first action have been studied, the researcher then plans the next series of actions. Each reflective phase yields more information about the issue and increases the researcher’s understanding. Sometimes the information gained leads the researcher to refine the question with a different focus. (ATA, 2000, p. 12)
The *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) has broadened the usual steps of action research. This spiral model outlines six stages. These stages are: 1) scanning; 2) focusing; 3) developing a hunch; 4) engaging in new professional learning; 5) taking new professional action; and 6) checking that a difference has been made. I chose this approach in September so that I could develop my action research in an organized and sequential way. I decided to use the steps or stages of the *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) to examine my own practice and implement strategies that would bring about better learning for my students. As I began the first stage of this *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013), my research began to take shape and my research questions developed. I realized that I wanted to create an environment supportive of student social language development and ultimately advance their peer interactions through improved speaking and listening skills, or social conversation. I was excited that my research this year could potentially help my students and I learn together.

This *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) allows me to systematically approach my action research by assessing where my students were at the beginning of the year, focusing on their oral language development, and looking at current research and theories regarding positive peer interactions and how they are impacted by social language development. From this research I can determine the direction of my new professional action. At the end of my action research, using the *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013), I can reflect and check the difference these actions make for my students and their peer interactions. Through my methodology, I apply this *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) to the process and timeline that I follow for my research.

**Research Process and Timeline**

**Scanning.** As the school year begins, the first step I take is scanning my students and my own practice. I ask myself what I observe about the students and their social interactions with each other. Scanning is the first step of my action research. Once I observe my class and notice
the frequency of negative social interactions between students and the lack of social conversation, I begin to reflect on this in a journal. My entry on September 22, 2015 states:

“I have a student who seems to be alone a lot. She is very quiet. She walks around the school at recess by herself and doesn’t interact with anyone. At center time I paired her with one other student but they do not play together. They each do their own activity without paying attention to the other. They do not speak to each other at all. I will need to see if her silence and her lack of interaction with the other students is due to shyness or language development. I am not sure how to assess this.”

My observations raise a new question for me: How do I assess my students’ oral language development?

**Focusing.** The next step of action research is to begin to collect data. The *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) speaks of focusing. Focusing entails asking the question: “Where are we going to concentrate our professional energies so that we can change the experiences and results for our learners?” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 51). As September progresses, I find myself thinking about communication and reflecting on it:

“So much of our communication we just ‘pick up’. What if we taught it instead and did not rely on this ‘hit-and-miss’ approach?

I have noticed that only when a child lacks a skill do we start to back track and simplify things so that we can teach something in smaller, simpler steps. The observable need is what propels us as educators to try something new or take a step back before moving forward.”

What can I do as a classroom teacher, do to improve social language with my students? How will this improved social language be reflected in positive peer interactions? I continue to scan my
class and their interactions throughout October into November of the school year, 2015-2016. I am getting to know my students and their families. I am able to have conversations with the parents of my students and I hear their concerns about their children. One parent mentions to me that her daughter would like to play “ponies” with the other girls but she does not know how to ask.

_The mother tells me, “My daughter has a pony in her pocket but she does not take it out because the other girls are running around the playground and she cannot stop them to show them her pony and ask to join.”_

I record this conversation in my research journal. By December, 2015 I am beginning to consider how I can document where my students are and what happens in my classroom as my research moves forward. My researcher’s journal is already a rich source of data. I also choose to collect data through the *Color My Conversation Rubric* (2013) and the *Social Skills Improvement System Teacher Rating Scale* (2008). These tools will give me a variety of sources of data. I will explain these data collection tools in greater detail in the research tools section of this chapter.

**Developing a hunch.** Once I have selected the research method and instruments I will use to gather data, it is time develop a hunch. The *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) approach explains “developing a hunch” as a phase that “requires inquiry teams to step back and take a serious look at what is contributing to the situation for learners. . . Once we have some pretty good hunches about what is going on, then it is time for new professional learning to take place” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 53). At this stage I am looking at my learners, my classroom, the data I am collecting and the research and readings I am doing. I am seeking to gather as much information as possible so I have a clear picture of where my learners are in their oral language development as we move forward together.
New professional learning. As part of my Master’s program I have an opportunity to learn and discuss my research with other educators. I also am motivated to read and consider new learning and research. Through my readings and literature review, I come to choose Color My Conversation (CMC) (Delmonico, 2013) as the program that is best suited for the needs of my students and for the research I am seeking to accomplish. CMC (2013) is designed to work with young children. Preschool to teen (3 to 18) is the age range this program is designed for. This program meets the application and context I am looking for: 1) it teaches the communication skill of social conversation; 2) it is intended for young children; and 3) it is designed to be used in the context of a classroom with all students.

The beginner level of CMC (2013) has been found to be effective in improving the confidence and conversation of some students. This happens for two reasons: CMC (2013) demystifies the conversation process by providing names and examples for each part of a conversation; and it shows the repetitive and predictable nature of conversations. The similarities between all our conversations throughout the day are highlighted for students. They are taught to see the commonalities in social conversations and learn to count on the repetitive nature of our social interactions (Delmonico, 2013).

Many students use technology extensively and do most of their communicating through this technology. The students in my class are not using technology yet, but CMC (2013) will show them the value of personal communication and teach them how to participate in social conversations at a young age. CMC (2013) addresses the challenges that some students have to engage in face to face conversations. Students are able to gain a deeper appreciation of emotional and social benefits of connecting with someone one-on-one and face to face. Conversations are the key to our ability to communicate with each other because they offer more than just the
words that we say. They offer a multi-faceted experience, using facial expressions, body gestures, tone of voice, and eye-to-eye interaction. Technology can only take us so far in our personal endeavours. It cannot replace this integral form of communication from one human being to another. “Human beings are capable of infinite combinations of vocal inflection and facial expression. It is from other people that we can learn how to listen and bend to each other in conversations.” (Turkle, 2011, p. 244).

The main focus of CMC (2013) is on meaningful conversations. Students are taught to engage with their peers in conversations. They are given opportunities to see conversations modelled for them, and then practice the skills that were modelled in a meaningful way with their peers. There are auditory songs and rhymes to help facilitate learning. There are also visuals like a “conversation path” and bulletin board displays, also to help facilitate learning and serve as a reference for students during their conversations. I see this program as working well with my students and am excited to begin to introduce CMC (2013) in my classroom.

Taking action. I have arrived at the point where I am ready to introduce CMC (2013) to my students. This stage of the Spiral of Inquiry (2013) is where “new learning leads to new practices” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 56). They caution that it is rare that everything will go “swimmingly”. I believe that clearly involving students, parents, administration and fellow staff greatly aids in bringing about change. Halbert and Kaser (2013) offer some sound advice: “As teachers try new approaches, it is really important that the reasons for these changes are well-understood by classroom assistants and by parents. . . The early involvement of key parent leaders can make a positive difference to new learning in an inquiring school” (p. 57). I involve my parents and administration throughout the research process and am happy with their positive response. I have an opportunity to speak with many of my parents throughout the year about my
research and then in a more formal way through a parent information evening (see Appendix I).

My research is approved by the administration at my school and by the Vancouver Island Research Ethics Board in March, 2016. This allows me to move forward with implementing *Color My Conversation* (2013) in May and June, 2016 in my classroom. The details of this ethical approval of my research and how this research is conducted are outlined in the procedures section of this chapter.

**Checking.** The six stage of the *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) is checking to see if a difference has occurred for learners. In order to “check”, the key question that needs to be asked is: “Did this make a difference to valued outcomes for learners?” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 57). The question of whether a difference was made is crucial. It is foundational to doing action research in my classroom with my learners. When I arrive at the end of my school year with my learners, I want to know if my work with *CMC* (2013) and the *Building Student Success* (2015) has had an impact on their social conversations and their social interactions. I examine my research data in great detail in Chapter 4 and explore the impact of this data in Chapter 5.

**Choosing the Instruments: Data Collection Tools**

**Research journal.** My researcher’s journal is a tool that helps me to shape my action research. It is through my journal that I glean information from interactions in the classroom and beyond. My research journal allows me to reflect on the interactions students are having with each other, with adults in the school setting and also with people in their daily lives. My researcher’s journal helps me to better attend to student’s social conversations. From September, 2015 to March, 2016 my research journal contains classroom observations and my thoughts as I see themes emerge with my students. This journal is an effective tool for me to examine my own practice and the needs of my students.
Once my research becomes more focused, my research journal also becomes more focused with specific questions and observations. I add entries weekly, usually following each CMC lesson. These journal entries reflect on classroom events around my lesson plans: what went well in each lesson, and what I would modify to meet with greater success the next time around. These journal entries provide me with continuous and repeated observations made over the months I implement CMC (2013). Reflecting in my journal enables me to explore a deeper understanding about my beliefs and actions in the classroom. Each journal entry contains reflections on these four questions: 1) What did I do in the lesson? 2) What responses did the students make during this CMC (2013) lesson? 3) Were there any other social conversation “events” that occurred with my students beyond the lesson? and 4) How did CMC (2013) align with the curriculum goals of this grade level? During the months of May through June, 2016 I have a total of twelve journal entries that present some particular patterns and themes. These journal entries help me to develop new insights into my practice. This researcher’s journal aids me in being more reflective as I go through the process. It is a way for me to document my findings in an organized and detailed way (see Appendix D).
Rubric. A rubric is a chart that clearly outlines expectations by listing the criteria and describing levels of quality from approaching to exceeding.

A simple answer is that rubrics are assessment tools that foster student learning, while at the same time helping teachers evaluate student progress more effectively. In using rubrics, instructors clarify goals, expectations, and focus; are better able to articulate expected behaviours and outputs; and find that assessments are more efficient and defensible. (“Rubrics 101”)

I will use the rubric developed for *Color My Conversation* (2013). This rubric is clear and organized. The *CMC Rubric* (2013) helps me to clarify where my students are in their communication at the start of my research. It itemizes my expectations and goals for my students through the use of *CMC* (2013). A portion of this rubric is shown below (see also Appendix B).

This rubric is developed to assess students on skills presented in each of the 12 lessons. It is a
four standards Likert Scale: 1) not yet meeting expectations; 2) approaching expectations; 3) meeting expectations; and 4) exceeding expectations. There is a clear description on the rubric of what each of these categories looks like in the classroom.

**Graphic 3.2: Color My Conversation Rubric (2013) Sample**

This rubric assesses students on the following indicators of social conversations skills: 1) eye contact; 2) facial expressions; 3) body gestures; 4) proxemics; 5) tone of voice; 6) greetings; 7) farewells; 8) conversation starter; 9) conversation stopper; 10) topics; 11) comments and questions; 12) topic changers; 13) turn taking; and 14) etiquette. I rate my students using this rubric prior to and following the implementation of the CMC (2013) program. This CMC Rubric (2013) consists of fourteen categories. The majority of the 26 students are in the “approaching expectations” range. There are one or two students that “exceeded expectations” in the first seven categories but no students “exceeded expectations” in the more complex categories of
eight through twelve. Some students are in the “meeting expectations” range, but this was mainly in the first three categories where skills are less complex. Two to five students are in the “not yet meeting expectations” range for the first seven categories but this significantly increased for the more complex categories of eight through 12 with 12 to 18 students in these categories. No assessment was done on any of the categories beyond twelve since these reflect an intermediate level and are topics that will not be covered at the primary level in this study. These scores for the initial assessment using the *CMC Rubric* (2013) are recorded in table 3.1 below. These scores seem to indicate that most of my students are not confident with most of the social conversation skills that will be taught to them. My students will benefit from being taught the skills necessary for communicating with each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories (topics of each lesson)</th>
<th>1 Not Yet Meeting Expectations</th>
<th>2 Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>3 Meeting Expectations</th>
<th>4 Exceeding Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Eye Contact</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Facial Expressions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Body Gestures</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Proxemics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tone of Voice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Greetings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Farewells</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Conversation Starter</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Conversation Stopper</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Topics</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Comments &amp; Questions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Topic Changers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Turn Taking</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Social Etiquette</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.1 – Color My Conversation Rubric* (2013) of Scores Before *CMC* (2013).
**Rating scale.** The *Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) (see Appendix C) is designed to assist professionals in screening and classifying students who are suspected of having social skill deficits and aids in the development of interventions for those students. A rating system is a scale for classifying categories and provides a system for establishing value to behaviours being observed. Rating scales are particularly well suited to recording specific and observable behaviours. The SSiS (2008) offers a multi-rater approach that may include ratings from teachers, parents and from students themselves. For the purpose of my research only the teacher rating scale was used. I am looking to rate and observe behaviours within my classroom. The students are too young to use the student rating scale and parents are not asked to rate their child at home. Since this is an action-based research project, I rate the subjects with the *SSiS Rating Scale* (2008) prior to and following the implementation of the *CMC* (2013) project. I seek to rate each student in a consistent and accurate manner by giving each of rating scales the same amount of time. I also select time to complete these rating scales when I am not distracted or pressured by other teaching duties.

National norms are used to classify results as representative of social skills strengths, social skills performance deficits or acquisition deficits. The SSiS (2008) assesses three domains: 1) social skills; 2) problem behaviours; and 3) academic competence. The focus of data collection is on the social skills portion of this rating scale. Problem behaviours and academic competence are considered but are not reported on in this study.

The social skills represent learned behaviours that promote positive interactions while simultaneously discouraging negative interactions when applied to appropriate social situations. The form for this rating system includes the social skills of: 1) communication; 2) cooperation; 3) assertion; 4) responsibility; 5) empathy; 6) engagement; and 7) self-control. These terms are
defined under the definitions of terms. The problem behaviours domain recognizes that the
behaviours of: eternalizing; bullying; hyperactivity/inattention; and internalizing will interfere
with either the acquisition or performance of socially skilled behaviours. These problem
behaviours as they relate to this rating scale are defined under the definition of terms. The
domain of academic competence is included since poor academic performance and social
behaviour problems frequently occur together. The teacher scale rates students on: reading and
math performance; motivation, parental support, and general cognitive functioning.

Rating scales are particularly well suited to recording specific and observable behaviours.
Raters are not asked to interpret the child’s thoughts, feelings, motives or personality traits. Thus
behaviour rating scales yield more objective, reliable, and valid information than assessments
based on projective techniques or clinical impressions. The SSiS Rating Scales (2008) were
designed with the knowledge that social responses are influenced by the setting an individual is
in.

All 26 students are assessed before and after I implement the CMC (2013) program in my
classroom. The initial findings of my classroom are interesting. In communication skills, eight
students are below average, the rest are assessed to be within the average range. For the
measurement of cooperation, eight students are found to be below average, the other 18 students
are within the average range. For the measurement of assertion, two students are below average,
all the rest of the students are assessed to be within the average range. In the assessment of
responsibility, one student is below average, the other 25 students are in the average range. For
the measurement of empathy, three students are below average, the other 23 students are found
to be in the average range. In the assessment of engagement, eight students are in the below
average range, whereas the other 18 students are in the average range. For the final category of
self-control, five students are rated to be below average, the remaining 21 students are within the average range. The before CMC (2013) scores are shown in Chart 3.1. The SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008) indicates that in all seven of the categories it assesses, the majority of my students are in the average range. There are some students who are below average and a small number of students who are above average. This rating scale seems to be suitable for the needs of my students as I begin my research.


The information I gather through my researcher’s journal, the Color My Conversation Rubric (2013) and the Social Skills Improvement System Teacher Rating Scale (2008) triangulate to give me a picture of where my students are at in their oral language development as I start my research. Wolcott (1988) explains, “The strength of educational research lies in its triangulation, collecting information in many ways rather than relying solely on one” (cited by Mills, 2014, p.
I want to use three different instruments to collect data about my students to ensure I have rich information for my research.

**Mixed-Methods and Triangulation**

I have struggled with the way I will collect data. I have a minor in psychology and have always being fascinated with studies. It is the empirical data of charts and numbers in studies that I am often drawn to reference. I need to recognize the validity of qualitative research, and in particular, experienced-based research. As I was designing my action-based research, I learned to trust my own observations and to become more comfortable referencing my researcher’s journal. My research’s journal (Appendix D) has allowed me to continually reflect on my actions and the impact they had on my students.

“Many teacher researchers find journals to be an especially helpful research method. Your journal can be helpful in documenting your behaviours and the behaviours of others. . . This documentation will reveal patterns in classroom interactions, illuminate constraints and possibilities” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 125).

Through the use of my research journal, qualitative patterns and themes emerge and move my research into new directions. Mills (2014) describes qualitative data as information that “often occurs naturally and is regularly collected by teachers. . . It is not a mysterious quest, but is quite simply an effort to collect data that increase our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 84).

In this study, I also incorporate other sources of data. I use two quantitative methods of data collection using number-based techniques with the rubrics and rating scales inside of a qualitative action-based research methodology.
“Experimental qualitative research requires students to be randomly assigned to a control group or an experimental group, and involves manipulation of the independent variables in order to control group assignments. In classrooms, it is usually not feasible for classroom teachers to structure their classroom instruction in this way. However, even if action researchers can’t control all of the variables in their classrooms, they can make use of quantitative data collection techniques to gather useful information about their students that can be analyzed and interpreted using the descriptive statistical techniques” (Mills, 2014, p. 100).

The qualitative and quantitative data methods I am employing will work well together as mixed data is nicely triangulated from my multiple sources. It allows me to “build on the synergy and strength that exists between qualitative and quantitative research methods” (Mills, 2014, p. 105).

The Context of the Classroom

Participants. I am teaching in a kindergarten classroom in an independent school in the province of British Columbia (BC). This is a mid-sized elementary school (220-250 students) in the Metro Vancouver area. Race and gender are not factored into this research, however most participants are Caucasian. All of my students have English as their native language. My class is a predominately homogenous group of 26 white students. There are 12 females and 14 males in my kindergarten class. My research includes all the students in the class since parental consent is given for all the students (Appendix J) as outlined by the Research Ethics Board of Vancouver Island University (Appendix E).

Procedures. As part of this research, the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale (2008) and Color My Conversation (CMC) Rubric (2013) need to be administered to the students prior to the implementation of the CMC (2013) program. Prior to
this rating scale and rubric being administered, an application for ethical review was submitted on March 4, 2016 to the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board. This application was later revised on March 29, 2016 (Appendix E). It was important that ethical approval was sought so the parents of these young students would have an opportunity to understand and consent to this research happening in their child’s life. The process of clearly outlining the methods and intentions of this study also solidified the process for me. It made me tighten my research and think through the data and procedures that I would be working with in this study. The Vancouver Island Research Ethics Board approved the revised application on April 11, 2016 (Appendix F).

Verbal approval was then given to the researcher by the administrator of the Independent school prior to April, 2016. A letter is also sent to the Board of Directors of the Independent school where the research took place on April 20, 2016 (Appendix G) and written approval was granted on May 9, 2016 (Appendix H).

A consent letter and an e-mail were sent to each parent of the students that would be participating in the program (Appendix J). Parents were also given the opportunity to connect with the teacher throughout the month of April and May. A parent evening was offered to parents on May 25, 2016 if they had any further questions about the program or the research. I used the script submitted to the Vancouver Island Research Ethics Board to construct a letter to parents and to explain this research project to parents at the parent evening (Appendix I). The returned parent/guardian letters were collected and stored in a locked filing cabinet by the school secretary.

The parents were interested in my research and excited to have their children participate in this program. There is strong parental interest and involvement in this school. Parents often
volunteer in the classrooms and are well-informed about the learning opportunities their children have. Of the 26 students in the my kindergarten class, all were given permission to participate in this research. The *CMC Rubric* (2013) and the *SSiS Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) were completed on each student during the month of April, prior to the start of the *CMC* (2013) program. The *CMC* (2013) program was conducted during the months of May and June, 2016 for 8 weeks.

Originally I planned to do this research over 12 weeks, but the timeline needed to be shortened to 8 weeks due to the ending of the school year. Data was collected on all students. Since the students are five or six years of age, many of them were not aware that a rubric and rating scale was being completed by the teacher. They are used to being assessed throughout the school year and view these research assessments as no different from any other assessment.

**Data analysis.** The data compiled during this research study was done in order to determine how social relationships were enhanced for students through the *Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013) program. Did students training in social conversation skills transfer to an improvement in general social skills? Furthermore did the students and their teacher benefit from a systematic and deliberate approach to social conversation skills and the development of the core competency of communication and social responsibility? This data was collected from May and June, 2016.

In July, 2016, when the school year has ended and the *CMC* (2013) program is done, I completed the *SSiS Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) and *CMC Rubric* (2013) for each student again. The completed and compiled data is stored in a locked and secure cabinet in the school secretary’s office when it is not being analyzed. The before and after *CMC Rubric* (2013) was compiled into tables (Table 3.1 and 4.1) so the students’ scores could be compared. The before and after *SSiS Teacher Rating Scales* (2008) were graphed into a variety of charts (Chart 3.1, and
4.1 through 4.9). I photocopied researcher’s journal and I highlighted themes I saw emerge with different colored highlighter pens. The themes of cooperation, communication, self-control, empathy, engagement, assertion, and responsibility were compared to the scores of the rubric and rating scale to determine if these three methods of data collection supported each other. Before I move to Chapter Four and discuss what happened to my learners and myself through this research, I will consider the validity and trustworthiness of my action research.

**Discussion of Validity and Trustworthiness**

**External validity.** “External validity is the degree to which study results are generalizable, or applicable, to groups or environments outside of the research setting” (Mills, 2014, p. 114). Action-based research by its very nature is based in the context of the researcher’s own classroom or school. It is not designed or intended to be replicated exactly. This research involved a small sample size of 26 students in one Independent school. The goal of this action research was to improve the learning of the students and their teacher in this context. In a matter of a classroom case study, it speaks to the possibility of this work in other contexts. It promotes an educational opportunity that has been successful in my classroom.

**Internal validity.** Internal validity refers to the degree to which results are true for the participants in the study. Attempts were made to address and minimize threats to internal validity where possible. For example, due to the age and stage of all students that participated in this research it was important to understand the maturity and self-involvement of this age group. They are affected by tiredness, hunger, separation from parents and other external factors. Therefore, it is realized that some of the students’ interactions and social conversations may reflect these extraneous variables. Students can display better social interactions on a day when they are excited or feeling good. These social interactions may have little to do with this research
or what is being taught in the classroom. With this being said, the longitudinal nature of this occurring over the span of two months, allows me to see the ongoing patterns of behaviour that I start to see as indicative of improvement through my qualitative research tools.

Another obstacle to this study which is related to the previous variable is maturation. As the students progress through school, so too do their skills and abilities, which could affect their confidence and communication skills throughout collection of data. The reality is that the students are two months older at the completion of this research than they are at the beginning. This variable cannot be changed or controlled for; it just needs to be recognized.

It is also recognized that I bring to this study my own personal history that can also affect the validity of this research. However, recognizing and being aware of these biases, also means attempts are made to minimize these wherever possible. For example, I assume from the onset of the research, that my students will and can improve their social competencies if communication skills are taught. Therefore, it becomes equally important to document the opposite experiences of social difficulties (i.e. inability to resolve a conflict, difficulty greeting or conversing with a peer) and compare and contrast the frequency of these behaviours as they are exhibited while participating in the CMC (2013) program. This enables me to be as objective as possible and have a richer understanding of how my students progress in their social interactions.

I also realize that my personal biases may still play a part in the unconscious distortion of data that is collected and analyzed. Specifically, it may have shown itself in the grading of the CMC Rubric (2013) and SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008). Attempts are made to standardize these assessments by utilizing the same format and procedures so all participants are given the same time and consideration. Guba (1981) argues about the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry
by addressing four characteristics: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I will look at these aspects of trustworthiness as they relate to my action research.

**Credibility.** The term credibility refers to “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (Mills, 2014, p. 115). There are some guidelines offered by Guba (1981) to ensure the credibility of a study. He suggests prolonged participation as one guideline. By being involved with the students, getting to know them, and being a part of their school lives for a prolonged period of time, there is less probability of a distortion of perceptions. I have chosen to get to know my students first, then introduce my research to them later in the school year.

Persistent observation is another guideline offered by Guba (1981) to ensure the credibility of research. A researcher’s journal can be crucial to ensure observations occur and are recorded frequently. These observations can be rich in data. The triangulation of data from a variety of sources can also add to the richness of the research. The use of a rating scale, a rubric and a journal have all worked together to give me the data I need.

Another aspect of credibility of research is the use of peer debriefing. This means allowing colleagues and other professionals to share in the insights and work I am doing in my classroom. I have had the unique opportunity with this research to talk to Rosslyn Delmonico, the author of the program, *Color My Conversation* (2013), and have her insights on my process and data. She has been able to guide me at different stages of my work with the research process. Her involvement has been very helpful and adds to the work I am doing. I have also shared my research with colleagues in the school and my administrator and have appreciated their interest and professional opinions.
Transferability. “The transferability of an action research account depends largely on whether the consumer of the research can identify with the setting” (Mills, 2014, p. 116). My research in my classroom is done first and foremost for my students. It is done to bring about changes in their learning. It is also done to bring about changes in my own learning and teaching. However, it is also hoped that through my action-based research, other educators or researchers may benefit. Through my detailed descriptions and extensive writing in this thesis others will be able to use this research as a start to their own work in their own classrooms.

Dependability. The dependability of data refers to stability of the data. Guba (1981) speaks of an audit of data just as an accountant would audit a company’s books. He is referring to a clear documentation of the process and of the data that is collected. Guba emphasises the importance of using more than one method to collect data. This way the weakness of one method will be compensated for by the strength of another method. This is similar to triangulation which I have already discussed. In my research, I believe the dependability is increased by my use of three different data collection tools. My researcher’s journal, the rating scale and the rubric all work together to increase the dependability of my data.

Confirmability. The characteristic of confirmability of the data means the “neutrality or objectivity of the data being collected” (Mills, 2014, p. 116), Again, the use of more than one method to collect data allows me to cross-check my findings and confirm them. I do come to this research with my own bias. I am not neutral in my classroom or in my desire to see this research have an impact on my student’s learning. However, I also do want to bring about real change so it is with a critical lens that I look at the data I collect and the observations I make. I approach my teaching and my research as a reflective practitioner.
Conclusion

I have followed the *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013) to organize my research process. For me, this action-based research can be compared to making a jigsaw puzzle. I am often not sure I have all the pieces or if the pieces will fit together to make a complete picture. By going through the process of scanning, focusing, and developing a hunch early in the school year as I began to teach my students I felt some of the pieces fitting together. As I engaged in new professional learning which I have compiled and analyzed in Chapter Two more pieces began to fit together and the picture of my research started to emerge. Through Chapter Three I outlined how I took action in my classroom. I needed more pieces of my research to fit in a thoughtful and collaborative way. I needed my students, parents and myself to work together for the benefit of my students. I needed the approval of the Ethics Board and my own administration. I needed the support of parents. I also needed to triangulate my methods in order to ensure I would be getting a complete picture. All these pieces of my research I have described in this chapter and demonstrated how they click together. Now I am ready to look at more pieces of my research in Chapter Four. I am ready for the checking stage of my research. I am excited to compare *CMC* (2013) with *Building Student Success* (2015). I want to share the voices of my students as they participate in social conversations and build relationships. These pieces will continue to fill-in the details of this research picture and show the vivid colours experienced by my students and myself.
Chapter 4: Adding Colour to Social Conversation

Overview of this Chapter: Starting to Paint

This research was a process for me. At times I had a clear picture of what I wanted to accomplish and my work excited me. Many other times I only had a blurred idea of what I hoped to achieve through my research. As I attended courses at Vancouver Island University as part of my Master’s program, and participated in numerous conversations with the faculty and members of my cohort, the research I envisioned began to take shape. It is the shape and colour of my research that I am sharing in this chapter. The data I gathered through my research journal, *Color My Conversation Rubric* (2013) and the *Social Skills Improvement System Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) all impact this research and prove to be a rich source of information.

I will start to paint a picture of how this research looked in my classroom. I will show the alignment of the objectives of *Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013) and *Building Student Success* (2015) in broad strokes and then examine each of the lessons I presented in my research and how *Color My Conversation (2013)* and *Building Student Success (2015)* work together in my classroom.

As *CMC* (2013) is implemented into my classroom, I reflect on how this program is received by my students and how their communication and social skills are impacted through this program. Already by the second lesson I see my students are excited about conversing with each other. When I lay the “conversation stones” on the floor (a visual prop students can walk on to help them sequence a conversation accurately) one of my students begins to clap her hands. I also reflect on how *CMC* (2013) aligns with the new British Columbia (BC) curriculum (2015) as it is being implemented throughout BC schools. I begin to see connections between the two programs that are exciting.
The Mixing of *Color My Conversation* and *Building Student Success*

As I begin to work with *CMC* (2013) in my classroom I spend considerable time getting to know the design and main components of the new BC curriculum, titled *Building Student Success* (2015). I discover that the BC curriculum lists three core competencies which encompass all grade levels and all subject areas. The conceptual framework of this curriculum envisions three broad cross-curricular competencies: 1) thinking competency; 2) personal and social competency; and 3) communication competency. The authors of *Building Student Success* (2015) acknowledge that these three competencies are related to each other and do not separate easily into three distinct categories. “These cross-curricular competencies are interconnected; and they are not three linear and discrete entities.” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3). It is the communication competency and the personal and social competency that are the focus of my research. In particular it is the intersection and intertwining of these two and how they complement and work together that I am most interested in. I explore how strengths or weaknesses in communication will impact personal and social competency within my classroom. Personal and social skills will affect communication (Eddy, Reid & Curry, 2002).

At the beginning of the school year, I observe my students playing in a large outside sandbox. They are constructing a dinosaur world. This is their project for over a week with more and more plastic dinosaurs arriving from home every day. One child wants to join the game but has no dinosaurs and has not been a part of the project up to this point. He picks up a shovel and begins to add to one of the sand mountains. Another child pushes him out of the way. The first child begins to cry and walks away, standing by himself and then eventually going to a different area of the playground. These two children have not used any words in their communication and they have not resolved their issue.
When these two children come inside after recess is over, I tell them what I have observed from my classroom window.

Child 1: “I want to play dinosaurs too.”

Child 2: “You can’t. You don’t have no dinosaurs.”

Child 1: “I have two at home.”

Child 2: “What kind?”

Child 1: “A brontosaurus and a t-rex.”

Child 2: “Okay. Bring them. I will help you make a place.”

Through this short and simple conversation these two students communicate and they resolve their conflict. Their communication serves a purpose as they reach an agreement and bridge their differences. I will give more examples of the link between communication and social interactions further in this chapter.

**Communication competency.** The impact communication can have on personal and social interactions will be a theme throughout this research and this chapter. These core competencies: communication and personal and social intersect.

Communication competency encompasses the set of abilities that students use to impart and exchange information, experiences, and ideas, to explore the world around them, and to understand and effectively engage in the use of digital media. Communication competency provides a bridge between students' learning, their personal and social identity and relationships, and the world in which they interact (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 8).

A sub domain of the communication competency is the ability to use language and symbols to communicate. Students are working towards having the ability to exchange
information, experiences, and ideas through many modes, including written and spoken language, symbols, movement, gesture, body language and images, in order to make meaning and to create and maintain relationships with the goal of building a common understanding. This is a tall order for my kindergarten students. I decide to help them begin to learn to be able to adapt communication modes and styles to various contexts and understand and appreciate the role of communication in building relationships and creating community. The goal of Color My Conversation (CMC) (2013) is also to improve a person’s ability to communicate through body language, gestures, movement and spoken language. Students are taught to “read a situation” and adapt their communication style to various contexts in order to build relationships. Therefore, through the implementation of CMC (2013) in my classroom, I am looking for evidence that the curriculum goals of communication competency will be met and my students will be able to build relationships as a result.

**Personal and social competency.** Personal and Social Competency is the set of abilities that relate to students' identity in the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society. Personal and social competency encompasses the abilities students need to thrive as individuals, to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purposes in the world (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 7).

*Building Student Success* (2015) has many layers. One of the subdomains of personal and social competency is a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity. Students become confident individuals who take satisfaction in who they are and what they can do to contribute to their own well-being and the well-being of their family, community and society. This personal awareness and responsibility is the ability to understand and take responsibility for
one's actions, including one's learning, to make constructive and ethical decisions about one's personal and social behaviour, and to accept consequences and understand how one's actions affect one's own well-being and that of others. Again, these are large goals for my kindergarten students. I am seeking to help them start on this path. Students who are able to demonstrate personal awareness and responsibility: set goals, monitor progress, regulate emotions, respect their own rights and the rights of others, manage stress and persevere in difficult situations.

Through my research with CMC (2013), I am looking for evidence that my students have gained in their ability to meet these curriculum goals of personal awareness and responsibility.

Towards the end of my research, I discover two toy airplanes are missing from the classroom. There are ten metal airplanes I have recently purchased for the classroom. At first I am concerned that a student might be taking them home and claiming them for his own. However, when I clean up the classroom at the end of the day, I discover my two missing airplanes are hidden between a few books in the library corner of the classroom. I decide to leave them there. The next day I watch a student retrieve them from the library corner when he is done his work. When it is time to clean up, he quietly hides them behind some books in the library corner instead of putting them in the basket with the other toy airplanes. I ask him to stay in the class at recess so I can talk to him:

“I noticed you like the new airplanes I bought.”

“Yup, they are really cool.”

“Do you think the other children like the new airplanes too?”

“Everybody wants the best ones.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“I like the best ones too.”
“Yes I noticed that you like the airplanes.”

“I guess I have to share.”

“What do you think?”

“I can’t have the best ones next time?”

“What do you think would be fair?”

“I think I can be a good friend and not hide them.”

“I think that would be good.”

With this conversation the student reached his own conclusion that hiding the airplanes was not being fair to the other students or being a good friend. Through communication he is growing in his awareness of personal responsibility. He is seeking to take the perspective of his classmates.

Besides personal awareness, there is also the sub domain of social awareness and responsibility. This domain encompasses the ability to: cooperate and collaborate with others, empathize with and appreciate the perspective of others, and create and maintain healthy relationships within one's family, community, and society. Students who are socially aware and responsible have the ability to co-operate with others, to manage and resolve conflicts, and to negotiate interactions with others from different backgrounds. CMC (2013) especially addresses the importance of being able to empathize with and appreciate the perspective of others. My students are taught to listen and respond to each other in ways that foster co-operation and resolve conflicts.

In order to develop communication competency relationships, respect and awareness are essential. In order to develop personal and social competency empathy, perspective taking and collaboration are necessary. These two competencies are intertwined and support each other. I
discover that they cannot be distinctly separated from each other in a classroom or in a student’s life.

One of my students had their pet dog die. She came to school a few days after her pet had died. She was sad. I asked her if she would like to tell the class why she had been away and what had happened. She said,

“I feel heavy. ________ made me smile.”

She then told the class the details of how her dog had died and what her family had done to bury the dog and say good-bye. A second student put her arm around her shoulder and said,

“I miss your dog too. He was your bestest friend.”

This second student had never met the dog, but she understood the loss, and empathized with the first student. She was able to take her perspective and offer comfort and support. She showed respect and concern for the emotions of her classmate.

As part of my research, I look at each lesson in Color My Conversation (CMC) (2013) and how it complements the core competencies of communication and personal and social growth by teaching effective social conversation skills. I look to see if it offers students real skills and opportunities to become adept conversationalists in a variety of situations both within and beyond the school context. Through life experiences students need to learn how to maneuver and grow into skilled communicators. For many students, I see that this process is both elusive and intimidating. I have watched one of my students walk around the school by himself on numerous occasions. ________ would love to join in the tag game or “free the bunch” but he does not know how to ask. He does not have the language or the confidence to say, “Can I play too?” I want him to have the words and the ability to participate in a game on the playground. I hope ________ will look forward to recess rather than walk alone around the school. I want to use my
research to see if CMC (2013) and the goals of the core competencies will help my students achieve success in social and personal growth as well as communication skills.

I decide to look at each of the twelve lessons of CMC (2013) and their alignment with various aspects of the new BC curriculum, Building Student Success (2015). This examination allows me to assess whether CMC (2013) is effective at meeting the needs of my students and also the curriculum goals I have in my classroom. This also will allow future teachers, researchers and therapists to determine if using CMC (2013) will meet the learning outcomes and social conversation goals of their learners and their programs. CMC (2013) seeks to take learners through twelve lessons which build on each other and teach social conversation skills for a variety of situations and contexts. I will discuss these social conversation skills as they relate to the lessons I present to my students and as they are connected to the data I collect.
Paint by Number: One Lesson at a Time

Lesson One: The Yellow Conversation

**Overview of lesson.** This lesson introduces how to start and end a conversation. Some of the fastest conversations often consist of just a hello and goodbye. This type of conversation is quick and easy and can also be done with or without words. Most people have many of these conversations everyday as they greet and say farewell to people at school, as they are driving past them, or perhaps on the way to a game or the store. From this simple conversation, students learn about meaningful eye contact and the use of body language as a nonverbal communication tool.

I often am on morning outside duty which means standing at the front of the school and greeting students and parents as they arrive in a vehicle or a bus. It also means directing students away from traffic areas and ensuring their bouncing balls head in a safe direction. I love this duty. I love seeing faces light up when I greet students by name as they exit the bus. I enjoy finding a positive word or offering a helpful hand to the students who have full hands and overflowing backpacks. I know that my smile and happy greeting can help to set the tone of many students’ day. I can see their eyes light up when I remember their name, even though I have not taught them for a number of years. I believe in the power of saying, “Hello”.

**Research Piece.** Within my kindergarten classroom, many students would enter the class at the beginning of the day and not say “hello” to their classmates. My researcher’s journal notes this observation early in the school year, October, 2015, as I am considering the communication skills of my students: “Few students greet their ‘table partners’ when they start their opening activity. It is interesting how they start on their activity often without words. They also don’t greet me but will ask a question or tell me a story without even making sure I am focused on
them.” Also at the end of the day, students will dash off when they are dismissed without a “good bye”. I observe that they do not see the day as a series of conversations that need to be ended in some way and they do not understand the impact a greeting or farewell can have.

As CMC (2013) progresses, this quick “yellow conversation” of hello and good bye is practiced regularly and develop it further. A number of colleagues and parents let me know that they have noticed how “friendly” my students have become. At the end of May, 2016 I write in my researcher’s journal: “Four weeks of CMC and my students are greeting everyone they meet in the hallways and throughout the school. Three teachers and two parents have told me this week that they had quick conversations with my students and thought they were an extra friendly group this year.”

The CMC Rubric (2013) completed after the implementation of the CMC (2013) program also shows that students have improved in their ability to engage in greetings and farewells. This rubric is summarized in Table 4.1 below. This table can be compared to Table 3.1 to see a progression of communication skills. Whereas prior to CMC (2013), the majority of students were in the “approaching expectations” category for greetings and farewells, now the majority are in the “meeting expectations” category. There are also a number of students that “exceeded expectations”. I have also observed an improvement in my students’ ability to greet and say farewell to everyone they meet. They are a friendly group of students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories (topics of each lesson)</th>
<th>1 Not Yet Meeting Expectations</th>
<th>2 Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>3 Meeting Expectations</th>
<th>4 Exceeding Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Eye Contact</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Facial Expressions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Body Gestures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Proxemics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tone of Voice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Greetings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 – Color My Conversation Rubric (2013) of Scores After CMC (2013).

Curriculum Connection. The communication competency in Building Student Success (2015) articulates the importance of gesture and body language in communication. These are introduced in this first lesson of CMC (2013) and built on in subsequent lessons. Regardless of the age of a student, this is the place to start building communication skills and engaging others in a social context. Just as the core competencies recognize that communication skills start before a child enters school and continue beyond elementary and high school, CMC (2013) also begins where the child is at cognitively and moves them forward.

As Building Student Success articulates:

Communication competency provides a bridge between students’ learning, their personal and social identity and relationships, and the world in which they interact. Development of communication competency begins within families, before students enter formal schooling, and expands at every level of schooling. At each stage, students maintain and enhance competencies from previous stages, while developing new skills. Students move from basic or highly supported to increasingly complex, sophisticated, independent communication. The development of competence in communication does not end with school graduation, but continues to develop in personal, social, educational, and workplace contexts (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 2).
When assessing a student’s level of communication skills, *Building Student Success* (2015) offers communication competency profiles which emphasize the concept of expanding and growing. They are progressive and additive, as illustrated by the concentric circles in this graphic. Kindergarten students, E.S.L. students, and students with learning challenges will be assessed at Profile 1 or 2 and then supported as they move to higher profiles.

*Graphic 4.1 – Communication Competency Profiles (Ministry of Education, Communication Competency Profiles, 2015, p. 4).*

Graphic 4.1 illustrates the core competency of communication from *Building Student Success* (2015). It shows the four goals of communication: 1) connect and engage; 2) acquire, interpret and present information; 3) collaborate to plan, carry out and review constructions and
activities; 4) explain/recount and reflect on experiences and accomplishments. The circles show how students build on the skills they have in each of these four goals of communication in a broader and deeper way. *Building Student Success* (2015) starts simple and adds a new layer to the communication skills a student has. Lesson one of *CMC* (2013) also begins simply with ways to start and end any conversation, thus allowing students to be supported as they seek to have meaningful conversations and be a part of a group. To this first lesson of *CMC* (2013) a new layer of skills is added in the next lesson. I find that the first lesson of *CMC* (2013) and communication competency profiles align well with each other.

The table below shows profiles one and two of the communication competency profiles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFILE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In a safe and supported environment, I respond meaningfully to communication from peers and adults. With support, I can be part of a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In familiar situations, with direct support, I communicate with peers and adults. I understand and share basic information about topics that are important to me. I talk and listen to people I know. I plan and complete activities with peers and adults. I can answer simple direct questions about my activities and experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 – Communication Competency Profiles 1 and 2 (Ministry of Education, Communication Competency Profiles, 2015, p. 5).

of the new BC curriculum (2015). *CMC* (2013) and these two profiles start at the same point and seek to build on what students are able to accomplish. The words, “safe and supported environment” and “familiar situations” are important. Within my classroom and school, students become successful at greetings and farewells because they feel safe and supported. They are interacting with familiar people and in comfortable situations.
Lesson Two: The Short Conversation

Lesson Overview. This short conversation builds on the yellow conversation of lesson one by adding a conversation starter and a conversation stopper to the greeting and farewell that have already been introduced and mastered. A short conversation is used with people who have a prior existing relationship like classmates, co-workers, and friends. It can also be used with people who do not have a prior existing relationship like two people who are in line, or between acquaintances. This conversation has great value. “A child who struggles with this basic short conversation may be perceived as rude or socially inept. . . In contrast, a child who is successful with the short conversation will likely present as a more friendly and outgoing individual.” (Rosslyn, 2013, lesson 2). Being able to have a short conversation with the people my students meet each day is an essential communication skill. It is also a crucial personal and social skill. It is the foundation for interactions with familiar and unfamiliar people and it affects my student’s perceptions of each other.

Research Piece. My reflections in my journal, following the introduction of this lesson, state how quickly the students grasp this short conversation and how eager they are to put it to use. In May, 2016 I write: “Five times this week I observed my students having a short conversation with someone. They were using the phrases we had practiced in class like, ‘thanks for talking to me’ and ‘well, I have to go’. I also reflect that the term “short conversation” is helpful to the students since they understand this is a chat about one topic and then they can say farewell and move on.

I also notice that many of my students are smiling as they talk to each other. Body language and eye contact are introduced in lesson one and two. I am surprised how quickly students are paying attention to this feature of communication. One student comes and tells me,
“_______ and I are friends. He smiled and said I can play with him in the sand box.”

This student understands that the smile and the words make them friends. The use of a quick or “short conversation” improves these students’ perceptions of each other.

Curriculum Connection. When assessing a student’s level of social skills, Building Student Success (2015) offers social responsibility competency profiles which emphasize the concept of expanding and growing as was done with a communication competency profile in

Graphic 4.2 – Social Responsibility Competency Profiles (Ministry of Education, Social Responsibility Competency Profiles, 2015, p. 5).

Graphic 4.1.

This social responsibility competency profile is progressive and additive, as illustrated by the concentric circles in Graphic 4.2 shown above. This graphic illustrates the four goals of social responsibility: 1) contributing to community and caring for the environment; 2) solving
problems in peaceful ways; 3) valuing diversity; 4) building relationships. There is a clear overlap between the communication goals/profiles discussed with lesson one and the social responsibility goals/profiles being presented here. Both profiles show that with support, interactions and being part of a group can occur. Perhaps with role playing and practice my student, who walks by himself around the school, can join in on a game of tag or build a dinosaur world in the sand box. He needs opportunities to ask, “Can I play too?” He first needs to feel safe enough to ask and he needs to experience the warm welcome of “Yes!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFILE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am aware that other people can be different than I am. I can interact with my friends. With some support, I can be part of a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In familiar and structured settings, I can interact with others and the environment respectfully. I can participate in classroom and group activities to improve the classroom, school, community, or natural world. I can share my feelings and listen to others’ views. I can solve some problems myself and can identify when to ask for help. With some direction, I can demonstrate respectful and inclusive behaviour, including online. I can identify when something is unfair to me or others. I can identify when others need help. I am kind to others, can work or play cooperatively, and can build relationships with people of my choosing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.3 - Social Responsibility Competency Profiles 1 and 2 (Ministry of Education, Social Responsibility Competency Profiles, 2015, p. 6).*

Table 4.3 outlines the starting profiles for students as they work through the social responsibility competency profiles. Beginning students such as my kindergarten students, E.S.L. students, and students with learning challenges, would be assessed at profile one or two. These students will then be supported as they move to higher profiles. At each profile level students are building on the skills and attitudes they have mastered at a previous level. I find this is also the goal of the early lessons of *CMC* (2013). Both *CMC* (2013) and *Building Student Success* (2015)
are laying a foundation for the basics of communication and conversation so that students have the tools to interact with each other and be part of a group. The goals of the Ministry of Education and *CMC* (2013) intersect. I find that they both seek to encourage participation in the school, community and broader world as goals for students through teacher and parental support and opportunities for conversation.

**Lesson Three: The Long Conversation**

*Lesson Overview.* The “long conversation” is the most complicated conversation a student will learn in *CMC* (2013). It consists of the greeting, the topics of conversation, and the conversation stopper and farewell. The topics of conversation are the new material where individuals usually discuss topics of interest, make comments, ask questions, and use topic changer words or phrases. The specific purpose of this lesson is to address skill development with initiating and maintaining topics of interest. As students become more skilled with this task, a greater variety of their own topics and peers’ topics will be introduced. This lesson extensively accounts for different age levels and skills. Children with special needs or with intellectual disabilities may have very limited topics, questions or comments but they can still have success and move forward in their social conversation skills. For my kindergarten students, I limit the amount of topics they will talk about and give them options for topics when they become “stuck”.

*Research Piece.* This lesson is only lesson three of *CMC* (2013), yet I record excitement and enthusiasm from my students and myself in my journal. There are a variety of comments from students when we start our *CMC* (2013) lesson: “Can I go first? I LOVE this!”, “I can chat to you!” , “I know what to talk about!” Following the lesson I reflect on how the lesson progressed and note: “I used picture cards that the students could select from if they needed help
coming up with a topic to talk about. A number of students wanted to do all of them. They expressed delight that their conversation partner also liked ice cream or had a pet. The connections that they made with each other felt good. Friendships are being built.” The students are excited for an opportunity to converse with each other on a wide range of topics. As the week progresses, we practice this lesson a number of times at the request of the students since they want to talk to “... more kids about more things.”


The before and after CMC (2013) scores of all participants in the category of engagement from the SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008) are plotted on Chart 4.1. Many students increase in their engagement scores following the CMC (2013) program. This category assesses students’ interaction with each other. It looks at whether a student seeks out other students or join in
activities. This chart shows that most students are interacting more with each other. My experience with my students already at lesson three of \textit{CMC} (2013), supports this observation of increased engagement. They are eager to converse and interact with their classmates. They are excited to have topics to talk about and want to find common interests and experiences.

\textit{Curriculum Connection.} Graphic 4.3 illustrates that the fourth goal of social responsibility in \textit{Building Student Success} (2015) is to build relationships. The objective of building relationships

### 4. Building relationships

Students develop and maintain diverse, positive peer and intergenerational relationships in a variety of contexts.

#### SAMPLE “I” STATEMENTS

- ★ With some support, I can be part of a group.
- ★ I am kind to others, can work or play co-operatively, and can build relationships with people of my choosing.
- ★ I can identify when others need support and provide it.
- ★ I am aware of how others may feel and take steps to help them feel included.
- ★ I build and sustain positive relationships with diverse people, including people from different generations.

\textit{Graphic 4.3- Facet Four of Social Responsibility Profiles} (Ministry of Education, Social Responsibility Profiles, 2015, p. 4).

The introduction and eventual mastery of topics is a big step towards accomplishing the goal of building relationships. Students who are able to respectfully share their interests and enjoy conversations about the interests of others will build relationships. I already mentioned that within my own classroom my kindergarten students quickly express delight and connection when they realize a classmate also enjoys apples or likes to go camping. The sharing of likes and
dislikes, of joys and fears draws people together and helps them to be included in the common events that many people share.

The third goal of social responsibility in *Building Student Success* (2015) is to value diversity. This goal is illustrated in Graphic 4.4. The objective is for students to value diversity and advocate for others. It is through the discussion of topics and interests that commonalities are discovered. It is also through this discussion of topics that differences are discovered. Through the opportunity to ask questions and make comments students will encounter shared interests and experiences. I find that *CMC* (2013) guides students as they learn to ask questions that promote further sharing in a safe environment. *CMC* (2013) also teaches students to make comments that support and are respectful. I experience relationships being built.

3. Valuing diversity

Students value diversity, defend human rights, advocate for others, and act with a sense of ethics in interactions, including online.

**SAMPLE “I” STATEMENTS**

- ★ With some direction, I can demonstrate respectful and inclusive behaviour.
- ★ I can explain when something is unfair.
- ★ I can advocate for others.
- ★ I take action to support diversity and defend human rights, and can identify how diversity is beneficial for my community, including online.

*Graphic 4.4 – Facet Three of Social Responsibility Profiles (Ministry of Education, Social Responsibility Profiles, 2015, p. 4).*

*CMC* (2013) offers many opportunities for modelling and role playing which are beneficial for student learning (Charlop Dennis, Carpenter & Greenberg, 2010). There are also a variety of visuals which help students to grasp the concepts and participate in the conversations in a meaningful way. The visuals my students enjoy are the “stones” used to make a
conversation path. These “stones” are a variety of colors and are laid out on the floor (see Graphic 2.1). As a student starts a conversation with their partner they step on the first “stone”, when they move the conversation to a topic, the student steps onto the next “stone”. As the students are progressing in their conversation, they are also walking along the “stone” path on the floor. The visual of the “stones” makes it clear to the students in what direction their conversation is moving. When the students reach the end of the “stone” path, the conversation is done. The “stone” path can be longer or shorter depending on the age and needs of the students. The topics, questions and comments can be tailored to fit the age group, social setting, ethnic interests or current topics. I find that there is a lot of flexibility within this lesson so that it can meet the needs of any group or age as they seek to value diversity and grow in their communication and social skills. This is important since research shows a clear connection between communication and social skills (Eddy, Reid, & Curry, 2002; Huang & Millunix, 2002). The building of communication skills will result in an improvement of social skills as well.

**Lesson Four: Who, What, When, Where, and Why**

**Lesson Overview.** This fourth lesson looks at the value of asking questions that begin with who, what, when, where, and why. These types of questions are referred to as “wh” questions. “Wh” questions are helpful in promoting conversation and building relationships. The introduction states, “I love asking people questions because I get to learn about them. Now we’re going to practice asking some questions in an activity called Learn About Me + Learn About You. I’m going to ask you some questions and then you can ask me some questions. By the time we are done, you will know more about me and I will know more about you.” (Delmonico, 2013, lesson 4, p. 2)
Through this lesson students become more confident and familiar with “wh” questions. The value of these questions is that they are open-ended. They are seeking an explanation, greater details, and a feeling or an opinion. These questions allow a person to become better known. Questions serve the important purpose of letting someone know someone else is interested in them and what they have to say. Questions also help people to gain information that can build relationships or help someone find out something they need to know.

This lesson builds on the previous lessons by adding questions to the greetings, farewells and comments students have already mastered. There is an emphasis on continuing to be aware of facial expressions, body gestures and eye contact as key components of communication. There is also a look at tone of voice and how it can impact perception and meaning. These nonverbal aspects of communication are very important. I find they are not always intuitive to children. Having students aware of facial expressions, body gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice will help them to be more socially and culturally competent when communicating.

**Research Piece:** Within my kindergarten class, this lesson starts with me adding some questions to the bulletin board we had started with *CMC* (2013). Immediately there are questions from the students: “*I know how to ask questions.*”, “*Can I ask everyone my question?*”, “*What can we ask about?*” The students are eager to be a part of this next piece of conversations. They want to communicate with each other.

In other subject areas and during a variety of activities, I note when students are engaging in conversations with each other. During this fourth week of *CMC* (2013) I write in my researcher’s journal that I have observed six occasions where a student initiated a “long conversation” with another student. These conversations involved a greeting, a topic that was
discussed, a question or comment and then a farewell. There are also two occasions where a student initiates a long conversation with me. One of these conversations I recorded:

“Hi Mrs. Onderwater.”

“Hi _____, How are you today?”

“Did you know that my Dad is a worker?”

“No, what kind of worker?”

“My Dad makes houses. When he works I go help him sometimes.”

“That sounds like fun, do you like to help your dad?”

“Yup. See you later. Bye”

“Bye”.

This conversation is complete and provides information in an organized way. The student makes eye contact and uses his hands to convey his excitement. The student is communicating well.

Chart 4.2 shows the before and after CMC (2013) scores of all my students in the category of communication from the SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008). Most students increase in their communication skills following the CMC (2013) program. This is also what I am seeing in the classroom during my lessons in CMC (2013) and also beyond the lessons in the student’s daily interactions with each other and with me.

I notice that some students who already have a high communication score do not improve as much as those who have a low communication score on this rating scale. There is a student in my class who often talks. This student is described as a “good communicator”. The first thing most people notice about this student is that s/he talks a lot. However, much of this student’s communication is one-sided with little opportunity for the student’s communication partner to participate in the conversation. As this student progresses in the CMC (2013) program, the student begins to pause and allows his/her communication partner to respond with a comment or question. Rather than the conversation being one-sided, it becomes more of a dialogue. This student’s communication score decreased on the SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008) even though the student’s communication skills have improved and become more balanced.

Curriculum Connection. The first goal of communication competency in Building Student Success (2015) is to connect and engage with others. As Graphic 4.5 illustrates, students
need to learn to be able to share ideas and connect with others. The first way to do this is by being able to ask and respond to questions. The second way is to be an active listener. This means supporting and encouraging the person a student is communicating with. Part of being an active listener is using facial expressions, body gestures, eye contact and tone of voice that communicates interest and support to the speaker. Non-verbal communication is foundational to CMC (2013) and foundational to the communication competency profile. The use of facial expressions and body gestures are aspects of listening that we work on in my kindergarten class.

The Communication Competency Profiles describe and illustrate students’ development, focusing on four interrelated facets, described below.

1. Connect and engage with others (to share and develop ideas)
Students engage in informal and structured conversations where they listen, contribute, develop understanding and relationships, learn to consider diverse perspectives, and build consensus. Examples include literature circles, book clubs, blogs, and small group discussions/decision making/informal debating.

SAMPLE “I” STATEMENTS

⭐ I ask and respond to simple, direct questions.
⭐ I am an active listener; I support and encourage the person speaking.
⭐ I recognize that there are different points of view and can disagree respectfully.

Graphic 4.5 – Facet One of Communication Competency Profiles (Ministry of Education, Communication Competency, 2015, p.2).

One of the examples in Graphic 4.5 for connecting and engaging with others is to share and develop ideas through blogs. The aspect of social media and relationships through technology is recognized throughout Building Student Success (2015) as a large part of many students’ lives and learning. CMC (2013) also recognizes the influence of technology. Students are asked to watch modelling clips of how body language, facial expressions and gestures compliment or detract from communication. My students also listen to a variety of examples that use tone of voice to communicate sincerity, sarcasm or disregard. Within this lesson, more
advanced or mature students are given the opportunity to discuss how social media influences who and how they communicate. The topic of social media is re-visited in a number of later lessons in *CMC* (2013) since it is a relevant topic for many students. Social media is not something I explore with my young students since they do not have access to social media. However, many students are interested in forming relationships with their peers but this is not limited to the peers they have in their own current classrooms. They are also interested in building relationships with peers around the globe through social media and web sites.

**Lesson Five: Yes! No! Maybe So!**

*Lesson Overview.* This fifth lesson expands on the questions that are introduced in lesson four by demonstrating that certain questions require only one of three answers: yes, no or maybe so. It is demonstrated for students that certain questions require only a one word answer. Questions like: Do you like pizza?; Is your mom at home?; Did you do your homework? are a necessary part of communication. These questions solicit answers to practical, every day topics. People use these simple questions frequently. They contribute to relationships and are necessary in daily conversations.

The skill of asking questions and being able to determine what kind of question is required in a situation, is part of communicating effectively. I find that *CMC* (2013) seeks to help students gain this skill in a variety of situations. *CMC* (2013) also wants students to experience how questions can move a conversation forward and how questions can stilt or end a conversation. The ability to determine what questions will help a student gain the information they need and move the conversation in the direction they would like it to go comes with practice and experience. This is a lesson that I find works well over more than one session so that students do have an opportunity to practice. *CMC* (2013) allows many opportunities for students
to learn these skills. There are games, activities and exercises that students are invited to be involved in both in the classroom and at home.

**Research Piece.** Following this fifth lesson of CMC, the students are asked to partner with a classmate and ask their partner three questions to help them learn more about each other. They are then asked to present about their partner to the rest of the class. This lesson occurs in early June, 2016. I write in my researcher’s journal three scenarios from three different sets of students:

“I talked to ____. He likes dolphins best, just like me. He wants to eat ice cream for dinner. And one more thing, his best center is cars. I like cars too.”

“I asked ______ three questions. ______ wants to play house at centres with me, that is our best. She only likes fries for supper. MMM. ______ wishes she had a monkey for a pet too.”

“______ likes painting too. He wants pizza to eat. AND and he likes to have a pet dog.”

What strikes me is how quickly the students find things they have in common. They ask each other three questions about animals, food and centres. They share the answers with the class. Instead of just sharing the answers, they present on behalf of their partner by showing how they are similar to each other. The phases; “just like me”, “that is our best” and “likes painting too” demonstrate commonalities between the two students who are questioning each other.

On Chart 4.3 the SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008) before and after CMC (2013) scores of all participants in the category of empathy are plotted. This chart shows that most students
increase in their empathy scores following the *CMC* (2013) program and no students decrease in their empathy scores. Empathy is the ability to share and identify with the feelings of another. I observe that my students are identifying with each other in likes and dislikes. They are finding common interests and activities. Through their conversations they are increasing in their understanding of each other. My research is looking for a link between improving communication skills and social interactions. I believe that the *CMC* (2013) program will promote students’ social skills and peer interactions. Their ability to communicate will help them form friendships and interact positively (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong & Gomby, 2005). I observe my student’s communication improve in my classroom.

Curriculum Connection. The new BC curriculum is organized by grade level and then further divided into competencies and content. Under the subject area of English Language Arts, each grade has content goals that are strategies and processes. One of the categories of these strategies and processes is oral language strategies. These strategies are defined as “focusing on the speaker, asking questions to clarify, listening for specifics, expressing opinions, speaking with expression, staying on topic, and taking turns.” (Ministry of Education, 2016, English Language Arts Curriculum). At each grade level the Ministry of Education recognizes the importance of oral language strategies. It also emphasizes the need for asking questions and listening as some of these oral language strategies. I find that CMC (2013) offers opportunities and activities that will
help many students to realize mastery of these oral language strategies. The goals of the Ministry of Education and lessons four and five of *CMC* (2013) that deal with the use of questions work well together.

**Lesson Six: Making Comments Count**

*Lesson Overview.* Comments are an essential part of most conversations. People use comments to indicate they are attending to the speaker. They use comments to verbalize agreement or disagreement about what is being said. People also use comments to encourage or discourage the speaker. Comments can be verbal or can be communicated through sounds, gestures, eye contact and body language. There is a complication and subtlety to comments that may not be intuitive to many students, especially not young students like my kindergarten class. Some students struggle with listening skills. This is a problem since when “people don’t listen it makes it seem like they’re uninterested and indifferent to the person they’re talking to. However, when people listen and demonstrate this by asking follow-up questions or sharing related information, it shows that they are interested and care about the information shared.” (Laugeson, 2013, p. 64).

*CMC* (2013) teaches that people will appear to be listening when they are actually just waiting for the other person to stop talking so they can say something else. Although simply pausing long enough to let the other person talk is an important aspect of having good conversations, people still need to show their partner that they are listening through verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. On the verbal side, comments,
encouraging words and asking follow-up questions are good methods for demonstrating the act of listening. On the nonverbal side, smiling or laughing, when appropriate, having good eye contact, and shaking his or her head up and down (showing agreement) or side to side (showing mutual disapproval) are good methods for showing interest and listening. These are all aspects of communicating that we work on during this lesson. Commenting on what the other person says and remembering details of conversations at a later time shows a person is listening. These verbal and nonverbal ways of indicating listening and active participation in a conversation are all part of lesson six of CMCD (2013).

**Research Piece.** This lesson introduces a wide variety of concepts to my students. We role play what good listening and not good listening looks like. My students think this is great fun. We take turns role playing not looking each other in the eye or even turning our back on someone while they are talking to us. Being dramatic and exaggerating good listening and poor listening habits helps my students to understand. I record a number of comments from my students in my research journal in June, 2016:

“*Listening is for ears and eyes.*”

“It is funny when you look up when I am talking. *I KNOW* you are not listening to me. *I will wait.*”

“_____ you have to look at me, then I can talk to you about my sharing.”

“*Did you know I have a ...WAIT! Look at me. Did you know I have a new pencil? WAIT! Looook at me! Never mind. (sigh)*”
They enjoy role playing and watching classmates demonstrate good and poor listening skills. It is good fun and great learning.

The second layer of this lesson is comments. My students have plenty of comments about this topic. We brainstorm how comments can hurt you or love you. We talk about ways to make comments meaningful and extend a conversation. Again, my students are very interested in comments and want to participate. What I also see is that their overall comments to each other throughout the day and in other subject areas became more considerate. I record eight occasions where I notice a student making a positive comment to another student. I also record two occasions where a comment is made that is not considerate. The learning is not perfect.

The before and after CMC (2013) scores of all participants in the category of cooperation from the SSIS Teacher Rating Scale (2008) are plotted on Chart 4.4. All students increase in their cooperation scores following the CMC (2013) program. Instruction in social conversation through CMC (2013) helps students to be more cooperative in their interactions with each other in the classroom. This is what I also observe in the classroom. There were more comments and interactions that indicate students were thinking of their classmates.

One student tells me, “I helped with the marble game. _____ said it was nice.” Another student says, “_____ fell down. I told her “You are okay.””

Curriculum Connection. Lesson two of CMC (2013) introduced the conversation. This ties in well with the social responsibility profiles one and two of Building Student Success (2015) (see Table 4.4). As students move further along in CMC (2013) and build on their conversation skills, they also move forward in the social responsibility profiles of the new BC curriculum.
As the profiles in Table 4.4 show, social responsibility is linked to social conversation. In order to show social responsibility, communication needs to happen. Profiles three, four and five all mention the need to demonstrate, identify, explain and advocate. Through appropriate actions and words, students need to be able to support, encourage and have empathy for their peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFILE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can interact with others and the environment respectfully and thoughtfully. I contribute to group activities that make my classroom, school, community, or natural world a better place. I can identify small things I can do that could make a difference. I can consider others’ views and express a different opinion in a peaceful way. I can identify problems and compare potential problem-solving strategies. I can demonstrate respectful and inclusive behaviour, including online. I can explain why something is unfair, I can identify when others need support and provide it. I can build and sustain relationships. I show care for elders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I can take purposeful action to support others and the environment. I can identify how my actions and the actions of others affect my community and the natural environment and can work to make positive change. I can identify different perspectives on an issue. I can clarify problems, consider alternatives, and evaluate strategies. I respect differences, and demonstrate respectful and inclusive behaviour, including online. I can advocate for others. I am aware of how others may feel and take steps to help them feel included. I maintain relationships with people from different generations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I can initiate positive, sustainable change for others and the environment. I can analyze complex social or environmental issues from multiple perspectives. I can take thoughtful actions to influence positive, sustainable change. I can clarify problems or issues, generate multiple strategies, weigh consequences, compromise to meet the needs of others, and evaluate actions. I take action to support diversity and defend human rights, and can identify how diversity is beneficial for my community, including online. I build and sustain positive relationships with diverse people, including people from different generations. I show empathy for others and adjust my behaviour to accommodate their needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 - Social Responsibility Competency Profiles 3, 4 and 5 (Ministry of Education, Social Responsibility, 2015, p. 6).

Each lesson of CMC (2013) requires a certain level of exposure and mastery of the skills from the previous lesson. Each profile of the Social Responsibility Profiles also requires an understanding and mastery of the goals and skills of the previous profile. I
found that with the progression of my research there was a revisiting of previous concepts at a new and deeper level in *CMC* (2013) and in *Building Student Success* (2015). Both programs lay the groundwork for concepts and skills in the early lessons or profiles and then build on these skills in the subsequent lessons. This approach allows students to continue to gain exposure and proficiency as they learn new skills or concepts at the next level.

**Lesson 7: Topic Changer Pro**

**Lesson Overview.** This lesson focuses on an individual’s ability to switch from one topic to another. When someone is about to switch topics, they often use a word or phrase, a “topic changer”. This “topic changer” may be a single word (i.e. “Hey . . .”) or it can be a short phrase such as “Oh, by the way . . .” or “That reminds me . . .” Without a “topic changer” conversation partners are left hanging as they try to follow the conversation. Without “topic changers”, the conversation will not flow and can be disjointed and confusing. Conversation partners may become frustrated. “If this type of conversation mishap occurs frequently, it is likely that others will come to view us as being socially awkward. Many children and adults suffer from this social alienation.” (Delmonico, 2013, lesson 7, p. 1).

This lesson again builds on previous lessons, in particular lesson three, the “long conversation”. I find that *CMC* (2013) gives learners extensive opportunities to master previous skills, continue to gain confidence and then learn new skills. Students are taught to discuss a variety of topics in a smooth and logical way. The students are given
numerous venues to role-play and participate in conversations. There is room for individual interests, personal preferences and a range of topics. That being said, at the kindergarten level there was not a smooth transition from one topic to another. Students often would leap from one idea to another. This lesson is challenging for this level and my students could have used more opportunities to practice and become fluid at “topic changers”.

*Research Piece.* I presented this lesson towards the end of June. My students are becoming competent conversationalists. However, the smooth topic changing was a challenge and this also is reflected in the *CMC Rubric* (2013). A comparison of the scores before and after *CMC* (2013) on the rubric, indicate this. Before *CMC* (2013) all my students were in the “not yet meeting” and the “approaching” categories. There were no students that knew how to change topics in conversations. After the *CMC* (2013) program, there are still half of the students in the “not yet meeting” category, some in the “approaching” and “meeting” categories and only one student is in the “exceeding” category.

In my researcher’s journal I also note this during the week of lesson seven. I write:

“The students found it challenging to move from one topic to another in a clear way. They often jumped without any words to indicate they were going to talk about something new.”
At this level, I begin to think that more than a week per lesson is necessary. “Topic changers” is a concept that could be built on throughout the year and in a variety of settings and subjects. Using CMC (2013) for only 8 weeks at the end of the school year is not the best way to implement the program. I think more time and opportunities would be helpful for my students and this is also suggested in the CMC (2013) program.

Curriculum Connection. Graphic 4.6 demonstrates the second facet of the communication competency profiles from Building Student Success (2015). Students are expected to learn to share on a variety of topics in an organized and clear way. They are given opportunities to present to an audience and also engage with peers. This aligns well with the need for topics and “topic changers” that is presented in lesson seven of CMC (2013). This is within the reach of my kindergarten students. They are proud to present and share information about topics that are important to them. If there was more than one topic or more than a few items about a topic, at this level, there sharing became less organized or smooth.

The fourth facet of the communication competency profiles for Building Student Success (2015) is shown in Graphic 4.7. This fourth facet expects students to move from acquiring, interpreting and presenting information to explaining and reflecting on experiences and accomplishments. Facets two and four are interrelated. I found that these facets complement each other.
2. Acquire, interpret, and present information (includes inquiries)

Students inquire into topics that interest them, and topics related to their school studies. They present for many purposes and audiences; their work often features media and technology. Examples include “show and tell,” explaining a concept, sharing a PowerPoint presentation about a research/inquiry topic, and creating a video proposal.

SAMPLE “I” STATEMENTS

- ★ I can understand and share information about a topic that is important to me.
- ★ I present information clearly and in an organized way.
- ★ I can present information and ideas to an audience I may not know.

*Graphic 4.6 – Facet Two of Communication Competency Profiles (Ministry of Education, Communication Competency Profiles, 2015, p. 3).*
They illustrate and describe students’ development as communicators in their world.

Communication is the bridge between students’ learning and their relationships.

**4. Explain/recount and reflect on experiences and accomplishments**

Students tell about their experiences – especially their learning experiences – and reflect, and share what they learned. Examples include presentations of learning, self-assessment, and receiving/offering feedback.

**SAMPLE “I” STATEMENTS**

- ★ I give, receive, and act on feedback.
- ★ I can recount simple experiences and activities and tell something I learned.
- ★ I can represent my learning, and tell how it connects to my experiences and efforts.

*Graphic 4.7– Facet Four of Communication Competency Profiles (Ministry of Education, Communication Competency Profiles, 2015, p. 3).*

Students who are working through lesson seven of *CMC* (2013) are also addressing many of the facets of the communication competency profiles of *Building Student Success* (2015). I find that there is flexibility for educators to tailor this lesson to the level and interests of their learners in creative and fun ways. There is room to move learners from basic and supported communication skills to more sophisticated and independent communication. In my classroom, each learner could connect to this lesson and reflect on their learning. The “I can” statements of *Building Student Success* (2015) assists me in assessing where my students are at and looking at ways to move them forward in their social conversation skills.
Lesson Eight: Speaking Loud and Clear

Lesson Overview. This lesson lists three main goals:

1) To improve the knowledge for and ability to self-monitor one’s own body language (i.e. eye contact, facial expressions, body gestures) and tone of voice in structured game activities within the lesson setting with peers and/or the conversation coach.

2) To improve the ability to observe and read the body language (i.e. eye contact, facial expressions, body gestures), and tone of voice of peers and/or the conversation coach in structured game activities within the lesson setting.

3) Improve social awareness in relation to social media and its effect on us as individuals and as a society. (Delmonico, 2013, lesson 8, p. 2)

CMC (2013) works on teaching students about their own body language and tone of voice throughout the program. However, lesson eight makes body language and tone of voice the focus. There are a variety of role plays that students can participate in. This allows me to build on the skills of my students and address any areas my students are finding challenging. I think this is one of the strengths of CMC (2013). This program presents a number of options for each lesson. There are a variety of ways to teach the importance of reading people’s facial expressions, eye contact and body gestures. CMC (2013) offers a range of activities.

Research Piece. This is the final lesson I taught as part of my research. It works well as a review for my students and is a good opportunity to emphasize some of the concepts
that had been only touched on in previous lessons. Non-verbal communication through eye contact, facial expressions and body gestures are very important.

As part of this lesson we play a game where each student has to make a statement with a blank face. No tone of voice, smile or eye contact. I model this for them. Then the students try to make a statement without any emotion, tone or facial expression. This is very hard to do. They try to talk like a robot. Soon we are all literally rolling on the floor with laughter since they find this nearly impossible to do. I record a number of comments the students make in my researcher’s journal:

“I knew _____ likes gym time, his eyes were smiling.”

“It was very funny to talk with a robot voice. I smiled to show I liked it.”

“_____ face was happy even when her talking was supposed to be sad.”

The result of this little exercise is that my students understand how important body language and tone of voice is to our communication. They become more aware of the non-verbal cues they attend to in every conversation.

A second exercise we do is to make statements that convey an emotion and have the rest of the students determine what emotion is being conveyed. My students enjoy this activity too and are very accurate at determining the emotion being displayed. We use the basic statement, “I don’t want to.” I was surprised how clearly my students could determine if the emotion was excitement, sadness, fear, happiness etc.

When I assess my students on the *CMC Rubric* (2013) (Table 3.1 and 4.1) before and after the CMC program I see that my students improve considerably in: eye contact,
facial expressions, body gestures, proxemics, and tone of voice. For eye contact, after 
CMC (2013) there are no students in the “not yet meeting category”. All the students are 
in the “approaching” or “meeting” category. Also for facial expressions, the majority of 
the students have reached the “approaching” or “meeting” category. For body gestures, I 
observe an increase in the use of body gestures that match the words the students are 
communicating. The rubric also reflects this with over half of the students in the 
“meeting” category. Proxemics also showed more than half of my kindergarten students 
in the “meeting” and “exceeding” category. Finally, on this rubric, tone of voice is an 
area most students have improved in. This rubric confirms what I was noticing with my 
students on a daily basis in the classroom. They are more aware of these non-verbal 
 aspects of communication and are using them to communicate more effectively with each 
other.

**Curriculum Connection.** Table 4.2 (discussed in lesson 1) shows the first two 
profiles of the communication competency profiles. Once students have worked their way 
to the eighth lesson of CMC (2013) they have made progress in both the lesson objectives 
of CMC (2013) and the communication competency profiles of Building Student Success 

Table 4.5 outlines the remaining communication competency profiles, three 
through eight. Each profile shows students become more self-aware, more confident and 
are able to communicate to a broader audience. My students did not advance through all 
of these profiles, nor would they be expected to at a kindergarten level. However, I do
find these profiles helpful to determine the competence of my students and to know what
the next step for them might be.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFILE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In familiar situations, with some support or guidance, I communicate with peers and adults. I understand and share basic information about topics that are important to me, and participate in conversations for a variety of purposes (e.g., to connect, help, be friendly, learn/share). I listen and respond to others. I can work with others to achieve a short-term, concrete goal; I do my share. I recount simple experiences and activities, and tell something I learned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I communicate with peers and adults with growing confidence, using forms and strategies I have practiced. I gather basic information I need for school tasks and for my own interests, and present it in ways I have learned. I am becoming an active listener; I ask questions and make connections. When I talk and work with peers, I express my ideas and encourage others to express theirs; I share roles and responsibilities. I recount and comment on events and experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I communicate clearly, in an organized way, using a variety of forms appropriately. I acquire the information I need for school tasks and for my own interests, and present it clearly. In discussions and collaborative activities. I am an engaged listener – I ask clarifying and extending questions. I share my ideas and try to connect them with others’ ideas. I contribute to planning and adjusting a plan, and help to solve conflicts or challenges. I am able to represent my learning, and connect it to my experiences and efforts. I give and receive constructive feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I communicate confidently in organized forms that show attention to my audience and purpose. I acquire information about complex and specialized topics from various sources, and synthesize and present it with thoughtful analysis. I contribute positively to discussions and collaborations, and help to organize and monitor the work. I ask thought-provoking questions, integrate new information, support others, and help to manage conflicts. I offer detailed descriptions of my own efforts and experiences. I give, receive, and act on constructive feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I communicate effectively in well-constructed forms that are effective in terms of my audience and purpose. I acquire, critically analyse, and integrate well-chosen information from a range of sources. I show understanding and control of the forms and technologies I use. In discussion and collaboration, I acknowledge different perspectives, and look for commonalities. I offer both leadership and support; I am flexible and have a variety of strategies and experiences to draw on. I am able to represent my learning and my goals, and connect these to my previous experiences. I accept constructive feedback and use it to move forward.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I access and make strategic choices from complex and specialized information sources. I show expertise in the forms and technologies I use. I can take leadership in a discussion or collaboration, and focus on deepening or transforming out thinking. I seek consensus and focus on collective results. I can articulate a keen awareness of my strengths, my aspirations and myself. I offer detailed analysis, using specific terminology, of my progress, work and goals.

Table 4.5 - Communication Competency Profiles 3 through 8 (Ministry of Education, Communication Competency, 2015, p. 5).

Lesson 8 of CMC (2013) also spends a considerable amount of time on social media. The importance of face-to-face conversations is emphasized. The lack of tone of voice and body language when using social media is discussed. Students are challenged to consider when social media is an effective mode of communication and when it is not. This is not applicable to my students but it could be very relevant to older students.

Profile six to eight emphasizes the need for students to show attention to their audience and purpose. I think this is a key aspect of teaching students to use social media in an effective and responsible way. Students need to be aware of their audience, also on social media. All communication has a purpose. I find that as my students moved through the lessons of CMC (2013) they gain skills in communicating in an aware and positive way. As they begin to advance through the communication competency profiles my students also learn to communicate effectively and in an intentional way.
Lessons Nine through Twelve Observations

These lessons were not covered in my research with my kindergarten class due to the time frame of eight weeks and also the communication level of my students. If I were to do this program over the course of an entire school year, as the manual for CMC (2013) suggests, I would probably move into these lessons. They seem to have merit in the natural progression of the approach to oral language and conversation. I see value in reviewing and sharing these lessons because I would like to use this program in its entirety with my students in the future or with an older group of students and others can see the entire program and its continuity from beginning to end. I will give a brief outline of each of these lessons and the curriculum connections I find as I was working with CMC (2013) and investigating Building Student Success (2015). There will be no research piece as I look at lessons nine through twelve.

Lesson Nine: Beading

Lesson Overview. This lesson does not introduce any new concepts but allows time for the students to remember, practice and master any conversation concepts they need to attend to. Students are given an opportunity to construct a series of beads to help remind them of the main components of an effective conversation. Some of the visuals that have been used throughout the lessons are removed so students can engage with each other from memory or use their beads to help them remember. Students who struggle with learning challenges are supported through the use of the beads in a variety of settings.
**Curriculum Connection.** The use of a visual reminder to reinforce and aid learning is important. This will assist students as they move forward in their communication competency. Table 4.5 shows the Communication Competency Profiles 3 to 8. The language of these profiles is important. Profile 4 states, “I can communicate with peers and adults with growing confidence, using forms and strategies I have practiced.” Profile 5 states, “I communicate clearly, in an organized way, using a variety of forms appropriately.” Profile 6 states, “I communicate confidently in organized forms to show attention to my audience and purpose.” (Ministry of Education, Communication Competency, 2015, p. 5). There is a movement forward with each profile from “growing confidence” in Profile 4 to “communicate clearly” in Profile 5 to “communicate confidently” in Profile 6. In order for this movement to happen, students need to take their learning outside of the familiar classroom. They need to grow in confidence and have opportunities to practice social conversation away from bulletin boards and teacher prompts. The beads are a visual prompt that students can take with them as they transition into independence and gain in conversation fluency.
Lesson Ten: Topics of Conversation

Lesson Overview. In this lesson, students are moving into advanced conversations. All the conversation features students have learned are combined and put into complicated “long conversations”. There is a conversation game that students are taught and encouraged to play at home or with friends. The skills that students learn move beyond the safety of the classroom.

Curriculum Connection. Both lesson nine and ten encourage children to expand from individual conversations and interactions to relationships. When people have a relationship, their conversations build on each other and span common experiences, emotions and memories. The broad goal of Building Student Success (2015) in the area of social responsibility involves the ability and disposition to consider the interdependence of people with each other and the natural environment; to contribute positively to one’s family, community, society, and the environment; to resolve problems peacefully; to empathize with others and appreciate their perspectives; and to create and maintain healthy relationships (Ministry of Education, Social Responsibility, 2015, p. 2).

I see that CMC (2013) and Building Student Success (2015) are looking for deeper learning. “Deeper learning” is a term used throughout the new BC curriculum to emphasize the need for students to develop their understanding and apply their learning in meaningful ways.

Deeper learning:
• develops understanding that allows students to think about and apply their learning in meaningful ways
• helps students build up an increasingly sophisticated conceptual understanding of how knowledge has been constructed within a particular topic or discipline
• helps students build generalizations and mental models of the world that allow them to make sense of new information and connect it to prior knowledge
• goes beyond rote learning or surface learning, where a student may memorize a procedure or formula, but does not actually understand the underlying principle
• goes beyond passively receiving content and involves students in actively developing and explaining their knowledge
• is not assessed by the ability to recall a textbook account or teacher’s explanation (Ministry of Education, 2015, glossary of curriculum terms, p. 3)

It is through practice, new contexts and a variety of opportunities that students will achieve this deeper learning in social conversation and communication skills. I see lessons nine and ten as providing opportunities for this to happen.

Lesson Eleven and Twelve: Carry Over and Customize

Lesson Overview. Students move to an expert level of conversation skills in these last two lessons. Lessons eleven and twelve are designed for students to have a variety of conversation partners as they are taken on field trips throughout their community.
Students are expected to use language and social skills that are appropriate for the situation and their level of functioning.

Curriculum Connection. “Differentiated instruction is an approach to learning in which instruction and assessment are based on the specific needs, learning style, interests, developmental level, and other learning preferences of the individual student” (Ministry of Education, 2015, glossary of curriculum terms, p. 3). Differentiated instruction is a key component of Building Student Success (2015). Educators are expected to find ways to differentiate instruction across subject areas and grades.

These last two lessons of CMC (2013) are designed to differentiate instruction so that all students become social conversation experts. There are tips and guidelines for group and individual field trips offered in these lessons. There are also conversation recipe sheets for students to use. These are planning sheets that students can use to prepare for social situations and social conversation on their field trips. For some students, being prepared and planning is essential to their success on a field trip. The teacher or parent is defined as the conversation coach. The conversation coach is an advocate for the child. The conversation coach plays a variety of roles from cheerleader when the student successfully maneuvers through a social situation to counsellor to provide empathy and encouragement when a situation does not go as planned. I did not implement these lessons in my classroom but I do see ways that these lessons could be applied and used with my kindergarten students in a differentiated way.
I also see that *CMC* (2013) seeks the success of all learners. The program offers assessment checklists and a rubric to determine if further support and instruction is necessary. The rubric I refer to throughout my research is very helpful as one source of information about my students and their progress.

*CMC* (2013) also provides general rules to social conversations that can be applied to novel social situations to help ensure continued success. *CMC* (2013) offers some guidelines and suggestions for cultural nuances and ethnic preferences. It provides scripts and suggestions for introductions, compliments, gift giving, telephone conversations, restaurant conversations, saying excuse me, pedestrian etiquette, waiting in line and family or community events. I think these suggestions can be tailored by the teacher or parent to meet the needs of individual children and situations.

**Conclusion**

By implementing *Color My Conversation* (*CMC*) (2013) in my kindergarten class for eight weeks and using my researcher’s journal, the *Social Skills Improvement System* (SSiS) *Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) and the *CMC Rubric* (2013) to triangulate my findings, I can reflect on what my students and I are experiencing. I do observe an improvement in the conversation skills of my students. I also see a progression in their broader social skills such as listening to each other, taking turns in conversations and in games and activities, and considering others’ point of view. The highlight for me in implementing *CMC* (2013) in my classroom is the positive effect it has on my students’
interactions with each other. I see them having fun with each other, getting to know more about each other and being excited as their friendships grow.

I also have become deeply familiar with *CMC* (2013) and the new BC curriculum, *Building Student Success* (2015). I am pleased with how well *CMC* (2013) aligns with the curriculum goals of *Building Student Success* (2015). I examine each lesson in the light of my own students’ needs as well as ways these lessons could be adapted for other classes and students. This allows my students to develop real skills and opportunities to become adept conversationalists in a variety of contexts both within and beyond school. This also gives other teachers a starting point for working with *CMC* (2013) and *Building Student Success* (2015) to meet the communication and social goals of their own students.
Chapter 5: Fine Lines and Deeper Colour

“I believe that the current emphasis on teaching reading skills in kindergarten is akin to removing the tricycles from kindergarten playgrounds and replacing them with two-wheelers.” (Costantino-Lane, 2013, p.2).

Overview

I am happy with the friendships my students are forming and the excitement they are experiencing as they develop their conversation skills. Their enthusiasm and positive attitude is contagious. I am pleased to see my learners taking turns, considering others’ points of view and having fun together. This research has been enlightening and colourful in relation to the true value of promoting oral conversation in my classrooms.

I feel confident with the new BC curriculum, Building Student Success (2015) because I am pleased with how well the curriculum goals of Building Student Success (2015) and the lessons of Color My Conversation (CMC) (2013) align. I have become familiar with each lesson in the light of my own students’ needs. I see that my work with CMC (2013) and Building Student Success (2015) allows my students to develop real skills and opportunities to become adept conversationalists in a variety of contexts both within and beyond school. Now it is time for me to continue to progress as a teacher and explore what the next step will be for me and my students after connecting to the major themes of this research.
Discussion

Green means go: Implications

I know that this research changes the way that I approach social conversation with my students. By examining my research and learning along with my students I come away with three “big ideas” or “green lights,” if you will. These “green lights” have developed out of my findings and help me to determine how I go forward in my teaching. My “green lights” from my research are: (1) it is important to have a blueprint for oral language and curriculum; (2) oral language can serve as a lens for school success; and (3) social conversation helps to build colourful friendships.

The importance of a blue print. I come to realize that throughout my teaching career I have not had a comprehensive understanding of oral language. I have certainly not examined oral language in the context of curriculum and in the level of detail outlined in this program and in connection to the provincial curriculum. I was aware at the outset of this research that I needed to have a clearer understanding of oral language development. I needed to understand this in the context of the goals that I have for my students. This “blue print” helps me to interpret the outcomes of this research and also helps me to improve my training in oral language instruction so that I can devote more meaningful time to my students’ oral language development.

Researchers have noted that, language development in elementary school is often limited by what children can read and write (Doak, 2012; Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson,
Oral language receives little attention from many teachers (Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson, 2006; Tompkins, Bright, Pollard & Windsor, 2005). “There is no controversy about the fundamental importance of English oral language development as part of the enterprise of educating.” (Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson, 2006). While educators, curriculum, and research recognize the importance of oral language for school success, the amount of classroom time and teacher training devoted to oral language does not reflect this importance. My curriculum, classroom and teacher training have also not reflected that oral language development is an essential element of school success, and it was through this research that I can see the merit of furthering my abilities as a teacher in this area.

Language is so comfortable and familiar to us that we often do not appreciate its complexity. This research allows me to gain a new appreciation for the layers of language. Hong and Aiex (1995) viewed oral language not only as involving basic communication but also thinking, knowledge and skills. Oral language is complex. There are many different components to oral language and the sub skill of social conversation. Snow (1972) broke oral language into discrete units. Later, Roth, Spence and Cooper (2013) conceived a four-part model for oral language. These conceptualizations of how oral language works can be helpful but also intimidating to teachers who want to improve oral language at a basic level in their classrooms.
While oral language is complex, it is also simple. Language is all about communicating. I experience this connecting of students through language in my classroom. I see my students enjoy talking to each other and talking to various people throughout the school. Their pleasure and connectedness underline for me that social conversation is important and needs to be a key part of their language learning. My students’ conversations are fun and real, as well as engaging. I find that this social conversation can be incorporated into many aspects of teaching and impact much of the students’ learning. I note in my research journal 88 instances where I converse with students during a lesson about something that is important to the students and their peer interactions but has very little relevance to the lesson being taught. As a teacher trying to teach a certain topic or subject this can be seen as “time wasted”. However, when I value social conversation I can see these “off topic” interactions as valuable.

Teacher: “Today we are talking about families and how our families help us.”

Student 1: “My family has only two people.”

Student 2: “My Grandpa is in heaven. He lived with us so now we have 5 people.”

Student 3: “My sister ________ is in heaven.”

Student 2: “I was sad when my Grandpa died. Mom cried.”

Student 4: “My family has 8 people but we don’t all live in the same place. My Dad has a house and my Mom has a house.”
The students make connections with each other and develop a wider point of view through these interactions. The meanderings of this conversation allows students to build friendships and share experiences.

In my search to find resources or a program to expand my own oral language knowledge and then eventually add to the oral language competence of my students, I discover that there are a number of approaches and options. However, when discussing these options with other teachers, few were actively teaching oral language and even fewer were assessing oral language. Research also shows that few teachers are actively teaching or assessing oral language (Costantino-Lane, 2013; Jones, 2007; Tompkins et al., 2005). There is a need for teachers to seriously engage with oral language and social conversation programs and resources. There was a need for me to spend the time sourcing out appropriate strategies to teach social conversation and to move my students forward. Frankel & Myatt, (2003) designed Children’s Friendship Training (CFT). This approach has been demonstrated to be effective with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and Attention Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD) (Frankel, Myatt & Cantwell, 1995; Frankel, Myatt, Cantwell & Feinberg, 1997; Frankel, O’Connor et al., 2006; Myatt & Feinberg, 2007). The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) adapted the methods and curriculum of the CFT (2003) to better accommodate instruction and content that were relevant to teenagers with ASD (Laugeson et al., 2009). I find that these approaches offer
excellent guidelines and reinforce the importance and effectiveness of social language instruction for students with social challenges.

I think every teacher needs to consider the research and the efficacy of the programs and lessons that are available to them. For this project and for future work in my classroom, the research and work in social conversation that has been done needs to be given the attention it deserves. With this need in mind, I selected *Color My Conversation (CMC)* (2013) for this research project and for my students. I examined *CMC* (2013) closely and worked with it extensively. I am pleased with the progress I see my students make. I see them talking to each other in meaningful ways. They are engaged in conversations throughout the school. The observations I make in my journal are supported by the *CMC Rubric* (2013) and the before and after scores on *The Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale* (2008). The learning is not perfect and the time is too short. I will use *CMC* (2013) again with my students but I will give it more attention. The eight week time frame is not enough to fully achieve the conversation objectives I have in mind. This is one of the limitations of my research – the timeline is too short.

I also examine the new BC curriculum *Building Student Success* (2015) as it guides educators in communication and personal and social skills. This is very effective. It clarifies for me where my students are and where they need to gain skills and understanding. The thorough look at the BC curriculum through the lens of *CMC* (2013)
gives me a new appreciation for oral language and the impact it has on school and life. Oral language training cannot have a “one size fits all” solution. This research reinforces for me the importance of giving social conversation development the serious consideration it deserves within the context of my class and their particular needs, strengths and challenges. There is also room in both *CMC* (2013) and *Building Student Success* (2015) to accommodate exceptional children who are either challenged by learning disabilities or in need of gifted opportunities.

*Oral language as a lens for school success.* Research supports the idea that oral language skills and habits serve as important resources for success or failure in school-related tasks such as learning to read (Beron & Farkas 2004). Wilde and Sage (2007) found that children’s communicative competence on entering school predicted later learning success. The ability to converse was found to be a reliable determining factor in students’ ability to read (Foorman, Herrera, Petscher, Mitchell & Truckenmiller, 2015). A study of preschool children showed that even at this young age, children with weaker oral language skills lagged behind their peers with stronger oral language skills in terms of their writing-related skills (Puranik & Lonigan, 2012). The partnership between language and reading is also acknowledged by many (Catts et al., 2000; Preston et al., 2010; Sticht, 2002). My research with my own students helps me to internalize these research findings. These findings become real to me. Social conversation does help students to become more competent with language and adds another layer of knowledge to their overall development as speakers, readers and writers. “It is generally agreed that
oral language and reading have a reciprocal relationship and children’s ability to reflect on language occurs in kindergarten.” (Costantino-Lane, 2013). My students’ competence in oral language serves as a lens through which I can view some of their challenges and successes.

With my students, I see them not only improving in their conversation skills, but also their ability to share who they are and what matters to them. An example of this is during lesson three when the students were given topic cards to help prompt their conversations. There is excitement and a number of students are disappointed to not have time to talk to ALL the other students about ALL the topics. As we progress through more lessons, this sharing moves beyond conversations to sharing ideas via pictures and simple writing. The language that students are developing and the conversations they are having transfers to other subject areas and contexts. I experience my students problem-solving on the playground and negotiating in centres. I am excited about the carry-over of competencies.

*Social conversation colours friendships.* Beyond the deep impact oral language skills have on the academic performance of children in school, there is also the importance of children’s social and emotional development. The ability to communicate, form friendships and interact positively with others affects students’ ability to learn (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong & Gomby, 2005). This has been my experience throughout my teaching career and is at the heart of this research. The improvement in
the social interactions of my students is where I look to see the most authentic change. The ability to stay on task, engage in listening, manage emotions, follow directions, work cooperatively, and manage conflicts are all aspects of social emotional skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2013). Through the use of CMC (2013) in my classroom, I observe these skills developing. The data of the rating scale, rubric and my researcher’s journal all triangulate to support that my students’ social interactions improved through social conversation.

When students struggle in the areas of listening, managing emotions, working cooperatively and addressing conflict, situations can arise which result in learning time being reduced, not only for the child but for the rest of the children in the classroom setting. I notice that students who are more socially aware, are also more capable of staying on task and engaging in a positive manner with their peers and teachers. Wentzel, Baker & Russell (2009) state: “given the social nature of the classroom, students have the opportunity to pursue many goals, both academic and social.” Students who know how to interact in a positive way with their peers and their teacher will receive more opportunities to contribute to the learning environment (Zins, Weissbert, Wang & Walberg, 2004). Students who receive these positive interactions from the teacher and their peers outperform those who receive negative attention (Baker, 2006). These students receive more praise and less criticism. Also within my own classroom, students who are able to conduct themselves in a positive manner do receive more attention. These students are able to learn better and have a more positive school experience. The goal of my research was to find effective ways to increase the positive interactions of my
students with each other and with me. Through better social conversation skills, my students did experience more positive interactions. This was one of the highlights of my research. I saw that my students received the tools they needed to converse in “praise-worthy” ways and improve their social experiences.

My experiences this year solidify for me the belief that teaching social skills through oral language development is essential. Communication skills are a predictor of cooperation and play (Wilde & Sage, 2007). If a teacher is able to improve a student’s communication skills, they will also increase the child’s ability to form friendships and have positive interactions with peers. Within my kindergarten class this year, my experience is that friendships are formed and positive interactions between peers increase.

Yellow Means Caution: Limitations

My research has been in one kindergarten class of 26 students. I recognize that the growth and excitement I see may not transfer into other classrooms and teaching situations. My research was conducted to bring about change to my students, it may not bring about change to another teacher’s students. I do know for sure, after completing this study, I have grown in my knowledge of social language. I also know I have much more to learn. I am not alone in my need to see more research completed and also more professional development available to assist teachers in appreciating the importance of oral language and having the tools to move their students forward. I also know that my
extensive examination of *CMC* (2013) and *Building Student Success* (2015) is a good starting point for other teachers who are looking to improve their own students’ conversations skills and meet the new BC curriculum objectives. My research was done with Caucasian kindergarten students in a middle-class independent school in British Columbia. Other teachers will have their own students, demographics and contexts to consider when exploring oral language. Other teachers will have to find their own colours just as I have had to find my own colours.

**Drawing on the Future: Suggestions for Future Research and Practice**

The new BC curriculum strongly articulates the importance of communication competency and personal and social competency. “Core Competencies underpin the curricular competencies in all areas of learning. They are directly related to the educated citizen and as such are what we value for all students in the system” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Overview, 2015). Teachers within BC, myself included, are going to need research, tools and training to accomplish these core competencies within their classrooms. “British Columbia’s redesigned curriculum honours the ways in which students think, learn, and grow, and prepares them for a successful lifetime of learning where ongoing change is constant” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Overview, 2015). In order for students to be successful life-long learners, their teachers will also need to be life-long learners. We will need current research, skilled mentors, learning opportunities and innovative programs. True educators are searching for opportunities to collaborate
with other educators. Teachers want to be able to mentor each other and work together to explore new approaches and research-supported curriculum.

I find *Color My Conversation* (2013) is an innovative program. It approaches social conversation in an organized and fresh way. It works well for me and my students. I believe the research I have done is a good starting point for other teachers to conduct their own research and impact their students. I would like to conduct more research with this program over a longer period of time. The eight week timeline was limiting and I want to give my students and myself a longer timeline to benefit from *CMC* (2013). I believe this would be more effective and promote better conversation and social interactions for my students. I would also look at different instruments to measure student engagement and learning in order to move my own knowledge forward and assist my next class of students. My goal is to continue to teach and learn along with my students. I am blessed with a strong support from the parents in my community who want to partner with their children’s teachers to give their children the best education possible. I also have the benefit of engaged and professional colleagues who are continually sharing ideas and new approaches.

**Conclusion**

As I look back over this research, I see how each piece of my life has contributed to the picture I now see. I am surprise by the speech therapy and social challenges I had as a child. I am amazed that my own challenges and successes were re-visited in two of
my own children. I can see the blending of my own experiences as a teacher with my role as a mother. These experiences all helped me to focus on social conversation in my research. I see how this study adds another layer and confirms for me that social conversation skills are important and worthy of my attention. I come away from my research knowing that competence in social conversation will improve peer interactions and the overall social climate of the classroom. The participants in this study do benefit from *CMC* (2013) and being taught social conversation skills. The *Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale* (2008) supports the observations I make in my researcher’s journal. In the categories of assertion, responsibility and self-control I see an improvement in my student’s scores using the *SSiS Teacher Rating Scale* (2008). The highlights of this data can be found in greater detail in Chart 3.1 and in Appendix A. The *CMC Rubric* (2013) also shows that my students increased in their social conversation skills which aided their interactions with each other. Furthermore, I gained in my knowledge of the new BC curriculum (2015) and how to align the curricular goals with the needs of my students. The findings of this research have encouraged me to continue to add colour to my teaching. My focus will become crisper. The picture will become brighter.
References


https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/docs/def_xcurr_comps.pdf


Foster, W., & Miller, M. (2007). Development of the literacy achievement gap: a


Jones, D. (2007). Speaking, listening, planning and assessing: the teacher’s role in
developing metacognitive awareness. *Early Childhood Development and Care, 177*(6-7), 569-579.


Larsen, J. T., & Stastny, B. J. (2011). It's a bittersweet symphony: Simultaneously mixed emotional responses to music with conflicting cues. *Emotion (Washington,


Obaid, M.A.S. (2013). The impact of using multi-sensory approach for teaching students...


Oxford dictionary  https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/communication


Public speaking program for kids, tweens, and teens. (2014). *PR Newswire*.


Rubrics 101 retrieved from: http://www.tarleton.edu/Faculty/becker/Rubrics%20101.pdf


Stan, M. M. (2012). Socio-emotional predictors of school success at the beginning of
school years. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 33, 806-810.


Wang, C., & Algozzine, B. (2011). Rethinking the relationship between reading and


Appendix A

SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008) Findings

Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale (2008) for teachers was used on all participants following the eight week intervention of the CMC (2013) program. The post-intervention results are shown in chart 3.1 on page 54. These results are also broken down below in charts 4.5 and 4.6 according to male and female participants. There were 12 female students and 14 male students who participated in CMC (2013) and were assessed following the program.

![Bar Chart](chart4.5.png)


On chart 4.7 the before and after CMC (2013) scores of all participants in the category of assertion are plotted. This chart shows that most students increased in their assertion scores following the CMC (2013) program. Some students decreased in their assertion scores.

The before and after CMC (2013) scores of all participants in the category of responsibility are plotted on chart 4.8. Many students remained the same in their responsibility scores following the CMC (2013) program. The SSiS Teacher Rating Scale (2008) for responsibility assesses students on: if they care for their own belongings, show respect for others’ belongings, behave when unsupervised, and take responsibility for their own actions. This category assesses behaviours that are not addressed through CMC (2013).


On chart 4.9 the before and after CMC (2013) scores of all participants in the category of self-control are plotted. Many students increased in their self-control scores following the CMC (2013) program. This rating scale assesses students on: staying calm when teased, taking criticism without getting upset, using appropriate language when upset, and responding appropriately when pushed. It seems most students were able to articulate their concerns better following CMC (2013). I found they had gained in their ability to communicate even in unpleasant circumstances.
## Appendix B

### Color My Conversation Rubric (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eye Contact</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A skilled conversationalist understands that eye contact (in a conversation) is a combination of direct eye gaze, face scanning, and glances at other parts of the person, other people or at items in the room.</td>
<td>Eye contact is infrequent, with minimal one-to-one eye gaze with CP. Eye contact is excess by either staring at the CP or fixated on objects in the room.</td>
<td>Eye contact is irregular and distracting for the CP. Eye contact is held too long with the CP or other people in the room.</td>
<td>Eye contact is frequent but may periodically draw attention from CP. Eye contact is an appropriate length of time with a combination of direct eye gaze and looking away.</td>
<td>Eye contact is natural and not distracting to the CP. Uses a combination of direct eye contact, face scanning, and glances at the CP's body, other people or other items in the room.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facial Expressions</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A skilled conversationalist uses facial expressions that match how they are feeling or how their CP is feeling. However, he/she also self-regulates facial expressions if the emotions being expressed are not positive to the situation.</td>
<td>Facial expression or lack of expression is very distracting. Facial expressions rarely match the emotions expressed by the individual or the CP. May have a flat affect with little to no expression, eye rolling and yawning. May be over exaggerated with expression.</td>
<td>Facial expression or lack of expression is distracting. Facial expressions periodically match the emotions expressed by the CP. Facial expressions are barely noticeable. Facial expressions frequently match the emotions expressed by the individual or the CP. Facial expressions are not drawing attention from the CP.</td>
<td>Facial expression or lack of expression is distracting. Facial expressions consistently match the emotions expressed by the individual or the CP. Facial expressions are not drawing attention from the CP.</td>
<td>Facial expression or lack of expression is distracting. Facial expressions consistently match the emotions expressed by the individual or the CP. Facial expressions are not drawing attention from the CP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body Gestures</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A skilled conversationalist uses body gestures that match how they are feeling or how their CP is feeling. However, he/she also self-regulates body gestures if the emotions being expressed are not positive to the situation.</td>
<td>Rarely uses body gestures that match the message being expressed by the individual or the CP in neutral or positive situations. Body gestures are frequently distracting to the CP (i.e. being overly expressive or not using body movement at all). Consistently demonstrates difficulty with the ability to self-regulate body gestures in situations that are not positive (i.e. when someone is angry).</td>
<td>Seldom uses body gestures that match the message being expressed by the individual or the CP in neutral or positive situations. Can at times be distracting to the CP (i.e. being overly expressive or not using body movement at all). Frequently demonstrates difficulty with the ability to self-regulate body gestures in situations that are not positive (i.e. when someone is acting aggressively).</td>
<td>Frequently uses body gestures that match the message being expressed by the individual or the CP in neutral or positive situations. Usually reads the social cues and environment well however, may struggle with the ability to self-regulate in situations that are not positive (i.e. when someone is acting aggressively).</td>
<td>Consistently uses body gestures that match the message being expressed by the individual or the CP in situations that are neutral or positive. Consistently demonstrates the ability to self-regulate body gestures in situations that are not positive (i.e. when someone is acting aggressively).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proxemic</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the physical distance that we have based our relationship with the CP. It should feel natural – not too far away or too close to the CP.</td>
<td>Rarely or never uses proper personal space, standing too close or too far away. Is not able to determine acceptable personal space and determine relationship norms for personal space bubble.</td>
<td>Inconsistently demonstrates natural adjustments in relation to personal space. Does not always change stance or distance according to relationship status.</td>
<td>Frequently demonstrates natural adjustments in relation to personal space and demonstrates the ability to consider other specific factors such as gender, age and culture.</td>
<td>Consistently demonstrates natural adjustments in relation to personal space and demonstrates the ability to consider other specific factors such as gender, age and culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone of Voice</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the way that we modulate our voice to express emotions. We will often match our tone of voice to how we are feeling or how our CP is feeling. However, we may choose to self-regulate our tone of voice if the emotions being expressed are not positive (i.e. angry).</td>
<td>Frequently misinterprets tone of voice of others and draws attention to oneself or uses tone of voice that is confusing to the CP. Unable to read and match thoughts and reactivity (inappropriately) to the emotional expression from the CP (i.e. sadness, frustration, sarcasm, humor, questioning).</td>
<td>Inconsistently uses tone of voice that matches personal thoughts and feelings. Inconsistently reacts appropriately to the emotions, thoughts and feelings expressed by the CP's tone of voice (i.e. sadness, frustration, sarcasm, humor, questioning).</td>
<td>Frequently uses tone of voice that matches personal thoughts and feelings. Frequently reacts appropriately to the emotions, thoughts and feelings expressed by the CP (i.e. sadness, frustration, sarcasm, humor, questioning).</td>
<td>Consistently uses tone of voice that matches personal thoughts and feelings. Consistently reacts appropriately to the emotions, thoughts and feelings expressed by the CP's tone of voice (i.e. sadness, frustration, sarcasm, humor, questioning).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Color My Conversation Rubric and Assessment is based on North American social expectations. Mark this rubric as if you are the Communication Partner (CP) from the perspective of a known adult or peer. Please note: This Assessment Rubric is primarily intended for the Conversation Coach who may not have access to more formal assessment measures for social language skills.

© 2013 Roselyn Dell’Osso
Cynthia Assendelft and Roselyn Dell’Osso
### Greetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely initiates or responds to nonverbal greetings with CP.</th>
<th>Inconsistently initiates or responds to nonverbal greetings with CP - needs frequent reminders to respond.</th>
<th>Frequently initiates or responds to nonverbal greetings with CP.</th>
<th>Consistently initiates or responds to nonverbal greetings with CP.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Farewells

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely initiates or responds to nonverbal farewells with CP.</th>
<th>Inconsistently initiates or responds to nonverbal farewells with CP - needs frequent reminders to respond.</th>
<th>Frequently initiates or responds to nonverbal farewells with CP.</th>
<th>Consistently initiates or responds to nonverbal farewells with CP.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Conversation Starter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never or rarely asks general questions or makes comments to initiate a conversation using predictable topics (i.e. weather, family, current events).</th>
<th>Sometimes asks general questions or makes comments to initiate a conversation using predictable topics (i.e. weather, family, current events).</th>
<th>Frequently asks general questions or makes comments to initiate a conversation using predictable topics (i.e. weather, family, current events).</th>
<th>Competently asks general questions or makes comments to initiate a conversation using predictable topics (i.e. weather, family, current events).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Conversation Stopper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never or rarely uses closing comments to indicate that a conversation is about to end (i.e. Nice talking with you. Well I'd better be on my way. It's been great to see you again etc).</th>
<th>Sometimes uses closing comments to indicate that a conversation is about to end (i.e. Nice talking with you. Well I'd better be on my way. It's been great to see you again etc).</th>
<th>Often uses closing comments to indicate that a conversation is about to end (i.e. Nice talking with you. Well I'd better be on my way. It's been great to see you again etc).</th>
<th>Skillfully uses closing comments to indicate that a conversation is about to end (i.e. Nice talking with you. Well I'd better be on my way. It's been great to see you again etc).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is unable to engage in a topic of personal interest; does not know what to talk about (says I don't know).</th>
<th>Engages in limited topics of personal interest but has difficulty or is unable to contribute to topics of shared interests.</th>
<th>Engages in specific topics of own personal interest.</th>
<th>Skillfully engages in specific topics of personal or CP's area of interest.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Comments & Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never or rarely makes comments or asks questions in response to the CP's specific topic.</th>
<th>Sometimes makes comments or asks questions in response to the CP's specific topic.</th>
<th>Often makes appropriate comments or asks meaningful questions in response to the CP's specific topic or the emotional tone of the topic.</th>
<th>Confidently and naturally makes appropriate comments or asks meaningful questions in response to the CP's specific topic or the emotional tone of the topic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

Color My Conversation Rubric and Assessment for Conversation Coach © 2013 Rosalyn Delmonico
Cyndie Anderson and Rosalyn Delmonico
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Topic Changers</strong> (optional for primary)</th>
<th>Never uses topic changer words or phrases to move from one topic to another.</th>
<th>Sometimes uses topic changer words or phrases to move from one topic to another.</th>
<th>Often uses topic changer words or phrases to move from one topic to another.</th>
<th>Confidently and naturally uses a variety of topic changer words or phrases to move from one topic to another.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These are the words/ phrases that we use to let our CP know that the topic is about to shift. A skilled conversationalist will not only use topic changers but their choice of topic changers will compliment the degree of change required. For example, a basic topic changer such as &quot;By the way...&quot; could be used if the topics are somewhat related. However if the topics are not at all related, a skilled conversationalist would prepare the CP with a topic changer that identifies a significant switch in the topics (i.e. &quot;On a completely different note...&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Turn Taking** | Frequently demonstrates difficulty with turn taking by either dominating the conversation or not contributing to it sufficiently. Frequently demonstrates difficulty with conversation transitions (i.e. enter into a dialogue, interrupt within the dialogue, exit a dialogue that is still underway). | Sometimes uses appropriate strategies for turn taking. May either dominate the conversation or not contribute to it sufficiently. May interrupt at inopportune times. | Often is able to take turns smoothly within a conversation. Frequently demonstrates the ability to transition (i.e. enter into dialogue, interrupt within the dialogue, exit dialogue that is still underway) within a conversation. | Skillfully uses appropriate strategies for turn taking or transitioning when interruptions are required within a conversation. |
| A skilled conversationalist has a sense of the timing required for turn taking (i.e. how to interrupt when engaged in a conversation). He/she also understands how to entertain a conversation that is already underway. |

| **Social Etiquette – Verbal Acts of Politeness** | Never or rarely uses polite words. May use slang or inappropriate language. | Sometimes uses polite words however, word choice may be improper or unflattering for the situation or the relationship with the CP. | Often uses polite words that are suitable to the situation and the relationship with the CP. | Consistently uses polite words and can skilfully adjust word choice that is fitting to the situation or relationship with CP. |
| A skilled conversationalist demonstrates social etiquette by using polite words/ phrases (i.e. please, thank you, excuse me). |
Appendix C
Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) Teacher Rating Scale (2008)

Social Skills Improvement System
Frank M. Gresham, PhD, and Stephen N. Elliott, PhD

Instructions
This booklet contains statements describing a student's behavior and level of academic performance. It consists of three parts: Social Skills, Problem Behaviors, and Academic Competence.

Social Skills & Problem Behaviors
Please read each item and think about this student's behavior during the past two months. Then, decide how often this student displays the behavior.

- If this student never exhibits the behavior, circle the N.
- If this student seldom exhibits the behavior, circle the S.
- If this student often exhibits the behavior, circle the O.
- If this student almost always exhibits the behavior, circle the A.

For each of the Social Skills items, please also rate how important you think the behavior is for success in your classroom.

- If you think the behavior is not important for success in your classroom, circle the n.
- If you think the behavior is important for success in your classroom, circle the i.
- If you think the behavior is critical for success in your classroom, circle the c.

Academic Competence (for students from kindergarten through Grade 12)
Please assess this student's academic or learning behaviors in your classroom. Compare this student with other students in the same classroom.

Mark all items using a scale of 1 to 5. Mark "1" if this student is in the lowest 10% of the class. Mark "5" if this student is in the highest 10% of the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lowest 10%</th>
<th>Next Lowest 20%</th>
<th>Middle 40%</th>
<th>Next Highest 20%</th>
<th>Highest 10%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to Mark Your Responses
When marking responses, use a sharp pencil or ballpoint pen; do not use a felt-tip pen or marker. Press firmly, and be certain to circle completely the letter you choose, like this:

N S O A
(n) i c

If you wish to change a response, mark an X through it, and circle your new choice, like this:

N S O A
(n) i c

Please mark every item. In some cases, you may not have observed this student perform a particular behavior. If you are uncertain of your response to an item, give your best estimate. There are no right or wrong answers.

Before starting, be sure to complete the information in the boxes on the right-hand side of page 3.
SOCIAL CONVERSATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS

1. Ask for help when needed. N S O A
2. Follows directions. N S O A
3. Takes to comfort others. N S O A
4. Says "please." N S O A
5. Questions rules that may be unfair. N S O A
7. Pays attention to your instructions. N S O A
8. Shows kindness to others when they are upset. N S O A
9. Interacts well with other children. N S O A
10. Takes turns in conversations. N S O A

Problem Behaviors

11. Tries to be the center of attention. N S O A
12. Has unsupervised motor behaviors. N S O A
13. Refuses to eat unless adults pressure him. N S O A
14. Hesitates before making a decision. N S O A
15. Has difficulty waiting for his turn. N S O A
16. Does things to make others feel scared. N S O A

Academic Competence

(For students from kindergarten through Grade 12)

Remember: N - Never, S - Sometimes, O - Often, A - Always

17. Complied with other students in my classroom, the overall academic performance of this student is 1 2 3 4 5
18. In reading, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
19. In mathematics, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
20. In writing, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
21. In science, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
22. In social studies, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
23. In physical education, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
24. In music, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
25. In art, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
26. In technology, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
27. In health education, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
28. In foreign language, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
29. In career education, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
30. In music, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
31. In art, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
32. In technology, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
33. In health education, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
34. In foreign language, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5
35. In career education, how does this student compare with other students? 1 2 3 4 5

Please mark every item.
SOCIAL CONVERSATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Analysis of Social Behaviors

For each student listed for one or ten behaviors (below) from each subscale that serve the student in Academic Skills, Social Skills, and Social Skills Competencies, the behaviors are rated by the student's teacher. Ratings are made on the basis of the student's performance on the behaviors as observed by the teacher. The ratings are based on the student's performance in the classroom, as well as in other settings, such as lunch, recess, and the playground. The ratings are made on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a low level of performance and 5 indicating a high level of performance. The ratings are then used to determine the student's Social Skills Competencies, which are used to guide the student's classroom instruction and behavior intervention plan.
### Determining Adjustment Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale/Subscale</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Number Missing (if any)</th>
<th>Adjustment Factor</th>
<th>Adjustment Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14</td>
<td>x 2 =</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4 10 14 20 24 28 32</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>2 7 11 16 21 26</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>1 5 9 13 17 21</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>8 12 16 20 24 28</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>3 5 8 11 14 17</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>10 14 18 22</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>12 16 20 24</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Behaviors</td>
<td>43 47 50 53</td>
<td>x 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining</td>
<td>43 47 51 55</td>
<td>x 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypersensitivity/Agitation</td>
<td>52 55 58 61</td>
<td>x 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>52 55 58 61</td>
<td>x 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Competence</td>
<td>77 79 80 81 82 83</td>
<td>x 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Researcher’s Journal Sample Page

```
LESSONS:

Yes! No! Maybe so! (Session 1 of 2)

1. What did I do in the lesson? Week 5 June 3/16
   - reviewed Wh questions from lesson 4
   - reviewed types of questions, conversation path (practice and model)
   - Talk about questions that require a single word answer → model some of these
   - Draw attention to wall display → what questions can we ask each other?
   - Together came up with 3 topics we are going to ask questions about: food, animal/pet, favorite color
   - Partner up, ask questions, present to class

2. What responses did the student make during the lesson?
   - The students are very engaged and enthusiastic about having a partner to ask questions to
   - Student A: “I asked — 3 questions — wanted to play house at centers with me, that’s our best. She only likes pizza for supper. MMM — wishes she had a pet monkey too.”
   - Student B: “I talked to — He likes dolphins best, just like me. He wants to eat ice cream for dinner! His best center is cars. I like cars too.”

```

SOCIAL CONVERSATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS
Note: also, too, as well, like me, our best

3. Were there any other social conversation events that occurred?
   • students presented to each other with some prompting
   • wanted to partner with more classmates
   • noticed them talking to each other at other times of the day about topics and remembering what a classmate liked for lunch, food or an animal.
   • saw a child share his apple with another child because he remembered liked apples too.

4. Align with curriculum goals?
   • I see turn taking
   • I see presenting in a positive and meaningful way to the class
   • questions that are relevant, questions that clarify information
   • I see the students focused and staying on topic.
   • Genuine interest in each other.
Appendix E
Vancouver Island University Application for Ethical Review

8/22/2016

Application for Ethical Review

Please complete ALL sections, and send one (1) electronic copy to the Ethics Officer via reb@viu.ca.
NOTE: When submitting electronically, all undergraduate and graduate student applications must be received via supervisor email(s). This electronic ‘signature’ indicates that the supervisor has reviewed and supports the application for ethical review.

Date: March 4, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Title of Research Project:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Language Instruction and the New BC Curriculum Core Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Research Investigators:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of Principal Investigator:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator(s):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.4. Application Details:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is this research funded?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If 'Yes', indicate Source(s) of Funds (specific agency, institution, corporation, and/or other):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicate nature of funds:</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this a multi-centered research project and/or is any portion of the proposed research to take place within a non-VIU jurisdiction (e.g. School District, other University, Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), or other)?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If 'Yes', please list other Centres:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credo Christian Elementary School, Langley, BC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An independent school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre 2:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre 3:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Ethics Approval been sought in each of these Centres?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If 'No', explain why:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicate status of Ethics Approval from other Centre(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Attach copies of approval certificates/notices that have been issued to the <a href="mailto:rob@viu.ca">rob@viu.ca</a> e-mail)</td>
<td>Centre 1 Pending-Approval Centre 2 Click to Select Centre 3 Click to Select</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If 'Not yet Submitted' or 'Not Required', explain why:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Application for Ethical Review
Updated Dec. 19, 2011, KJ.
after VIU ethical approval

**Tri-Council Policy Statement Tutorial – Course on Research Ethics (CORE)**

*All Students* conducting research involving human participants are required to complete the Tri-Council Policy Statement Tutorial CORE regarding ethical principles associated with research involving human participants. CORE is free of charge and can be completed online at: http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/. VIU faculty, other investigators and researchers are also encouraged to complete the tutorial.

---

### 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

**Provide a brief (maximum 200 words) abstract summary of the project purpose, participant population, and general methods. You will be asked about details of these in later sections:**

**Project Purpose:** To improve the social skills and social language abilities of Kindergarten students as they participate in a series of lessons. I will design learning experiences using a program called "Color My Conversation" for my students to improve their social language skills. The students' experiences and learning will be assessed based on the ideas presented in the Communication Core Competency in the New BC Curriculum. A learning journal, a Color My Conversation Assessment rubric, and a Social Skills Improvement System rating scale will be used as primary sources of information for the research.

---

### 3. BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

#### 3.1. Why did you choose this research topic?

I chose this topic because of my desire for my students to be better able to communicate socially. I believe that communication is a core skill and students who receive instruction in social communication will be able to improve their peer interactions. Good social communication skills will also impact student learning within and beyond the classroom. This research also gives me an opportunity to test out a program (Color My Conversation - http://www.colormyconversation.com/) that has been used in other jurisdictions to see if it is applicable to the BC context. Color My Conversation is a program that was developed by a Speech-Language Pathologist in the US, based on her years of experience in working with young learners. It uses movement, color, song and hands-on learning to promote face to face conversation skills.

#### 3.2. What are your hypotheses, research questions, and/or research goals?

My hypothesis is that when students learn to communicate well they will be able to improve their peer relationships, share their learning and become more competent in social and learning situations.

My research question is: In what ways can I help my students to develop as communicators through a diverse range of social and learning situations? Will they develop an enhanced understanding of their role as communicators and the impact their communication has on their relationships and learning? Do I notice enough gains in my students' abilities and enough connections between the program and the BC Curriculum to encourage me to continue to use it? This is guided by research about, oral and social language development within a school setting, current curriculum regarding the Communication Core Competency and links between social...
conversation skills and peer interactions.

3.3. How do you intend to present your findings? (conference paper? term paper? publication? internal report? etc?)
Thesis paper and presentation to professional colleagues in my independent school.

4. STUDY METHODS AND DESIGN
Attach the schedule of interview questions, questionnaire, and any other instruments to be used to collect data (see section 12 for instructions).

4.1. List documents attached for this section (e.g. Appendix A etc. – Interview Questions):
Appendix A: Assessment Rubric from Color My Conversation
Appendix B: Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Teacher Rating Scale

4.2. Providing all steps and procedures, indicate how you plan to conduct your research (Please number them):

As a Teacher:
1. I will use the Assessment Rubric from Color My Conversation and the SSIS Teacher Rating Scale to determine my Kindergarten students’ assessments are prior to implementing the instructional program.

2. The students will participate in 12 weeks of lessons from the program "Color My Conversation". The lessons will teach the impact of: eye contact, facial expressions, body gestures, proxemic, tone of voice, greetings, farewells, starting a conversation, stopping a conversation, topics, comments & questions, topic changing and turn taking. The lessons include movement, color, song and hands on learning.

3. Throughout the program, I will use a learning journal to help me to reflect on my perceptions of the effectiveness of the lessons in the program, so as to continually monitor and adjust my use of the strategies with my learners. I will also be reflecting on connections that become apparent between the program and the BC Curriculum.

4. Once we have worked through the program, the Assessment Rubric from "Color My Conversation" and the SSIS Teacher Rating Scale will be used again to help me to determine the social and conversation skills my students have acquired.

5. After I have reviewed my experiences with the program, and the apparent gains (or lack of them) among my learners, I will be able to decide whether or not I would use the program again, in what ways I would adjust the program, and in what ways it offers a means to implement ideas laid out in the Core Competencies.

As a Researcher:

1. I will seek consent from the families of my learners to use the rubric and rating scale as data for my research.

Application for Ethical Review
Updated Dec. 19, 2011, KJ.
2. I will closely examine the anonymized rubrics and rating scales based those students whose parents have given me consent to do so.

3. I will also closely analyze the learning journal where I will be recording my ongoing observations, reflections and interpretations. My reflections will not identify individuals in any way. They will focus my experiences of delivering the program 'Color My Conversation' and the connections between the program and the Communication Core Competency in the BC Curriculum.

4. I will engage in analysis and synthesis of key themes that emerge from the rubric, SSIS rating scale and my learning journal, and focus on connections between these themes and the BC Curriculum.

### 4.3. Where will the research be conducted and/or data be collected?

In the Kindergarten classroom of Credo Christian Elementary

### 4.4. Describe what participants will be asked to do (e.g. fill out a survey, participate in an interview, focus group, etc.). Indicate how much time each task will take and/or the approximate total time commitment required by each participant:

The participants will be asked to participate in the program "Color My Conversation", completed as part of the regular learning program. Those whose parents choose to allow their rubrics to be part of the research will not be doing anything different from those who are not part of the research.

### 4.5. Briefly describe the kind of data and/or information that will be collected:

The Assessment Rubric and Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) teacher rating scale will be used to assess progress as well as my own personal learning reflections in my learning journal.

### 4.6. What research instruments will be used (e.g. surveys, focus groups, observation, etc)?

- assessment rubric, rating scale, ongoing reflections in a learning journal

### 4.7. How will data be recorded (digital/tape recordings, interview notes, questionnaire answers, clinical charts, etc)?

- hard copies of assessment rubric and rating scale, and a handwritten learning journal. The journal responses will be guided by consistent prompts such as 'effectiveness of strategy/lesson', 'connections to Communication Competency', 'social skills observations'

### 4.8. If data are to be transcribed, describe the transcription (i.e. from audio to electronic, paper to electronic, etc) and indicate who will undertake the transcription?

### 4.9. How will the data be analyzed?

All data will be analyzed for themes related to aspects of social communication skills as outlined in the assessment tools and the Communication Core Competency of communication. Hand coding with highlighters and manual tools will be used to seek patterns across the assessment tools and the learning journal.

### 4.10. Who will conduct the data analysis?

The Researcher.
5. **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

5.1. **Does the study involve physical invasion of the body/physical distress/risk?**
    If 'Yes', explain and indicate how these will be minimized:

5.2. **Does the study involve mental distress, risk, stress, embarrassment?**
    If 'Yes', explain and indicate how these will be minimized:

5.3. **Does the study involve social risk (loss of privacy, status, reputation, identity)?**
    If 'Yes', explain and indicate how these will be minimized:
   This project will not identify any individual participants; however, as the research becomes public, and the size of the learning group is small there is a slight chance that one might infer the identity of a learner in the group, but as the rubric and rating scale will be anonymized before the research analysis, it will be difficult for even the researcher to identify individuals.

5.4. **Does the study have any potential direct benefit to the participants?**
    If 'Yes', explain:
   I hope the use of this social conversation program will directly benefit their learning experience for all learners. Students may gain skills that will improve their learning and peer interactions, but there are no particular benefits to research participants as opposed to all learners in the group.

---

6. **STUDY POPULATION**

6.1. **Describe the sample of participants to be recruited (occupation, gender, age, race, etc.):**
   Elementary school students in a Kindergarten class. Males and females. Age 5 and 6, mixed race and socio economic background.

6.2. **How many participants do you plan to include in your study?**
   20-26

6.3. **Does the study involve vulnerable populations (e.g. children, people in institutions, cultural groups, members of stigmatized groups, or individuals who have diminished competence and/or limited decision-making capacity to fully understand and consent to what is being asked of them)?**
   If 'Yes', discuss the population and why it is vulnerable:
   I am working with children in my class ages 5 and 6, and I am their teacher.

6.4. **Is there a relationship between the investigator(s) and the participants (e.g. professors / students, employer / employees, care**

---

Application for Ethical Review
Updated Dec. 19, 2011, KJ.
provider / care receiver, etc)?
If 'Yes', discuss the nature of the relationship:
I am the teacher of the students who will be participants in this study.

6.5. Is there coercion exerted upon participants to participate?
If 'Yes', discuss what form of coercion is involved and justify its need: No

6.6. Is there a conflict of interest, real or perceived, for any research team members with respect to their relationship with potential research participants?
If 'Yes', discuss the nature of the conflict of interest and the steps you have taken to mitigate it:
There is potential for perceived conflict of interest due to the fact I am the teacher of the participants. The steps that I have taken to mitigate this are that all students in the class will be expected to participate in the social conversation program. Students whose parents don't wish allow me to use the assessment tools as data in the study will not have their rubric or SSIS teacher rating scale used. Those that have their rubric and rating scale used will be anonymous, using pseudonyms and removing any identifying material. I will not know who have chosen to be participants. As a result there should be no pressure upon students, or their parents who are giving consent, to participate based on concerns about their grades or treatment within the class. I will reassure them of this in the consent letter and in any communication that ensues about the program.

6.7. Will participants receive incentives or compensation for their participation?
If 'Yes', provide details, including whether and how participants will be compensated if they withdraw: No

7. RECRUITMENT
Attach Recruitment Script and/or Recruitment Poster (see section 12 for instructions).

7.1. List documents included for this section (e.g. Appendix A, B, C etc. – Recruitment Script and/or Recruitment Poster):
Appendix C: Parental Consent Form
Appendix D: Recruitment Script

7.2. Describe the recruitment procedure. State who will initiate contact with potential participants, what actions they will take, and where or how these will occur.
Consent Procedure:
1. I will make a presentation about the Color My Conversation program to my parent group at a classroom meeting giving them an opportunity to ask questions and get clarification.

2. At that time, I will briefly explain that I will be sending consent forms home with all students to seek consent to use the assessment rubric and rating scales as part of a research project in addition to
their uses in the instructional program.

3. I will send home a consent form to all families in my class upon approval of this application.

4. Parents will complete the paperwork in Appendix C, giving or not giving consent for the assessment rubric and SSIS rating scale to be used by the researcher. The consent forms will be submitted to the secretary of our school. She will store the forms in an envelope in a locked file cabinet. After the students have completed the school year and all report cards have been completed (approximately June 26, 2016), I will give the whole class set of rating scales and rubrics to the secretary. I will ask her secretary open the envelope stored in the file cabinet to ascertain whose rubric and SSIS rating scale can be used to inform my research. She will then photocopy and remove names or identifying aspects from the rubrics and rating scales of those whose parents have consented, and return all materials to me.

7.3. Describe the recruitment instruments (poster advertisements, flyers, email letters, verbal contact, etc):
Recruitment will be done in writing to parents and students. Consent letters will be sent home with all students at the same time.

8. CONSENT PROCESS
Attach copies of the Consent Forms/ Letters that will be used to obtain consent from participants (see section 12 for instructions). A sample Consent form can be found on the REB web site on the following web page: http://www.viu.ca/REB/forms.asp

8.1. List documents included for this section (e.g. Appendix A, B, etc. Consent Form):
Appendix C: Consent letter for parents

8.2. Will participants be fully informed of the nature of their involvement on a consent form? Yes
   If 'Yes', indicate how participants will be informed.
   If 'No', explain why not (with particular attention to the questions asked in 8.2 – 8.9):
   Yes, on the consent form I will include exactly what the participants will be expected to do.

8.3. Is the purpose and/or goal of the study clearly described for participants? Yes
   If 'No' explain why not: If 'No' explain why not:

8.4. Do contact numbers of investigators or faculty supervisors appear on the consent form? Yes
   If 'No' explain why not:
8.5. Will participants be given a copy of the consent form?  
   No 
   If ‘No’, explain why not: 
   Once the forms are submitted to the secretary, I will not know who has 
   and has not given consent in order to give them a copy.
8.6. Are participants informed that they have a right to withdraw at any 
   time during and after the research project?  
   Yes 
   If ‘No’, explain why not:
8.7. Will the data be treated as confidential?  
   Yes 
   If ‘No’, explain why not:
8.8. Does the study involve concealing information or deception?  
   No 
   If ‘Yes’, explain/justify the nature of the concealment or deception:
8.9. Will information about participants be obtained from third parties?  
   No 
   If ‘Yes’, justify and explain this information-gathering procedure:
8.10. Will participants be asked to sign a Consent Form?  
    Yes 
    If ‘No’, explain why not: 
    If ‘Yes’, how will you distribute consent forms and when will 
    participants sign them (eg. Before or at the interview, etc.)?
    Consent forms will be sent home with all students in my class upon approval of this application. 
    Parent/Guardian will be expected to sign before any of a student’s rubric or SSIs rating scale is used 
    for data. Parent/Guardians who do not agree to their student’s/child’s participation will have their 
    child/student receive the same education as those who do consent.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY
9.1. Are the data to be collected of a personal or sensitive nature?  
    No
9.2. Will participation in the research be anonymous?  
    Yes 
    If ‘Yes’ explain how anonymity will be protected: 
    If ‘No’ explain why anonymity is unnecessary: 
    Students/Parents/Guardians will not be told which parents/guardians have 
    authorized the use of their rubric and SSIS rating scale. A third party (the 
    school secretary) will be removing identifiers from the assessment tools. Any 
    use of the learning journal will also be anonymized, which will be very 
    straightforward, as the journal will not contain particularities about any of 
    the learners. Participation will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in all 
    cases. There is a slight chance that as the researcher and the teacher I will be 
    able to recognize a particular rubric as belonging to a particular students, in 
    which case I will be careful to maintain anonymity as I describe the results.
9.3. Will participants be quoted or will their names appear in the final  
    No

Application for Ethical Review
Updated Dec. 19, 2011, KI.
report, article, or presentation that explains your research findings?  
If 'Yes', explain why attributing names to quotations or including  
participant names in the research results is necessary and explain  
how consent to do so will be obtained:
Student names will not be used, nor will they be accessible to the researcher  
once their identifying markers are removed. Quotations from the learning  
journal may be used, but they will not identify particular students.

9.4. Describe how and where the data will be stored and secured, who will have access to it, and  
how confidentiality will be ensured:
Data will be locked in a filing cabinet in my classroom. The only person with access will be myself.

9.5. When and how will the data be destroyed? Specify the media (e.g. paper or electronic data,  
etc.) and what will be done with each:
Any personal data, such as the learning journal, will be shredded at the end of two years (  
approximately July 2018). I will retain possession of the assessment rubrics and SSIs rating scales.  
These will also be shredded at the end of two years.

10. RESEARCH SERVICES PROVIDERS AND PRIVACY
Increasingly, the use of software services for research purposes has implications for the privacy  
and confidentiality of research participants. For instance, despite corporate policies aimed at  
protecting data security, survey software services that originate in the United States are subject  
to legislation in that country that allows government access to data stored on US-based servers.
This does not prohibit use of these types of services by Canadian researchers, but it does  
require that research participants be informed of these implications.

10.1. Indicate what software, if any, you will use to collect (e.g. survey software), store (e.g.  
database software) and/or analyze your data:
N/A

10.2. Indicate where the software server is located and whether the survey company will be used  
to assist in data collection, management, storage, or analysis:
N/A

10.3. Indicate how you will ensure that participants are made aware of any data security issues that  
may impact on their privacy, stemming from the use of particular software:
N/A

11. FEEDBACK TO PARTICIPANTS
Attach a copy of the Debriefing form (see section 12 for instructions). A sample Debriefing  
form can be found on the REB website on the following web page:
http://www.viu.ca/REB/forms.asp

11.1. Will general results of the study be made available to participants? Yes  
If 'Yes', explain how:
The results of this study will be shared and possibly published. Parents and participants will have  
access to this study.
11.2. Will results about individual participants be made available?  
   If ’Yes’, explain how and under what conditions:  
   No

11.3. Will participants be provided with a contact name and telephone number to access more information about the study after their participation has been completed?  
   If ’No’, explain why not.  
   If ’Yes’, explain how:  
   Yes  
   Participants are 5 and 6 years of age. The participants’ parents will receive a contact name and telephone number to access information about the study once it has been completed.

11.4. Are there plans for debriefing, especially if deception is involved?  
   If ’Yes’, explain the debriefing procedure:  
   No

12. ATTACHMENTS CHECKLIST

Please submit the application in no more than three documents:

1. REB Application Form
2. Appendices – Clearly label and include all letters, consent forms, advertising scripts, etc.
3. Appendices – Clearly label and include all survey instruments, questionnaires, schedules of questions for interviews, focus groups, etc.

These three documents noted above are to be attached and e-mailed to reb@viu.ca. Please indicate which of the following documents and forms have been included:

- Questionnaires, interview schedule, test instruments included [ ] [ ] [ ]
- Recruitment ads/posters included [ ] [ ] [ ]
- Consent forms included [ ] [ ] [ ]
- Debriefing forms included [ ] [ ] [ ]

Other documents attached (please specify):

13. FACULTY/SUPERVISOR AUTHORIZATION FOR STUDENT PROJECTS

Student applications must be submitted by way of the Supervisor’s email account.

Electronic submission of Student Applications by way of Supervisor’s email account indicates that the supervisor has read and endorsed the student research project prior to submission for ethical review by the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board.

Faculty/Supervisor Paige Fisher (Name)  
(Name)  
for Student Jennifer Onderwater

Application for Ethical Review
Updated Dec. 19, 2011, KU.
Date: March 4, 2016
Appendix F

Vancouver Island University Ethical Approval

April 11, 2016

Jennifer Onderwater
Masters of Education Leadership
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
900 Fifth Street
Nanaimo, BC V9R 5S5

Dear Ms. Onderwater:

The Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board is pleased to grant approval for the project entitled “Social Language Instruction and the New BC Curriculum Core Values,” as submitted for review by Dr. Paige Fisher on March 4, 2016 and as revised and resubmitted March 29, 2016.

Please be aware of your obligation to carry out the research as stated in the revised proposal and to comply with the regulations of the Schools and School District involved in your research. Guidelines as posted on the website at http://www.viu.ca/reb/guidelines.asp must be followed for all submissions.

Sincerely,

Aggie Weighill, Ph.D.
Chair, Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board

VIU REB Protocol: 2016-016-VIUS-ONDERWATER
Date of Approval: April 11, 2016
Expiry Date: April 10, 2017

Please sign the acknowledgement below, print and retain a copy for your records, and return the original to:
Research Ethics Officer
Bldg. 305 – Rm. 460
Vancouver Island University
Nanaimo, BC V9R 5S5

As researcher(s) I (we) hereby agree to carry out the research in an ethical manner as outlined in the approved proposal submission. If I (we) need to make changes to the methodology and/or recruitment and consent procedures, I (we) will request an amendment from the VIU REB. If the project runs longer than one (1) year, I (we) will submit a request for continuing review (renewal) to the Ethics Officer one (1) month prior to the expiry date indicated above. At the end of the project, I (we) will notify the VIU Research Ethics Officer that the study has been completed and that the file can be closed.

Jennifer Onderwater
Masters of Education Leadership
Vancouver Island University

April 11 2016
Appendix G
Letter to the Board of Directors of the Independent School Seeking Research Approval

To the Board of Credo Christian Elementary:

As you are aware, I am a student in a graduate Masters of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University. As part of my thesis work I am required to design and conduct research. I have chosen to design a research project that looks at the relationship between oral language instruction and peer relationships with a BC curriculum context.

I have been working with the program, ‘Color My Conversation’ (CMC) in my class. I feel that this is a high quality program, as it offers a variety of songs, movement and color activities to support children in their social communication skills. I also think that there are strong connections between the design of the lessons and the new BC Curriculum focus on the Communication Core Competency.

I have been using a rubrics and a rating scale to help me to assess each child’s progress. After the program has been completed, and the school year is over, I would like to use the rubrics and rating scales as part of the data for my research. I will look closely at the rubrics and ratings scales to see if there are any patterns or themes that emerge. This analysis will also help me to decide whether or not this was an effective program for my class.

As a student at the University of Vancouver Island, I have completed and Ethics course. I also had to apply to an ethics board for approval for my research. This approval has been given. The next step is to obtain approval from Credo’s Board that I may conduct research in the school. Once I have obtained approval from you, I will need to seek parental consent.

I am required to ask each parent to sign a letter to give consent for their child’s rating scale and assessment rubric to be used in my research. The letters will be returned to the secretary in the school office, who will place them in an envelope in a locked filing cabinet. At the end of the school year, I will
give her the completed assessment rubrics and rating scales, and she will photocopy and remove names from only the forms of those students whose parents have given consent. She will then return the assessment rubrics and rating scales to me so that I can analyse them without knowing who they belong to.

All records will be kept strictly confidential, such that only the secretary and I have access to the information. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed at the end of the project, approximately July 2018. The results from this study will be reported in a written research thesis. Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants.

The use of each child’s rubrics and rating scales is completely voluntary. Parents may withdraw consent at any time without explanation and without penalty. Their consent or non-consent is kept confidential from me, the researcher. It will not impact your child’s schooling or reporting in any way.

If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

Sincerely, Jennifer Onderwater
Appendix H
Letter from the Board of Directors of the Independent School Granting Research Approval

Credo Christian Elementary School
Operated by the
Canadian Reformed School Society
21915 52 Ave. Langley, BC, V2Y 2M7

Principal: O. Bouwman, B.A., B.Ed.
Assistant Principal: Jennifer Onderwater, B.Ed

May 9, 2016
To Jennifer Onderwater:

This letter is to give you approval to conduct research with the Kindergarten class on the relationship between oral language instruction and peer relationships with a BC curriculum context.

It is understood that you are using the program, ‘Color My Conversation’ (CMC) with your class to promote social language. It is also understood that your research project looks at the relationship between oral language instruction and peer relationships with a BC curriculum context.

You have Board permission to seek parental approval to use the rubrics and rating scales you have completed on the students prior to starting CMC and following the completion of this program. We recognize that you are committed to following the parameters of the ethics board of Vancouver Island University:

Each parent will be asked to sign a letter to give consent for their child’s rating scale and assessment rubric to be used in my research.

All records will be kept strictly confidential.

The results from this study will be reported in a written research thesis. Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants.

The use of each child’s rubrics and rating scales is completely voluntary. Parents may withdraw consent at any time without explanation and without penalty. Their consent or non-consent is kept confidential from me, the researcher. It will not impact your child’s schooling or reporting in any way.

We consent to this research and the guidelines you have outlined.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Chris Holt
Chairman of the Board of Directors of Credo Christian Elementary School

The purpose of our parental Christian School is to educate our children to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for a life of responsible stewardship in God’s Kingdom.
Appendix I

Parental Recruitment Script

Recruitment Script
Social Language Instruction and the New BC Curriculum Core Values

As you may be aware, in addition to my teaching work at the school, I am a student in a graduate Masters of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University. As part of my thesis work I am required to design and conduct research. I have chosen to design a research project that looks at the relationship between oral language instruction and peer relationships with a BC curriculum context.

I have found a program called ‘Color My Conversation’ (CMC) that was developed by a Speech-Language pathologist in the United States that I would like to use with my class. I feel that this is a high quality program, as it offers a variety of songs, movement and color activities to support children in their social communication skills. I also think that there are strong connections between the design of the lessons and the new BC Curriculum focus on the Communication Core Competency.

During an 8-week period I will be working with your child in the classroom setting on 8 oral language lessons. Prior to the series of lessons and upon completion I will be completing an oral language rubric and a social skills rating scale. I would like to use these rubrics and rating scales to help me to assess each child’s progress. After the program has been completed, and the school year is over, I would like to use the rubrics and rating scales as part of the data for my research.
I will also keep notes about the CMC program and how it relates to the new BC curriculum. These notes will be in a researcher’s journal. They are my own reflections and observations regarding the program’s validity as it relates to the Communication Core Competency.

I will look closely at the rubrics and ratings scales to see if there are any patterns or themes that emerge. This analysis will also help me to decide whether or not this was an effective program for my class. If you are interested in seeing the rubric and rating scale, I would be happy to provide you with a copy. I am planning to use the program with the whole class, regardless of whether or not I am able to analyze the rubrics and rating scales from the program for my research.

I am asking you to sign a letter to give consent for your child’s rating scale and assessment rubric to be used in my research. The letters will be returned to the secretary in the school office, who will place them in an envelope in a locked filing cabinet. At the end of the school year, I will give her the completed assessment rubrics and rating scales, and she will photocopy and remove names from only the forms of those students whose parents have given consent. She will then return the assessment rubrics and rating scales to me so that I can analyse them without knowing who they belong to. There is no known harm associated with your child’s participation in this research. The lessons, rubrics and rating scales will all be part of regular classroom learning and assessment.

All records will be kept strictly confidential, such that only the secretary and I have access to the information. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed at the end of the project, approximately July 2018. The results from this study will be reported in a written research thesis. Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants.

The use of your child’s rubrics and rating scales is completely voluntary. You may withdraw consent at any time without explanation and without penalty. Your consent or non-consent is kept confidential from me, the researcher. It will not impact your child’s schooling or reporting in any way.
Appendix J
Research Consent Form to Parents of Participants

Research Consent Form
Social Language Instruction and the New BC Curriculum Core Values

As you may be aware, in addition to my teaching work at the school, I am a student in a graduate Masters of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University. As part of my thesis work I am required to design and conduct research. I have chosen to design a research project that looks at the relationship between oral language instruction and peer relationships with a BC curriculum context.

I have found a program called ‘Color My Conversation’ that I will use with my class. I feel that this is a high quality program. I also think that there are strong connections between the design of the lessons and the new BC Curriculum focus on the Communication Core Competency.

During an 8-week period I have been working with your child in the classroom setting on 8 oral language lessons. Prior to the series of lessons and upon completion I will be completing an oral language rubric and a social skills rating scale. I would like to use these rubrics and rating scales to help me to assess each child’s progress. After the program has been completed, and the school year is over, I would like to use the rubrics and rating scales as part of the data for my research. I am using the program with both Kindergarten classes, regardless of whether or not I am able to analyze the rubrics and rating scales from the program for my research.
I am asking you to sign this letter to indicate if you give consent or do not give consent for your child’s rating scale and assessment rubric to be used in my research.

The letters will be returned to the secretary in the school office, who will place them in an envelope in a locked filing cabinet. At the end of the school year, I will give her the completed assessment rubrics and rating scales, and she will photocopy and remove names from only the forms of those students whose parents have given consent. She will then return the assessment rubrics and rating scales to me so that I can analyse them without knowing who they belong to. There is no known harm associated with your child’s participation in this research.

Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants.

The use of your child’s rubrics and rating scales is completely voluntary. You may withdraw consent at any time without explanation and without penalty. Your consent or non-consent is kept confidential from me, the researcher. It will not impact your child’s schooling or reporting in any way.

If you have any concerns about this research or the use of your child’s information, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-xxx-xxxx or by email at xxxxxxxxxxxxx or my academic supervisor, Dr. Paige Fisher at 250-xxx-xxxx or by email at xxxxxxxxxxxxx.

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email or phone number below:

Jennifer Onderwater
Masters of Educational Leadership
I have read the above form, understand the information, understand that I can ask questions and withdraw my child’s rubrics and rating scales at any time. I consent to have my child’s rubrics and rating scales used in this research study.

I have read the above form and understand the information. I do not consent to have my child’s rubrics and rating scales used in this research study.

Child’s Name    Parent/Guardian Signature    Date