

Teachers' Approach to Sharing Classroom Ground Rules Using Out of Class Contexts

Mayumi TAKAGAKI

Go MATSUO

International and Cultural Studies, Tsuda College

Fukuoka University of Education

(Accepted September 30, 2014)

Abstract

Characteristics of teachers' approaches in sharing ground rules for discussion were examined from the perspective of relationships between the class and homeroom activity. First graders' interactions in a Japanese language arts class and homeroom activity were interrelated by coding and interpretive analysis. The results suggested that the teacher encouraged the children to use ideas and norms discussed in the recent homeroom activity as a framework to appropriate the ground rules for language arts class discourse. This approach was aimed at helping the children of the lower grades could lean the framework for reviewing the conversations conducted in the classes, as a part of the definite and empirical knowledge shared by the class.

Key words : ground rule, classroom discourse, homeroom activities, first graders

There is a growing demand for classes in school in which children have opportunities to learn subjectively. One method that teachers employ towards this end is the sharing of ground rules. Ground rules are the set of implicit understandings by which classroom activities and discussions operate (e.g., Edwards & Mercer, 1987). A shared awareness of the ground rules for exploratory talk allows for collaborative learning to take place in the classroom (e.g., Wegerif, Mercer, & Dawes, 1999).

Matsuo and Maruno (2009) have described the process of sharing ground rules from two perspectives: explicit sharing, where the teacher defines and communicates the ground rules to the students, and implicit sharing, where the teacher supports self-learning through discussion. The aim of explicit sharing is for children to acquire knowledge and a basic framework from which to deepen their understanding through their daily life experiences (Matsuo & Maruno, 2007). Through implicit sharing, children have the opportunity to realize how ground rules actually work and learn why they are important (Matsuo & Maruno, 2008). Explicit sharing does not mean that the teacher simply reads off a list of rules to follow. Experienced teachers constantly search for ground rules behind various classroom discussions and strive to define the themes, functions, effectiveness, and problems of ground rules by reconstructive recap (Mercer, 1995); in each particular context (Matsuo & Maruno, 2007).

The teacher in Matsuo and Maruno (2007), however, was highly skilled and the students were old enough and experienced enough to be able to reflect on their own behaviors in response to prompts from the teacher. In the case of less experienced teachers and children in lower grade levels with little experience in classroom discourse, what are the options? The purpose of this study is to answer this question by unraveling actual classroom discourse and investigating ground rule sharing techniques

that are both practical and effective. We focus particularly on the role of homeroom. Shimizu and Uchida (2001) have noted that homeroom provides an important chance for teachers to adjust young children to classroom discourse. The comments that Matsuo and Maruno (2007) collected from the students in their study also suggest that children rely on a framework of homeroom discussion themes in the process of learning ground rules. Our hypothesis in this study is, therefore, that a teacher's calculated use of homeroom makes it possible for children to learn and share ground rules.

The main research question of this study was: How less experienced teachers and children in lower grade levels share ground rules through homeroom and class? The subjects of our study were a class of first graders and a teacher who was assigned to teach the first grade for the first time. Based on category and interpretive analysis of classroom discourse, we first categorized the types of approaches used by the teacher when sharing ground rules during Language Arts class and identified when these approaches reflected homeroom activities. Second, we examined how the teacher interacted with students during homeroom to strengthen the process of ground rule sharing during Language Arts class.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 28 first graders (12 boys, 16 girls) at a university affiliated school in Kanagawa prefecture. The teacher was a man with five years of teaching experience who was assigned to a first grade class for the first time. The primary author of this study has followed the teacher through five years of participatory observation in the field. A strong reciprocal relationship gave the primary author a good understanding of the teacher's values and teaching style and allowed for a more thorough interpretation based on close observation and interviews. The primary author and teacher have also teamed up once per trimester over two years to study on practical classroom practices based on their theoretical framework for the sharing of ground rules.

Procedure

The primary author of this study and two graduate students in a masters program in psychology observed the class over the course of the first trimester of school, from the beginning of April 2007 to the end of July. The data consisted of 12 homeroom sessions centered on discussion (excluding roll call, assembly, and other ceremonial activities, as well as silent reading, math drills, singing, and other class activities; approximately 10 minutes per session), and six sessions of Language Arts class centered on discussion (excluding handwriting, kanji drills, reading aloud, plays, and other expressive activities; approximately 45 minutes per session).

Analysis

Each session was video recorded and audio data was transcribed. We then conducted a category analysis of the teacher's speech and interpretive analysis of the transcripts and field notes.

Extraction of ground rule sharing situations

From all of the classroom interaction data, we extracted 37 explicit ground rule sharing interactions in which the teacher either explained ground rules to a child or asked a question to confirm the child's understanding.

Analysis of the teacher's approaches

We examined the nature of the ground rules that the teacher wanted to share in the 37 situations and created categories for the different approaches taken by the teacher in each situation. We also created categories for the topics discussed during homeroom and identified associations made between each ground rule and homeroom topic. Specifically, we counted an association each time the teacher referenced a homeroom topic when explaining ground rules to a student.

Creating categories

The categories for this study were created in three steps. 1) The primary and secondary authors decided on the objective for analysis (what to analyze and from what approach) and then independently

created categories for all of the data. The categories were then compared for discrepancies in interpretation. Matching categories were finalized after revisions to wording. Differing interpretations were discussed and then finalized after agreement. 2) These categories were then tested again to see if they could explain all of the data. Revisions were made as necessary, and this process was continued until all data could be explained and categorized. 3) A graduate student used these categories to code all data. Inter-rater validity was high at 90.0% for teacher approaches. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Finally, to clarify the meanings that the teacher's utterances held for himself and his students, and to understand how these meanings were interrelated, we conducted a interpretive case analysis in which the primary and secondary authors discussed their interpretations with consideration to the context of the interactions.

During the summer break following the observation period, we were also able to interview the teacher and review classroom video data. Our case analysis was based on the precedent set by Matsuo and Maruno (2007). We 1) specified the context of the interaction (questions, tasks, development during class, etc.), 2) interpreted the teacher's speech within the context of the rest of the discourse to consider how the teacher's approaches were interpreted by the children, 3) interviewed the teacher to identify his intentions and perceptions, and 4) revised and refined the categories after testing their validity with the aid of two graduate student assistants. Based on this framework, we chose cases which we judged to be highly valid and typical in explaining the characteristics of ground rule sharing approaches that draw on homeroom activities.

Results

Ground rules sharing in Language Arts class

Table 1 shows the ground rules that the teacher wanted to share in Language Arts class. In comparison to the ground rules for upper grade levels in the study by Matsuo and Maruno (2007), the emphasis is on the clear statement of one's own thoughts, and the careful listening to and understanding others, both of which are precedents for deeper discussion.

Table 2 summarizes the ground rules sharing approaches used by the teacher in Language Arts class. In Case 1 (Table 3), the teacher presented two ground rules to the students: "listen quietly to other people" and "do your best to understand people." He shared the ground rules (turns 1-4, 1-6) in response to noticing that K.N. and M.T. were not listening to what Y was saying (turns 1-2, 1-3). Rather than simply stating the ground rules, the teacher invited the children to monitor their own behavior by asking, "You know that you're not drawing a line for yourselves right now, don't you?" (turn 1-5). This was a reference to a discussion during homeroom about the need to draw a line between what one wants to do and what one should do. The teacher also encouraged the students to apply the ground rules by asking themselves, "I wonder what Y is going to talk about?" (turn 1-6) and then again proceeded to associate this with the concept of "drawing a line" in one's own behavior (turn 1-7).

In the interactions that followed, the teacher restated the importance of drawing lines (turn 1-9), and based on this framework, the children chose which ground rules to follow (turn 1-10, 1-11) and independently regulated their own behavior.

The teacher commented: 1) "I think it is important to convey when and how to apply ground rules, and show what benefits there are, in the process of active learning. I also try to adapt to each child's current level and speak in a way that is easy for them to understand," 2) "Children may think that ground rules apply only to discussion skills if they are taught solely in class. I want them to understand the value of ground rules in a variety of other areas in their daily lives and school activities," and 3) "Language Arts class and homeroom may seem like completely separate situations. That is true in terms of curriculum, but I think that it is all part of school life as a whole for the children. If I don't consciously tie the homeroom activities to class, I don't think they would independently create and apply ground rules to different situations."

Table 1. Ground rules for sharing in class

Ground Rule	Content	Examples
1. Speak clearly.	Be specific and speak in a clear voice so that your thoughts and feelings will reach the listener.	Teacher: If you just say you tried hard, and you were happy, well, even if everything made you happy, people who are listening to you want to know more about what exactly made you happy, and how you did what you did.
2. Listen quietly to others.	Listen quietly and do not whisper or do other things while another person is talking.	Teacher: You don't need to write things down with your pencils. Just listen carefully to A.
3. Do your best to understand people.	Try hard to understand and interpret what other people say, think, or intend.	Teacher: Listen to the presentation. Y is going to say something now. I've got to be quiet. I wonder what Y is going to talk about.? That's what you want to ask yourselves. That's what it means to draw a line, for yourself.
4. Support others and be receptive.	Be supportive of each other so that everyone can participate in class, and don't put down or make fun of other people's opinions.	Teacher: M, what do you think it means to get along? M: Don't interrupt people. Teacher: That means that you can accept them, doesn't it.
5. Value your own opinion.	Talk about your own thoughts and feelings in class.	Teacher: It can be whatever you think or feel.
6. Listen to others and refine your own thoughts.	Listen to what other people say and reconsider or deepen your own thoughts instead of trying to talk first or the most in class.	Teacher: Yes, it is important to confirm. Just because someone says something, that's not what it is about, who says it first.
7. Respond to the opinions of others with your own opinion.	Let a conversation develop by listening to others while thinking about how your opinions are different and telling the other person your own opinion.	Teacher: You should be able to interact in the presentation and say, this is how I think about what this person said.

Because of their limited experience in classroom discourse, is extremely difficult, in the context of class alone, to get children in lower grades to understand the meaning and value of their interactions with others. The teacher's use of strategies to reflect on (turn1-5) and associate meanings with homeroom topics (turn1-7) demonstrates an effort to help students understand and experience the meaning and importance of ground rules from different familiar perspectives. The teacher was able to explain concepts like visualizing thought processes and transferring perspectives in a way that children could understand, thus enabling the students to draw associations between Language Arts class and homeroom contexts and reflect on their own behaviors in the process of learning ground rules.

Relatedness of Ground rules and topics of homeroom

As a framework for students to reflect on their own behavior and understand ground rules in

Table 2. Teacher approaches in Reading class

Category	Definition	Examples
Warning/instruction	Giving warnings about inappropriate behavior that break GR/Giving instructions to behave according to GR.	<2. Listen quietly to others> (Teacher explains how to listen in class.) Teacher: Hey, everyone. Okay. There's no need to write with pencils right now. Let's pay attention to A.
Shifting perspective	Explaining how and why to shift between child, teacher, and self perspectives in the thought process of using GR.	<6. Listen to others and refine your own thoughts> (Teacher speaks from the child's perspective about wanting to change ideas about a title for an essay on sports day after hearing other children's ideas.) Teacher: But, I want to change mine. Oh, I want to change mine more. Okay. "My happy sports day."
Visualization of thought process	Verbalizing the thought process of using GR and showing a model to the children.GR.	<3. Try hard to understand others> (Teacher explains how to listen by actively interpreting what others say and what their intentions are.) Teacher: Listening in your studies and in school means wondering what your friends are thinking about, or what they're going to tell you about.
Reflecting on behaviors based on homeroom topics	Encouraging the children to reflect on their behaviors during class based on a framework of the concepts discussed in homeroom.	<2. Listen quietly to others> (Teacher tries to have a child who is competing for attention reflect on his behaviors using a "Self control of behavior" GR (limits) framework.) Teacher: Me me me me me, here here here here here, you know, right? There are limits.
Giving meaning to behaviors based on homeroom topics	Giving meaning to GR during class based on a framework of the concepts discussed in homeroom.	<4. Supporting and accepting others> (Giving meaning to GR in class using an "Active engagement with others" GR framework for a child (M) who interrupted another child by saying "I know that.") Teacher: M, what do you think it means to get along? M: Don't . . . interrupt people. Teacher: That means that you can accept them, doesn't it. We know that it is a good thing to get along with our friends. We know that, but it's important that we really understand what it means, isn't it.

Note) The categories are not mutually exclusive. Speech may fit under multiple categories in some cases. Brackets < > indicate GR, parentheses () indicate context.

Language Arts class, the teacher referenced topics that were discussed during homeroom. These homeroom topics are shown in Table 4.

"Self control of behavior" refers to the ability to make judgments about behavior that is appropriate to the situation or the objectives of different school activities, and to monitor and regulate your own behavior. For example, the teacher introduced this topic through a discussion about manners when commuting to school. The objective was to share ground rules to "speak clearly" and "listen quietly to the other person."

Table 3. Case 1: Teacher approaches (explicit process) for teaching how to “Listen quietly to other people” and “Do your best to understand people” (Observation date: June 11)

Turn	Speaker	Content	Category
1-1	Teacher	Yes, Y.	
1-2	K.N.	(playing around) I’m going to choke slam you.	
1-3	M.T.	Just try! (putting hands up)	
1-4	Teacher	Hey! Listen to the presentation.	Warning/instruction
1-5	Teacher	You know that you’re not drawing a line for yourselves right now, don’t you?	Reflecting on behaviors based on homeroom topics
1-6	Teacher	Oh, it looks like Y is going to say something now. I wonder what Y is going to talk about.?	Visualization of thinking process Shifting perspective
1-7	Teacher	That’s what you want to ask yourselves. That’s what it means to draw a line, for yourself.	Giving meaning to behaviors based on homeroom topics
1-8	M.T.	(quickly faces forward) — omitted —	
1-9	Teacher	Okay, draw a line, draw a line. Now, draw a line for yourself.	Reflecting on behaviors based on homeroom topics
1-10	S.M.	What am I doing . . . not good. (looking back at goals)	
1-11	A.H.	Not good. (straightening posture) Not good not good. (muttering to self while searching for page in textbook)	

Note) Parentheses () indicates the speakers actions or surrounding conditions. An ellipsis . . . indicates a short silence, a question mark ? indicates rising intonation. Name initials are used for child speakers. The categories in the right column correspond to those in Table 2.

“Active engagement with others” means the ability to understand the intentions and feelings behind the actions and words of others. For example, the teacher presented this topic through a discussion about fighting with other people. The objective was to share ground rules to “do your best to understand people” and “support others and be receptive.”

“Understanding self and others through interaction” means coming to understand differences and mutually recognizing strengths and weakness by interacting with each other. For example, the teacher introduced this topic by discussing an overnight school trip. The objective was to share the ground rules to “value your own opinion,” “listen to others and refine your own thoughts,” and “respond to the opinions of others with your own opinion.” Table 5 also shows the timing of the introduction of each homeroom topic and ground rules. Related items tended to be presented at approximately the same time.

Discussion

As in the study by Matsuo and Maruno (2007), our results show how the teacher clarified ground rules by associating them with class contexts rather than simply presenting them unilaterally. The aim of the teacher’s approach was for children to gain metacognitive understandings by monitoring and reflecting on the discussion process. During homeroom, he introduced different real life situations and discussed with the children how they should interact with others and make adjustments their own behaviors. These sessions then served as a framework for the children to use during class time discourse. This is a strategy that compensates for the lack of metacognitive knowledge and monitoring in younger children. Even when the teacher’s approach was directed at a specific student, the shared framework

Table 4. Homeroom topics tied to ground rules

Topic	Content	Examples
1. Self control of behavior	Monitor and adjust your own behavior by evaluating how you should act according to goals you have in school life or in certain situations. < “speak clearly” “listen carefully to others”>	Teacher: On the train, there are some people who talk in loud voices to their friends and <u>don't care at all</u> that they are disturbing the people around them.
2. Active engagement with others	Actively try to understand the intentions and feelings behind another person's behavior or words. < “Try hard to understand others” “Supporting and accepting others”>	Teacher: Even if you are fighting, think carefully about yourself and others. Instead of raising your fists, <u>pay attention to words.</u> <u>Have an open mind about the words you say and they words you hear.</u>
3. Understanding self and others through interaction	Through active engagement with others, learn about your differences and deepen your understanding of your mutual strengths and areas for improvement. < “Value your own opinion” “Listen to others and refine your own thoughts” “Respond to the opinions of others with your own opinion.”>	Teacher: <u>You can show your friends a different side of yourself. You have a special power that even you don't know about.</u> Right? Like maybe sometimes maybe you think, I'm not very good at this, or, oh, I'm pretty good at this. Try to discover the good things you can't see yourself.

Note) Brackets < > indicate GR tied to the topic and underline indicates the defining characteristics of the category.

Table 5. Timing and frequency of introducing ground rules in homeroom and reading class

Date	4/16	4/23	5/14	5/21	5/28	6/4	6/11	6/18	6/25	7/2	7/9	7/18	total
Homeroom													
Topic 1	0	3	3	4	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	15
Topic 2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	0	1	0	8
Topic 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	4
Reading class													
GR1		1		1			2		2	2		2	10
GR2		1		1			4		3	0		1	10
GR3		0		1			1		0	0		0	2
GR4		0		0			0		1	0		1	2
GR5		0		0			0		3	0		3	6
GR6		0		0			0		3	1		1	5
GR7		0		0			0		0	0		2	2

developed in homeroom also appeared to contribute to transfer of understanding to other students. For example, the approaches in Table 1 (turn 1-4 to 1-7) were directed at M.T., but S.M. and A.H. later responded to the teacher's approach (turn 1-9) and modified their own behaviors (turns 1-10 and 1-11).

The subject of this study was a teacher with comparatively little teaching experience. It is normally very challenging to try to create impromptu lessons out of the interactions that happen during class, but this study suggests that homeroom topics can be used by both the teacher and students as a preset framework from which to draw references about important ground rules.

As Table 5 shows, ground rules and homeroom topics were presented almost concurrently. This is evidence of the teacher's treatment of homeroom and Language Arts class contexts as a continuous and synthesized body of activity, rather than separate entities. It also suggests the importance, especially for new teachers, of thinking about student behavior goals and the ground rules that will help to achieve them, as well as how these behaviors may be tested in real life experiences.

The results of this study suggest that in-class and out of class contexts are systematically linked in the ground rules sharing process. This perspective offers an important framework from which teachers may reflect on their own classroom practices (Schön, 1983).

Although we focused particularly on explicit sharing of ground rules in this study, it will be important to investigate how homeroom and other out of class contexts affect implicit sharing as well. For example, in this study we observed how a reciprocal relationship was formed between the teacher and students in homeroom. It is possible that this is a form implicit sharing and demonstrates the importance of discourse strategies used by teachers, as discussed by Matsuo and Maruno (2009). In future studies, we may gain more insight into the role of implicit sharing in the ground rule sharing process by studying how children perceive their relationship with the teacher in in-class and out of class contexts, and how these perceptions change.

References

- Edwards, D., & Mercer, N. (1987). *Common Knowledge: The development of understanding in the classroom*. London: Methuen / Routledge.
- Matsuo, G. & Maruno, S. (2007). How does an expert teacher create lessons so that children think subjectively and learn from each other? Students' sharing of the ground rules for classroom discussion. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, 55, 93-105.
- Matsuo, G. & Maruno, S. (2008). Students learn the meaning of classroom ground rules from reflection and from each other: Case study of an elementary school class. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, 56, 104-115.
- Matsuo, G. & Maruno, S. (2009). How can teacher share the implicit rules for collaborative reflective discussion? *Japanese Psychological Review*, 52, 245-264.
- Mercer, N. (1995). *The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk amongst teachers and learners*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Wegerif, R., Mercer, N., & Dawes, L. (1999). From social interaction to individual reasoning: an empirical investigation of a possible socio-cultural model of cognitive development. *Learning and Instruction*, 9, 493-516.
- Schön, D. (1983). *Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Shimizu, Y. & Uchida, N. (2005). How do children adapt to classroom discourse? Quantitative and qualitative analyses of first grade homeroom activities. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, 49, 314-325.