CHILD-PEERS TALK : A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Talk between child and peers are apparent in every preschool. Talk enhances child's communication and social skills besides developing one's self confidence. In fact developing communication skills is one of the objectives highlighted in the preschool curriculum in Malaysia. This preliminary study was carried out to investigate the types of talk between child and peers during learning activities, in particular, individual task and free play sessions. The data arises from qualitative study investigating preschoolers aged 6 years old from two preschools in Klang district, Selangor, Malaysia. Twenty preschoolers aged six years old were drawn from purposive sampling, based on the preschool teachers' suggestion of children who talk the most in the preschool classroom. This study is significant since there are limited studies in child-peers talk especially in preschools in Malaysia. Non-participant classroom observation was conducted and field-notes were taken during the observation. The findings of this preliminary study revealed two major types of child-peers talk, namely: on-task talk and off-task talk. Each type of talk was categorized further based on the thematic analysis of the data collected. Implication of this preliminary study showed that more opportunities should be given for children to engage in quality children talk.

Keywords : Preschoolers, child-peers talk, on-task talk, off-task talk.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom talk is the conversation that occurs in a classroom setting. It can take different forms such as asking of questions, giving explanation or elaboration and recap of information, which engage pupils into a shared understanding to construct knowledge (Mercer, 2004). Researchers on classroom talk have also highlighted the many importance of talk, among others: cognitive development, social development and language development (see Test, Cunningham & Lee, 2010; Mercer & Dawes, 2014; Knight, 2014; Alexander, 2012). This study in particular adopts the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky. In the present era of the 'pressure cooker' lifestyle or in precise the education system that gives more emphasis to academic performance, students' talk is often given the least importance (Dass, Normah, Arumugam & Dillah, 2014). This had motivated the researcher to find out about child-peers talk especially due to the limited study in Malaysian preschools related to it. Evidences from empirical studies suggest that teachers are well aware of the importance of student talk but due to certain constraints that they are unable to fully implement in their classrooms (Alexander, 2012; Pimental & McNeill, 2013; Sedigheh, 2014; Dass et.al.,2014; Coultas, 2015). The following sections of this paper will be discussing on the definition of child-peers talk, aims of the study, the method of data collection and analysis, lastly, the findings and discussion.

Child - peers talk
Conversation that takes place between two children or among children is defined in this study as child-peers talk. The discourse has many functions and as such it should be given due importance by teachers. Mercer, Dawes and Wegerif (1999) suggest three crucial functions of discourse: a cognitive tool to process knowledge; a social tool to share knowledge; and as a pedagogic tool. The child-peers talk also aids the child's pursuance of knowledge and serves as an intellectual guidance (Kawalkar & Vijapurkar, 2013). Interaction that takes place with one another among children in classrooms enhances their learning (Wood & Kalinec, 2012). Hence, child-peers talk should be encouraged especially in preschools since learning experiences in preschools lay a strong foundation for later years.

Many of us know that children love to talk, but how many of us take the courage to know the content of their talk and how it constitutes to their development? Child-peers talk can be varied according to the circumstances or the environment the child is in at that point of time. It can vary from talk pertaining to the task that is being performed, to talk that is pertaining to something that the child did the day before or even something that is of interest to the child (Knight, 2014; Sedigheh, 2014). Many researchers place importance on students' talk during on-task engagement and used it as a way to measure teacher effectiveness (Wood & Kalinec, 2012). However, that does not mean off-task behaviour is not studied, as Thornborrow (2003) advocates that off-task talk has relevance to social interactions which is an essential part of academic learning too.

Students' talk were analysed and divided into four types in a study conducted by Ami (2013). The four types are: asking questions, creating talk exchanges, repeating and answering teachers' or peers' questions. Creating talk exchanges is actually talk among students or peers, however the researcher did not separate leisure talk / off-task talk and talk regarding the knowledge/information specifically or also known as on-task talk. The child-peers interaction types that were revealed in yet another study are sociable, creative and non-verbal interaction (Siti Noor Fauziah & Nik Suryani, 2013). The first two types of talk, which are sociable and creative, are similar to the creating talk exchanges type mentioned by Ami (2013).

Aim of the present study

Much has been researched regarding the benefits of talk to the overall development of children. Researches on teacher-child talk is largely available (see Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Price, Bradley & Smith, 2012; Gjems, 2013; Ami, 2013; Molinari, Mameli & Gnisci, 2013) but there is limited study in child-peers talk in preschool classrooms especially in Malaysia (see Siti Noor Fauziah & Nor Azian, 2011; Siti Noor Fauziah & Nik Suryani, 2013; Angelina & Kuang, 2016). Therefore, the findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge, especially in Malaysia, in particular in preschool education.The purpose of this preliminary study is to investigate the types of child-peers talk in preschools. This study addressed the following question: What are the types of child-peers talk that occur in preschool classrooms during individual task and free-play sessions?

METHOD
Qualitative research design is adopted in this study due to its nature of exploration of a particular phenomenon in its real context. This study focuses on how preschoolers initiate talk among themselves. The researcher can only achieve this purpose through engaging oneself in the real context, i.e. the preschool classrooms during the leaning activities. Thus, to achieve the research objective, qualitative research methodology is the appropriate way.

Samples and sampling procedures
This study focuses on child-peers interactions in preschool classrooms. The preschoolers are 6 years old children from two government aided preschools in Klang district, Selangor, Malaysia. A total of 20 preschoolers were chosen based on the preschool teachers' suggestion. The selection criterion was basically children who talk the most, as this study is pertaining to talk. The samples are handpicked in pursuance of a particular characteristic that satisfies the need of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010). Children participating in the observation comprised of 8 girls and 12 boys. Both preschools were observed on two different days and each observation lasted for an hour. Children were observed during two different learning activities namely: individual task and free play. This is in accordance with optimizing purposive sampling efficiency as diversity of the characteristics of the samples allow greater influences to be contributed to the phenomenon studied (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The preschools that participated in this study were volunteers and verbal consent was obtained from the preschool teachers. The teachers were debriefed regarding the objectives and the methods of this study prior to the observations. Confidentiality is maintained in this study by the usage of fictitious names of participants and the research site.

Classroom observations
Naturalistic observation is the recording of the behaviour of interest in the natural environment (Berk, 2013). Thus, this study conducted observation of classroom talk in the preschool classrooms. Non-participant observation was used in this study in order to obtain rich quality data. Observations were conducted in two different preschools and during two learning sessions in order to collect reliable data, as behaviour changes according to different contexts (Cohen, *et.al.*, 2010). In this study the pre-schoolers were observed during the individual task and free play sessions in both the preschools. The children were observed in their natural setting without the researcher interference. The observational data was recorded as field notes. The field notes were later expanded into descriptive narrative after observation to be typed and stored into computer files.

Data analysis
Discourse analysis is the exploring of the natural talk and the social actions (Cohen, *et.al.,* 2010). The child-peers talk in this study which is recorded as field notes was transcribed into textual material and analysed. According to Cohen, *et.al.* (2010) this process will enable the researcher to discover patterns which lead to the unfolding of intentions, functions and consequences of the discourse. Consequently in this study the discourse analysis enable the researcher to uncover the types of child-peers talk in the preschool classrooms. The observation data were later coded, themes and descriptions were formed. The themes were interpreted as findings of this study.

FINDINGS
The findings are presented in two sections to explain the two major types of child-peers talk: on-task talk and off-task talk. These two types comprised of many other sub-types of child-peers talk. There were five sub-types of talk under the on-task talk and two sub-types of the off-task talk. The dialogical interactions between child and peers during the event of individual task , tended to be consisting of a balanced talk between on-task talk and off-task talk as compared to during free play. The dialogical exchanges between child and peers were mostly on-task talk during free play sessions. Next, the extracts from the data are presented to illustrate the types of child-peers talk that was identified in this study.

On-task talk
On-task talk is dialogues between child and peers that revolve around the assigned task. The following five sub-types of child-peers talk were identified in the discourse analysis of this study:

    Type 1 : Seeking opinion
    Type 2 : Giving comments
    Type 3 : Giving explanation
    Type 4 : Justifying one's opinion
    Type 5 : Showing disagreement

A more detailed explanation of the types of child-peers talk is in the following sections. In all the example of extracts, the non-verbal communication is described in parentheses and the author's commentaries are in brackets. The dialogical exchanges in all extracts were originally spoken in Malay language and later translated in English.

    Type 1: Seeking opinion

Sequences of seeking opinions from one another were highly typical in preschool classrooms. The opinions sought were mostly regarding one's accomplishment, a finished product or one's piece of work. The following are examples during the individual task sessions of science lessons (Example 1 & 2) and free play sessions (Example 3 & 4) from both the preschools.

Example 1. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool A. The topic of the lesson is 'Magnet : Objects that attract and repel'. This observation is recorded after the teacher had taught the content of the topic. The task is to draw objects that attract and repel magnet.

Kamal	:	Nice or not? (shows his drawing to his friends)
Shah	:	Eee…not nice la
Alia	:	See, I colour nice la (points to her drawing)
Kamal	:	Ala, I also colour nice la

In the above exchanges it can be seen that Kamal is seeking his friend's opinion regarding his drawing. Though it turns out that his friends' opinions are not in favour of his, Kamal seems not bothered about it. Also it shows that children are genuine in giving opinions (e.g. "eee…not nice la").

Example 2. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool B. The topic of the lesson is 'Animals that live by the shore/beach'. This observation is recorded after the teacher had taught the content of the topic. The task is to draw animals that live by the shore or beach.

Ina	:	See this…nice or not? (shows her drawing to her friends)
Siti	:	What's that? (looks at Ina's drawing and points at a particular animal drawn)
Ina	:	Crab la. Okay or not?
Siti	:	Hah! Crab? [expresses shock]
Ina	:	Ya la…Crab [slightly raised voice]
Siti	:	Mmm…can la…can la [continues with her work]

In the Example 2, it is obvious that Ina seeks her friend's opinion twice in order to get the desired response. During the second time seeking opinion, Ina raises her voice a little in order to convince her friend. Siti gives her opinion accordingly after making sure of the particular opinion being sought by Ina. Another type of conversation that can be seen in the above example is asking question ("Crab?") and giving response ("Ya la…Crab").

Example 3. Free play session in Preschool A. Children were given building blocks to play. They were playing on the mat.

Man	:	Is this beautiful? (showing his blocks to his friend) [it looks like a robot]
Sam	:	Very beautiful (smiles as he praises his friend's creation)
Man	:	I want to show teacher la (walks towards the teacher)

The example 3 shows a child asking opinion of his friend regarding his piece of work or creation. Sam, gives a very genuine opinion, which can be seen from his smiling face. Man, proud of his creation, wants to be acknowledged by his teacher since his friend had accredited him, thus walks towards his teacher with his blocks (robot).

Example 4. Free play session in Preschool B. Children were allowed to choose between puzzle and building blocks. Most of the children chose building blocks. This particular extract involves two children playing blocks.

Rin	:	Give me blue colour. (points her hand at a blue coloured block)
Salwa	:	Here. (gives the blue block)
Rin	:	Look at my house. Ok ah? (shakes her friend's hand asking her to look at her blocks) [the blocks are in the form of a house. A blue house]
Salwa	:	Try adding white…nicer (looks at Rin and gives her some white blocks)
Rin	:	Oh… ok…give me white (takes the white blocks from Salwa) [reconstructs her blocks by alternating blue blocks with white blocks]

The above extract between Rin and Salwa shows children asking opinion and the response of giving opinion is in a form of suggestion. Salwa does not just give an opinion by saying nice or not, instead she offers a suggestion to Rin. The suggestion given by Salwa is well received by Rin.

Type 2: Giving comments

Sequences of giving comments are seen rather largely among preschoolers. The comments are either given by children to themselves or to other children. The comments vary from statements regarding ones inability to complete a certain task to commenting about someone's task or attitude. The following are examples during the individual task sessions of science lessons (Example 5 & 6) and free play sessions (Example 7 & 8) from both the preschools.

Example 5. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool A. The task is the same as in Example 1.

Jamal	:	I have finished. I am going to hand in to teacher. [happy face]
Siti	:	Finish? See…got white white here. Teacher will scold. (points at the paper) [surprised face. There are some parts of Jamal's drawing that is not coloured fully/properly]
Jamal	:	Never mind [shows face of disagreement by turning his face]
Siti	:	Colour properly…only than it's nice
Jamal	:	Ok la…ok la [continues to colour]

Comment given by Siti is not sought by Jamal. Though initially Jamal does not show much care about the comment but upon Siti commenting again ("colour properly…only than it's nice"), Jamal seems convinced.

Example 6. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool B. The task is the same as in Example 2.

Syed	:	Ala…I don't how to do la [sighing] (looks at his friend)
Amin	:	Just do it la. [says while drawing, without lifting up his head]
Syed	:	It's so difficult la. I don't how to draw. [sighs louder]
Amin	:	Try first la. Just do it…faster (looks at his friend)

The conversation between Syed and Amin shows comments given by Syed regarding himself. Syed comments twice to Amin pertaining to his inability to draw. Amin tries to console or motivate his friend to attempt the task given.

Example 7. Free play session in Preschool A. The task is the same as in Example 3.

Ali	:	Hah…hah…hah…that's what…do higher la…see it has fallen. Just do like mine. (laughs)
Sobri	:	I wanted to do KLCC la…must be high
Ali	:	Ala…what KLCC…see all had fallen (laughs even louder)

In the extract above the comment given by Ali is regarding his friend, Sobri's blocks which had fallen apart. Besides giving comment, Ali also suggests to Sobri to follow his way of building the blocks. Sobri tries to justify his reason for wanting to build high, yet Ali seems not convinced.

Example 8. Free play session in Preschool B. The task is the same as in Example 4. In this extract four children are trying to solve a ten pieces picture puzzle.

Salwa	:	Give that. (points at a piece of puzzle)
Rin	:	Here. (gives the piece to Salwa)
Atie	:	Eh…that's wrong la…place it here (takes the piece from Salwa)
Salwa	:	Oh ya… (looks at Atie and nods her head)
Wan	:	This… place it here. (places a piece of puzzle) This? Where to put? (shows another piece that she is holding in her hand)
Rin	:	Hmmm…wait…wait…place this one first (gives another piece to Wan)
Atie	:	Hah! Place it here. Yeah!! finish!! (points to Wan) [screams in excitement]

In the above conversation it is obvious that asking and giving responses are apparent besides giving of comments. The above dialogical exchanges show comments given by children while attempting to piece the puzzle together. However the comments vary in their functions, for example when Atie comments "Eh…that's wrong la…place it here" - it is giving comment to her friend's attempt. Another is a comment by Rin ("Hmmm…wait…wait…place this one first"), which is more of an idea given to solve the puzzle. Atie's comment, "Hah! Place it here. Yeah!! finish!!", is regarding the placement of the last piece and showing of accomplishment.

Type 3: Giving explanation

Sequences of giving explanation are seen commonly among preschoolers especially during free play sessions. The explanation mostly is regarding ones task. Sometimes the explanation is given upon a peer asking question, nevertheless children also give explanation without being asked. The following are examples during the individual task session of science lessons (Example 9) and free play sessions (Example 10 & 11) from both the preschools.

Example 9. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool B. The task is the same as in Example 2.

Ahmad	:	Eh! What's that? Worm? (points at Syam's drawing)
Syam	:	Water worm… (laughs)…skinny worm (laughs again) [literally translated from Malay '*ulat air*']
Ahmad	:	Skinny worm? Oh! Not enough food is it? (laughs)
Syed	:	Sick worm probably (laughs)
Syam	:	Yes…correct…stomach ache (laughs) [all the three boys laugh]

The above extract shows children giving explanation regarding the drawing, in particular the worm. Ahmad initiated a question seeking clarification on what Syam had drawn. The question sought the children to take turns to explain and elaborate on it, for example: "Skinny worm? Oh! Not enough food is it?".

Example 10. Free play session in Preschool A. The task is the same as in Example 3.

Shah	:	I want to build a house. [says aloud while building blocks]
Alia	:	I also. [says aloud while building blocks]
Shah	:	I want to build a big house.[says without looking at Alia]
Alia	:	Yes…big but not high. [says while continuing to build]
Shah	:	Ya…if high than will fall. (laughs) [both children laugh]

Both the children in Example 10 are explaining to one another, their activity without being asked. It can also be seen that both of them seem to be engrossed in their own work yet they talk without any disruption to what they are doing.

Example 11. Free play session in Preschool B. The task is the same as in Example 4.

Syed	:	I want to make a robot…like Transformers (looks at Amin)
Amin	:	I want to make a gun. I make a gun for your robot.
Syed	:	Ok…we play together ya? (pats Amin's shoulder)
Amin	:	Ok (nods his head)

Syed and Amin both explain their intentions without being asked. Also another type of talk that can be seen here is children offering to do something for others, example Amin offers to make a gun for Syed's robot ("I make a gun for your robot") and offering to do something together, example Syed offers to play together ("Ok…we play together ya?").

Type 4: Justifying one's opinion or response

Children are seen to justify one's opinion especially when challenged by someone. However this particular child-peers talk can be pertaining to oneself or others. The following are examples during the individual task sessions of science lessons (Example 12 & 13) and free play session (Example 14) from both the preschools.

Example 12. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool A. The task is the same as in Example 1.

Zam	:	[draws a whiteboard on her piece of paper]
Jamal	:	Eh so big! (looks at Zam's drawing) [looks shocked]
Zam	:	Whiteboard is obviously big! (looks at Jamal and points at the class whiteboard)
Jamal	:	Eee…big like a giant. (giggles)
Zam	:	Errr…(puts her hands on the waist)[seem to be angry]
Jamal	:	Ahh!!! Scared!…Tiger! (screams then burst into laughter)
Zam	:	(laughs)

The extract above shows Zam justifying her reason for drawing a big whiteboard, "Whiteboard is obviously big!", upon the comment given by Jamal. The above example also exhibits element of humour being inserted by children in their conversation, for instance: "Ahh!!!Scared!…Tiger!". Another element that can be seen in the above extract is making an analogy. Jamal makes an analogy to Zam's drawing, "big like a giant".

Example 13. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool B. The task is the same as in Example 2.

Wan	:	Eh…how to draw a crab? (looks at Syam)
Syam	:	Oh that's so easy la.
Wan	:	I don't know how to draw
Syam	:	Look here…circle…legs…crab! [explains as he draws]
Wan	:	Oh ya…that's so easy (grins)
Syam	:	See I told you right? It's so easy. (nods his head while smiling)

Justifying one's opinion can be seen as Syam makes a statement that drawing a crab is an easy task and proves it by drawing while explaining the steps, "Look here…circle…legs…crab!". Syam again justifies his opinion upon Wan agreeing, "See I told you right? It's so easy". In the conversation above asking and giving of response can also be observed ("how to draw a crab?" and "oh that's so easy la").

Example 14. Free play session in Preschool A. The task is the same as in Example 3.

Shah	:	I want to build a house. [says aloud while building blocks]
Alia	:	I also. [says aloud while building blocks]
Shah	:	I want to build a big house.[says without looking at Alia]
Alia	:	Yes…big but not high. [says while continuing to build]
Shah	:	Ya…if high than will fall. (laughs) [both children laugh]

The child-peer talk above shows an example of a child justifying an opinion given by his friend, "Ya…if high than will fall". Alia makes a comment that the blocks (house) should be big but not high, hence, Shah in agreement to it makes a justification.

Type 5: Showing disagreement

Verbal exchanges of showing disagreement are particularly seen when a child has a deferring opinion from his/her peers. Sometimes children even tend to raise their voice in order to show disagreement. The following are examples during the individual task session of science lessons (Example 14) and free play sessions (Example 16 & 17) from both the preschools.

Example 15. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool A. The task is the same as in Example 1.

Alia	:	Green colour nice right? (shows her colouring to Man)
Man	:	Hmm…no…red is nicer. (shows his colouring to Alia)
Alia	:	Green or red doesn't matter…as long as finish (giggles)
Man	:	(nods his head and giggles)

The extract above shows a child disagreeing to his friend's opinion regarding a particular task. Man, disagrees that green colour is nice, "Hmm…no…red is nicer". However, Alia seems not bothered by the disagreement and makes a general conclusion that no matter what the colour is as long as the task is completed ("Green or red doesn't matter…as long as finish").

Example 16. Free play session in Preschool A. The task is the same as in Example 3.

Shah	:	Dush…Dush [makes sound of shooting with his gun made of blocks]
Sobri	:	I am a robot…u cannot shoot me! [angry face]
Shah	:	Can…You are dead…(laughs)
Sobri	:	No…no…I am a steel robot…cannot shoot…hah! I am going to eat you now…(moves his robot towards Shah and laughs)
Shah	:	Ahhh!! Scared!! Run…(moves away his gun and laughs)

The verbal exchanges above exhibits the child showing his disagreement twice; first, "I am a robot…u cannot shoot me"; and second, "No…no…I am a steel robot…cannot shoot". Both times Sobri disagrees as well as tries to justify his disagreement. Though Shah tries to convince Sobri into agreeing with him, yet Sobri does not agree. The element of humour is also seen ("Ahhh!! Scared!! Run…").

Example 17. Free play session in Preschool B. The task is the same as in Example 4.

Ina	:	Ala…so difficult [keeps looking at the puzzle piece]
Rin	:	Slowly…can do…[tries to piece the puzzle]
Ina	:	No la. This is so difficult (folds her arms)
Rin	:	Try first (looks at Ina)
Ina	:	No…I don't want to play la…difficult (moves away)

The sequences of the above dialogue exhibit a child disagreeing to her friend despite attempts of motivating. Ina disagrees with Rin that if done with patience the puzzle can be pieced together ("No la. This is so difficult"). Once again Rin tries to motivate Ina to attempt at the task of piecing the puzzle, but Ina still not convinced by Rin's remarks and shows disagreement ("No…I don't want to play la…difficult").

Off-task talk

Off-task talk is dialogues between child and peers that occurs while children are engaged in the assigned task but the talk is not regarding the task. Off-task talk revolve around the activities done by children earlier on or even the day before, either in preschool or at home. Some of the off-task talk was also pertaining to something seen or smelt by the children at the very instant of the dialogue. Off-task talk was not present during free play sessions, it occurred only during individual task sessions. The following two sub-types of off-task talk were identified in the discourse analysis of this study:

Type 1 : Giving explanation
Type 2 : Asking and answering of questions

A more detailed explanation of the sub-types of the off-task talk is in the following sections.

Type 1: Giving explanation

Sequences of giving explanation were largely seen during the off-task talk. Sometimes the explanation is given when someone asks for it, however, most of the times the explanation is given voluntarily by children (without being asked). The following are examples during the individual task sessions of science lessons (Example 18 & 19) from both the preschools.

Example 18. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool A. The assigned task is the same as in Example 1. The three children in the conversation below are engaged in off-task talk while attempting the task given by the teacher.

Siti	:	Yesterday I went to the night market with my mom. [talks while colouring]
Alia	:	Me too. [talks while colouring]
Zam	:	Bought fried chicken? [pauses her colouring, looks at Siti then

<div style="margin-left:2em">

		continues to colour]
Siti	:	No la. Bought this…[takes out something from her pocket and shows her friends]
Alia	:	Wah…so nice (looks at the small brooch shown by Siti and continues her colouring)
Zam	:	Let me see? [shows an open palm, in gesture of asking Siti to show the brooch]
Alia	:	I want…buy for me (looks at Siti)
Zam	:	Me too (looks at Siti)
Siti	:	One costs 80 cents. There are many colours. What colour do you want? (looks at Zam and Alia) [still colouring in between stops and looks at her friends]
Alia	:	Mmm…purple [talks before continuing her task]
Zam	:	Blue. I like blue. (looks at Siti) [pauses a while before continuing her task]
Siti	:	Give me the money first…only then I will buy. Tomorrow bring the money [stops her colouring and talks to her friends]
Alia	:	Ok…ok…tomorrow I bring the money [stops her colouring and talks to Siti]
Zam	:	Ok…let me ask my mummy first [talks while colouring]

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The extract above exhibits exchanges of giving explanation as well as asking and giving responses. Siti explains to her friends of her activity the day before (where she went, what she bought and the cost).

Example 19. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool B. The assigned task is the same as in Example 2. The two children in the conversation below are engaged in off-task talk while attempting the task given by the teacher.

<div style="margin-left:2em">

Syed	:	I want to be a soldier when I grow up.[talks while drawing]
Wan	:	I want to a policeman…can shoot. [talks while drawing]
Syed	:	I can shoot too [talks while drawing]
Wan	:	Ya…ya…we both can shoot (looks at Syed)[both of them pause their drawing and laugh]

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The dialogue above shows both children giving explanation pertaining to their ambition, without being asked.

Type 2: Asking and answering of questions

Sequences of asking and answering questions during the off-task talk seem very obvious. Mostly the questions are seeking clarification to an explanation or statement made by a child, yet there are times questions are asked in order to find out something. The following are examples during the individual task sessions of science lessons (Example 20 & 21) from both the preschools.

Example 20. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool A. The assigned task is the same as in Example 1. The two children in the conversation below are engaged in off-task talk while attempting the task given by the teacher.

<div style="margin-left:2em">

Kamal	:	Just now I saw a cake in the kitchen. [talks while colouring]
Man	:	Really? (looks at Kamal) [pauses to talk then continues colouring]
Kamal	:	Ya. Whose birthday? [talks while colouring]
Man	:	Don't know. Ala…just do your work first. [talks while colouring]

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The extract in Example 20 between the two children exhibits them asking and answering questions besides giving explanation, example, "Just now I saw a cake in the kitchen". The explanation is given without being asked.

Example 21. Individual task during science lesson in Preschool B. The assigned task is the same as in Example 2. The two children in the conversation below are engaged in off-task talk while attempting the task given by the teacher.

<div style="margin-left:2em">

Syam	:	I am hungry la. [talks while colouring]
Atie	:	Do your work first. [talks while colouring]
Syam	:	Today what are we going to eat? What food? (looks at Atie)[pauses his colouring, talks before continuing to colour]
Atie	:	Maybe '*nasi lemak*' [a kind of rice delicacy in Malaysia]. I smelt *nasi lemak* [talks while colouring]
Syam	:	Mmm…tasty (licks his lips) [showing gesture of tasty]

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The verbal exchanges above shows both children asking and answering questions pertaining to the menu of the day and assumption of the food to be served later based on their sense of smell.

To summarize, the on-task talk comprises of five sub-types of talk where else the off-task talk includes two sub-types of child-peers talk. The dialogical exchanges between the child and peers are formed by mostly two or more sub-types of a particular type

of talk (on-task or off-task talk). However, there are also verbal exchanges that only constitute one sub-type of the child-peers talk.

Discussion

The current study focused on the following question: What are the types of child-peers talk that occur in preschool classrooms during individual task and free play sessions? The findings that I have presented suggest that children tend to emulate adult like talk, for instance: (i) motivating their peers (see Examples 6,13 & 17); and, (ii) reminding their peers (see Examples 20 & 21). This is important for preschool teachers to take note as the language used by them is emulated by children. This also supports the view of Vygotsky (1978) that dialogical experiences which children gather during shared activities enable the development of thinking skills. Giving motivation and reminding peers of a particular instruction or task, show that children are able to engage in problem solving activities. Thus, higher mental processes are able to take place as put forth by Test et.al (2010), when children are given opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations. Child-peers talk also consists of humour (see Examples 9 & 12). The types of child-peers talk also revealed that children are very open or genuine in giving their comments and opinions. Nevertheless, some children are very receptive to the comments and/or opinions, yet, some choose to decipher. The findings of this study indicate that child-peers talk need to be encouraged in preschools as children are able to solve problems without adult interference (see Examples 8, 10 & 13) (Mercer & Dawes, 2014; Knight, 2014). The current study being a preliminary study was a small-scale study attempting to gain insights into child-peers talk in preschools for the actual study. Limitations of the study were the small sample size and the short duration of observation. This study, however, contributes to the existing body of knowledge by describing the types of child-peers talk in preschools. Further research can be done in the same area by increasing the samples and/or incorporating different methods of data collection.

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