

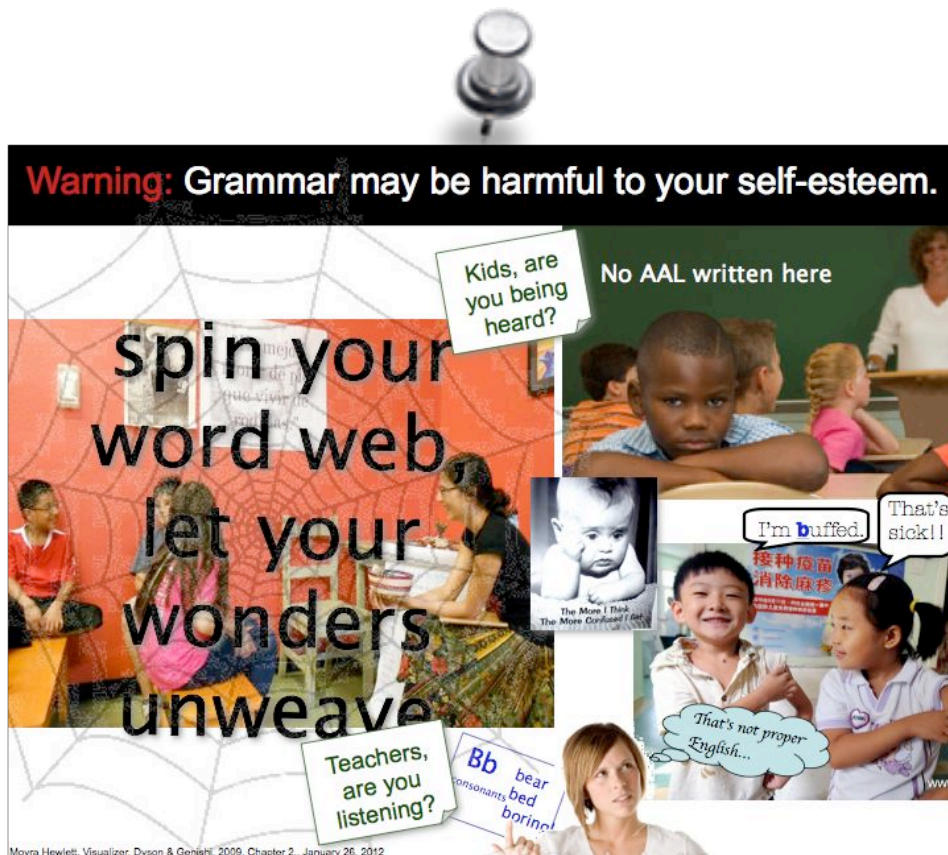
The first time I heard the term “extended discourse” it was music to my ears. The phraseology seemed to encapsulate those grand narratives that I hear time and again when in the presence of children. Yet, as I observed children expressly for the purpose of deciphering how these miraculous exchanges come into being, I realized that it was more complex than I had imagined. What triggers children’s extended discourse? What suffocates it? To gain insight into the dimension of children’s oral



language pathways, I had the privilege of collecting tidbits of conversations over the course of three weeks, in an early childhood education environment. I observed the range, nature and context of children’s oral language abilities, and the approaches used by educators to foster developing language skills in English, and used my collection of data to address the implications of these findings for educators. As I strive to enrich my personal pedagogy of literacy, I fear that, we as educators may be

unintentionally hindering these oral exchanges. Children have something to say. Are we ready to listen?

Observing a classroom through a lens of literacy enables educators to critically reflect on the conversations we generate (or fail to generate) during the day. I feel that a personal connection with a child is integral to all linguistic interactions.



Regardless of the purpose of the conversation (management or teaching), the relationship between teacher and child seems to draw out genuine, authentic conversation (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 16). A heightened awareness of the linguistic environment has deepened my understanding of children's language acquisition, and the burgeoning teaching opportunities that arise from child-centered

discussions and extended discourse. As educators, we may need to loosen our grip on accountability-driven ideals, to let conversations “spin” on more genuine terms. As educators, we often fail to see the opportunities for extended discourse offered to us by the children. During these observations, what emerged before me was a tapestry of ideas that were unwoven; watching these moments pass became almost painful. I longed to fathom these conversational gems, and transform them into extended discourse —and on a few occasions, I put down my pen, and I did.

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