

A scientific look at the art of teacher talk

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It has long been said teaching is both an art and a science. In a new study that uses a scientific lens to look at the conversational art of instruction, a team of researchers identify specific ways teachers talk to students that measurably impact literacy skills.

Teachers who built [literacy](#) lessons around standardized test questions, and those who failed to cultivate class-wide discussions saw a negative effect on literacy skill building, said Lynch School of Education Associate Professor Patrick Proctor, a co-author of the new study. Teachers who offered measured, positive feedback saw their students' performance improve.

Proctor, lead author and doctoral student Catherine Michener, LSOE PhD '15, and University of Maryland Associate Professor Rebecca Silverman present their findings today at the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting session "Advances in Reading Instruction and Interventions."

"We know that teaching involves a lot of talking in the classroom, but our question was what kinds of talk promote the growth of [literacy skills](#)?" said Proctor, whose research focuses on the language and literacy achievement of English language learners in U.S. public schools.

"Reading is the underpinning of all learning. If kids are not strong readers by the time they are in middle school or high school, one of the fundamental mechanisms of learning is compromised and that puts those students behind in readiness for college and careers."

The team used class observations and assessment data to study 236 students in grades three through five in 31 classrooms at six schools.

Literacy education has seen shifting support in recent years, with the Obama administration seeking \$187 million for its Effective Teaching and Learning: Literacy initiative. The Bush administration's massive Reading First program cost \$1 billion annually.

Provided by Boston College

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