COLOR MY CONVERSATION
EVIDENCE BASED RESEARCH
(In Progress - Updated March 2021)

INTRODUCTION

Face-to-face conversations are becoming more of a challenge in our social media driven society. Technology has, in many ways, hijacked our personal relationships by making our social interactions so much more convenient online.

Technology has its benefits. In a quest for knowledge, it has allowed individuals to connect with information from around the world within seconds. In a quest for relationships, it has provided an easy conduit in which to connect with others for the purposes of building relationships; both personally (i.e. social media platforms) and professionally. However, technology cannot replace the intimate connection that is created when one human being is in the physical presence of another. This is one thing that technology cannot do. The preservation of face-to-face social interactions has been and will always be a vital component in our ability to sustain a socially and emotionally healthy society.

Children are the future. It is imperative that they are adequately prepared so that they can grow into global citizens who are capable of achieving educational and vocational success. However, it is of greater importance, that their social-emotional wellbeing be valued and nurtured because these are the wells from which the hearts of our greatest world leaders have emerged.

The act of verbal communication can be employed for a variety of purposes (i.e. providing instructions, storytelling, negotiating/debating, relationship building). The specific conversational act which targets social interactions for the purpose of building relationships is referred to as social communication. It may be defined as follows:

"Social Communication is the use of language in social contexts. It encompasses social interaction, social cognition, pragmatics and language processing. Social communication skills include the ability to vary speech style, take the perspective of others, understand and appropriately use the rules for verbal and nonverbal communication and use the structural aspects of language (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, and phonology) to accomplish these goals" (ASHA: Grice, 1975; Nelson, 1978; and Timler, Olswang, & Coggins, 2005).

When individuals engage in social communication for the purpose of building relationships, social cognition (i.e. emotional literacy and perspective taking) will become of critical importance. Social cognition plays the vital role in moving one beyond the simple act of saying 'hello' into more meaningful social encounters. Given time, opportunity and positive interactions, relationships can move safely to a place of intimacy. This is a vulnerable state of being where an exposed heart can find a safe place in which to land; in the trusted and cherished hands of another.

The starting point for this complex process is found in the simple act of using one's verbal (i.e. oral language) and nonverbal (i.e. eye contact, facial expressions, body gestures, etc.) communication to initiate and/or respond to a social encounter. Through skillful use of conversational features (i.e. greetings, chitchat, longer conversations on shared interests, questions, comments, etc.), positive social connections can be created in the early stages of relationship development. Over time, these successful encounters can lead to the development of emotional attachments.

As emotional attachments are found to be trustworthy, a sense of security or safety can emerge. As one develops a sense of safety, their desire and/or willingness to explore their immediate relationships may further be expanded. As one develops a positive history within their social relationships, they may also become more inclined to experience new social connections and potentially new learning opportunities (i.e. academics) with greater enthusiasm as well!

Thus, when one's social competence and confidence is realized, motivation and curiosity can move individuals forward in achieving the full potential of their social and emotional development within their personal relationships. Such benefits can extend in allowing individuals to reach their full educational and vocational potential as well.

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Strong social skills developed in childhood are linked to social adeptness (i.e. peer acceptance) and academic achievement. In contrast, underdeveloped social skills can negatively impact a child's success; both socially and academically (Rao, Beidel, & Murray, 2008). Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons (i.e. poverty, technology overuse), today's children are entering their school systems with significant social and emotional challenges (Ryan, Fauth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006).

One of the ways that schools can support the social and emotional development for all children within a school community is through classroom instruction. Naturally occurring social encounters (i.e. greeting, chitchat, longer conversations) that take place outside of the classroom setting (i.e. hallways, playground, staffroom, school parking lot, etc.) are vital as well. They are the key ingredients that foster a warm and inclusive social climate for all individuals (i.e. students, teachers, administration, custodial, etc.) within a school community.

However, beyond this, direct instruction which occurs within the classroom setting, can provide incredibly rich opportunities for children to receive intentional and thoughtful instruction regarding the necessary tools and strategies for becoming a socially and emotionally adept individual. Such knowledge and skill acquisition can potentially be transferred and applied outside of the structured learning setting into the natural environment as children interact with their peers, their teachers and others within the school setting. When programming includes parents in this learning process (i.e. home letters, home assignments, workshops etc.), the impact of the curriculum can be further extended into the child's home environment and within their greater community as well.

EVIDENCE BASED PROGRAMMING

Evidence-based practice (EBP) incorporates three fundamental features which include:

1.   CLINICAL EXPERTISE: This involves taking into consideration one's knowledge, judgement and critical reasoning that will have been acquired through training and professional experiences.

2. EVIDENCE: This involves seeking information from the scientific literature to support the programming. It can also include the data and observations gained from one's clinical investigations.

3. OTHERS PERSPECTIVES: This involves taking the client or caregivers perspectives into account.

    "When all three components of EBP are considered together, clinicians can make informed, evidence-based decisions and provide high-quality services reflecting the interests, values, needs, and choices of individuals with communication disorders." (ASHA)

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES WITHIN THE
COLOR MY CONVERSATION (CMC) CURRICULUM

Color My Conversation is a social language-based curriculum that is rooted in pragmatic skills development yet intimately intertwined with all other areas of social communication (i.e. receptive/expressive language, social cognition, social interactions). Pragmatic skills may be defined as, *"The rules associated with the use of language in conversation and broader social situations." (ASHA).* The Color My Conversation curriculum teaches children the specific verbal and nonverbal communication skills that are required for face to face interactions. It emphasizes three foundational principles within its structure. They include errorless learning, multisensory teaching, and emotional literacy.

ERRORLESS LEARNING: EASY TO TEACH - EASY TO LEARN

Learning the art of conversation can be a confusing and overwhelming process for children and adults alike. Errorless learning is a method of teaching new information by eliminating or reducing the opportunities for errors to occur. One of the ways this can be achieved is by providing the answers up front. In contrast, errorful learning strategies allow and even promote opportunities for children to make mistakes within the learning process. Both strategies have their place.

For example, with errorless learning, retention of information may not be as deeply embedded within the memory because the answers are being provided. However, the use of this strategy can create a safe and more comfortable learning environment for children who might benefit from its use (i.e. shyness, anxiousness, language limitations, etc.). In contrast, errorful learning strategies can create a measure of stress. Such stress can act in a positive manner to trigger an individual's memory retention towards a deeper level of understanding.

Young children in particular, can become easily frustrated (i.e. tantrums, aggression) and/or apathetic when the learning of tasks becomes too difficult (Weeks & Gaylord-Ross, 1981). Errorless learning strategies can reduce or eliminate errors and reduce discouragement by making the tasks achievable and the learning environment enjoyable. Research done by Ducharme, Folino, and DeRosie (2008) shows that errorless learning has the ability to reduce antisocial behavior while promoting prosocial behavior. Five boys and three girls, aged 6-8 years, who displayed antisocial behavior and aggression in the classroom, participated in an 11-week social

skills training program (Ducharme et al., 2008). All five children were diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Ducharme et al., 2008). Social skills training sessions were held in the classroom setting with instruction being provided by two classroom instructors. Sessions were videotaped in order to observe the children's peer to peer interactions (Ducharme et al., 2008). Acquiescent behaviors, antisocial behaviors, prosocial behaviors, and clean up behaviors were monitored at baseline as well as post intervention (Ducharme et al., 2008). Results showed that acquiescent behaviors increased by 26%, antisocial behavior decreased by 18.2%, prosocial behavior increased by more than 80%, and cleanup behaviors increased by 38% (Ducharme et al., 2008). By utilizing errorless learning strategies, the CMC program can allow children to develop prosocial behavior as well as increase compliance in the classroom setting.

Ducharme, Padova, and Ashworth (2010) also looked at the effect that errorless learning had on a 7-year-old mentally challenged male who displayed extreme aggressive, noncompliant, and antisocial behavior both at home and in school (Ducharme et al., 2010). An intervention plan that included errorless learning strategies was implemented in an attempt to reduce negative behaviors, develop prosocial behaviors and increase compliance (Ducharme et al., 2010). The mother was trained, by the therapist, to combine high probability requests with positive reinforcement for the child (Ducharme et al., 2010). Shortly after implementing these strategies, the child demonstrated more compliant behavior and less aggression at school and at home (Ducharme et al., 2010). The relationship between the child and parent improved significantly. For example, instead of telling his mother to shut up and leave him alone, the child accepted the parent's praise. Through his verbal comments (i.e. "Look what I did mom!"), he also expressed a sense of pride in his personal achievements (Ducharme et al., 2010).

Not only can errorless learning be beneficial as a teaching strategy within the classroom setting, it can also strengthen and support a child's relationships; both in and outside of the structured learning environment (Ducharme et al., 2010). Color My Conversation employs this strategy in order to increase motivation and confidence for concept learning in the early stages of skill acquisition. It is specifically designed to support the needs of young children and those with social emotional (i.e. shyness, anxiety) or learning (i.e. language development) challenges.

Moreover, this program embeds the use of the errorless learning strategy within its Teaching Manual by providing scripted instructions for the Conversation Coach (i.e. teachers, parents, clinicians). As such, those who implement the lessons can do so easily because an example of what to say has been provided. This can create a low stress-high success teaching opportunity for the Conversation Coach in the early stages of program implementation. Thus, CMC is a dynamic program that incorporates the use of errorless learning techniques in order to ensure that stress levels are kept low and outcome remains positive for adults and children alike.

MULTISENSORY LEARNING: ACTIVATE ENGAGEMENT - STIMULATE CURIOSITY

The CMC program provides a variety of multisensory learning opportunities which include arts and crafts (i.e. drawing, beadwork, research posters), written exercises (i.e. worksheets, journaling), visual supports (i.e. still pictures, photographs, color coding, gestures/signs, role plays, video recording, etc.), kinesthetic elements (i.e. walking, clapping, throwing) and musical activities (i.e. chants, songs). The three components to the CMC program that are less commonly used in traditional programming include the use of music, gestures, and movement. Research supports the use of these strategies within the treatment process.

MUSIC

Color My Conversation employs a variety of opportunities for children to engage in songs or chants. Whether done independently or in a group setting, musical elements can be used to activate engagement with learning concepts. They can also provide an opportunity for children to express themselves independently or whilst interacting in a joint activity with others.

Music has been shown to have a positive impact on child development. Houde and Narendran (2018) reviewed literature on the influence of early childhood development, music education and therapy. They found that music helped foster improved ability to focus or attend with more time spent watching peers. It also helped to strengthen communication skills, turn-taking behaviours and integrated thinking.

Music therapy has been found to be a useful form of support for children with developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). A study done by Novenia (2019) indicated that musical elements and structures create a positive way for children on the spectrum to express and communicate their thoughts. It can also help them learn how to effectively use non-verbal communication such as eye contact, facial expressions

and body gestures. In a similar study, Chou, Chang, Chen, Lee, Hsin, Siu, Chen, Wang, and Hung (2019) looked into the effectiveness of music therapy for individuals with Rett Syndrome. In this study, families within the experimental group were enrolled into a music therapy program twice weekly in 2-hour sessions over a 24-week period. Researchers found that the music therapy improved the participant's receptive and expressive language skills, non-verbal communication skills and socialization skills. Additionally, the RTT participants showed greater improvements in hand functions and breathing patterns along with a decrease in the frequency of epileptic seizures. Furthermore, researchers suggested that the musical therapy was of benefit for the RTT caregivers as well in that it lowered their anxiety and stress levels.

Goodling (2011) examined the effect of music therapy in social skills training in children and adolescents with social skills deficits. A total of forty-five children and teens (6-17 years of age) participated in a group based five-week program. Self-reports, adult reports and behavioral observations were collected. Based on results that demonstrated significantly improved social skills, Goodling (2011) suggested that music therapy-based curriculum may be of benefit when specifically targeting impaired social functioning.

Thompson and Elefant (2019) found that when working with highly verbal children with Autism, that the introduction of music during the children's playtime left the children appearing less anxious and more in control of their emotions. Even when these children did not participate directly in the music, the music provided by the therapist supported the children's interpersonal engagement, attention and memory. The music provided an environment that enhanced communication, imagination and emotional expression. Thompson and Elefant (2019) felt that whether music was structured or improvised, it provided an opportunity for engagement, breaking past a child's repetitious behavior so as to support further growth and development in social skills.

Bharathi, Venugopal & Vellingiri (2019) found that for children with autism, the ability to take another's perspective, initiate, respond to, and maintain an interaction increased through the process of receiving music therapy. As an intervention, music therapy increased the children's communication, specifically allowing them to better understand, respond and maintain peer interactions.

Another study done by Spychiger, Patry, Lauper, Zimmerman, & Weber (1993) found that increasing the amount of classroom music within school curriculum increased social cohesion or a sense of belonging within a community. In addition, the children demonstrated a greater measure of a positive attitude and self-reliance

along with increased ability to make social adjustments (Spychiger, Patry, Lauper, Zimmerman, & Weber, 1993).

Music therapy has a long and documented history showing improvements in parent-child interactions, growing peer awareness and social interactions (Fratila, 2018). It is often used as a cue for social events, providing a sense of structure and coordination (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005) as it can serve to orient individuals to situations and settings.

Music is often connected to dance. Kinesthetic movement plays an important part in childhood learning. Pasc (2016) looked at how music and dancing facilitated parent-child relationships, helping children balance their emotions and bodies. In the experiment, Pasc (2016) used music to get parents and children to express anger, make a demand and ask for support. Specific words and phrases (i.e. "Please", "Thank you", "Yes", "No", etc.) required specific intonations. Pasc (2016) found that parents and children were better able to understand the communication of others through these exercises. Pasc (2016) acknowledges that the study was limited in scope and did not use representative sampling; which would then limit the application of the results to a wider population. However, the study provides a good starting point for further investigation into the specific music-oriented techniques that could be used to help children and parents communicate more effectively.

Music may have specific benefits such as clarifying meaning in communication (Pasc, 2016), providing a structured entrance into social interaction (Kyriacou, 2017; Garrison et al, 2106), providing a unique perspective of self (Batt-Rawden and DeNora, 2005), and facilitating better communication between children and parents (Pasc, 2016).

The CMC program encourages the use of music with active participation in order to create an engaging and enjoyable learning environment for children and educators alike. Beyond the social engagement of these musical exercises, the CMC program also embeds and highlights key words and phrases within the lyrics in order to support the learning of targeted concepts.

GESTURES AND SIGNS

Another important feature of the CMC program is the emphasis on the use of body language to communicate one's message to their conversation partner. We gain a significant amount of information from

others through our observations of their nonverbal communication (i.e. facial expressions, body gestures, body positioning, body movements). CMC implements the use of either natural gestures or American Sign Language (ASL) within its lessons. The use of these gestures is primarily used with the younger children or for those with developmental disabilities. The intent is not to teach the children to use a signing system. Rather, it is intended to demonstrate to the children that conversation partners are agents of information; not only by the words they say but by the movements (i.e. gestures) they make. We want the children to learn to watch so that they can watch to learn. As such, CMC uses oral language as much as required but only as necessary. If nonverbal communication is sufficient enough to portray one's message (i.e. motioning someone to come), then it should be used.

Gestures are a form of nonverbal communication that can provide a strong foundation for language development (Guidetti & Nicoladis, 2008). Nonverbal communication is referred to as any form of communication other than language (Gregersen, 2017). Most of our communication is done nonverbally and as such, there is a large sense of dependency on its use (Gregersen, 2017). Research has shown that on average, we speak for only 10 to 11 minutes each day even though we spend 70% of our waking hours in the physical presence of others (Gregersen, 2017). Our body language accounts for nearly two thirds of our total messaging, which leaves just one third of what we communicate to be portrayed through our speech and tone of voice (Gregersen, 2017). This clearly illustrates the significance of nonverbal communication within one's social interaction with others.

Gestures are important within our social interactions because they can provide visual clarification for what we are trying to express. As such, they can play a tremendous role within language development (Guidetti & Nicoladis, 2008). For example, infants communicate through gestures (i.e. waving, pointing, requesting to be picked up, etc.) before they even start to speak (Guidetti & Nicoladis, 2008); with each physical movement portraying its own function (i.e. requesting an object, requesting an action, greeting, etc.). One's use of gestures and ability to interpret those expressed by others is a vital and lifelong skill that begins at the moment of birth.

Beaudoin & Goldin (2014) aimed to investigate the effectiveness of gestures in school aged children. They found that children who were told to gesture produced significantly more responses involving multiple perspectives in speech after a lesson in moral reasoning than children who received no instructions to gesture

(Beaudoin & Goldin 2014). They concluded that children who were making use of gestures on their own prior to the lesson or children who were instructed to make use of gestures ultimately gained more depth of the lessons on morality and also formed stronger opinions whilst taking others perspectives into consideration. According to the researchers, concepts that require moral reasoning are not inherently spatial however, the use of gestures allowed the learners to make use of spatial learning mechanisms (Beaudoin & Goldin 2014). Therefore, encouraging children to gesture allows a better understanding of complex topics such as moral reasoning and allows individuals to take multiple perspectives into account.

KINESTHETIC MOVEMENT

CMC employs kinesthetic elements within its lesson activities. The children physically walk along a conversation path as they step on individual conversation stones that represent the various components of a conversation (i.e. Hello, Conversation Starter, Topics of Conversation, Conversation Stopper, Goodbye). As the children step along the path, they throw a conversation ball back and forth whilst sharing speaking turns with their conversation partners.

As previously stated in Pasc's (2016) study, music and movement facilitated the parent-child relationship and improved the child's ability to better understand the communication of others.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY: CREATE CONNECTION - CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIP

When children develop secure early attachments with their primary caregivers (i.e. parents, family, etc.) during their developmental years, they come into the school system with the valuable coping skills that will be needed to help them navigate through what might otherwise feel like a foreign land. Being deeply rooted with safe attachments, such individuals can move forward to create and maintain healthy social-emotional connections with others (i.e. peers, teachers, etc.). These connections can then lead to the development of a safety net from which the children can grow in skill and confidence. This flourishing and vibrant culture can then foster curiosity and a desire to venture forth into the world of learning.

The CMC program is designed with a complete understanding and appreciation for the broad aspects of social communication. Though it is initially rooted within the blueprint of pragmatics, CMC recognizes and

addresses many of the other significant features that influence one's social emotional development. CMC values the understanding that early attachment styles can impact a child's social and emotional development prior to entering the school system. It also recognizes that in the absence of strong early attachments, there is much that educators can do to create a safe environment from which such children can grow. Furthermore, the CMC program recognizes that the act of conversation provides a natural conduit from which to nurture a child's social and emotional connections.

Attachment involves the strong bonds of affection that are formed within human beings (Khodabakhsh, 2012). Research states that the two dimensions of attachment are comfort and anxiety (Khodabakhsh, 2012). All individuals show high or low comfort in behaviors and emotions as well as high or low levels of anxiety (Khodabakhsh, 2012). The two main forms of attachment are secure or insecure (Khodabakhsh, 2012). There is a strong correlation between attachment styles and empathy (Kohdabakhsh, 2012). Research indicates that even in infancy, the development of empathy is directly related to the quality of early attachments that children experience with their primary caregivers (Khodabakhsh, 2012).

In a large study, Khodabakhsh (2012) investigated the correlation between attachment styles and empathy with 370 university students. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine their attachment style (Khodabakhsh, 2012). They were then asked to complete a multidimensional questionnaire of empathy (Khodabakhsh, 2012). Results conveyed that those who had a secure attachment style were more empathetic compared to those who had an insecure attachment style (Khodabakhsh, 2012).

Opportunities to create healthy attachments during childhood is crucial. These experiences allow children to develop a secure attachment style which can translate into the formation or development of supportive relationships (Khodabakhsh, 2012). As children grow to trust individuals who are empathetic towards them, they too can grow in their ability to respond with sensitivity and empathy towards others (Khodabakhsh, 2012). Early and sustained opportunities to receive and give empathy can then create the fertile soil to grow a child into a truly empathic adult.

SUMMARY

Color My Conversation employs a variety of teaching methods to keep the child engaged with learning. It recognizes and values the acquisition of a curious mind. When children develop a sense of curiosity for the act of conversation and for each other, motivation to engage in social interactions with others may be a natural outcome. When the Conversation Coach discovers their own sense of curiosity towards the topic of social communication, they can bring their enthusiasm into the teaching moments and also into the greater learning environment. Curiosity can be contagious!

Through its fundamental principles (i.e. errorless learning, multisensory teaching, and emotional literacy), Color My Conversation seeks to provide programming that is easy to learn in the early stages of skill acquisition. It seeks to create engaging activities that highlight the enjoyable nature of being in the presence of others whilst experiencing social encounters together. Color My Conversation also seeks to promote opportunities for all participants to gain a deeper sense of self (self-reflection, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-regulation, etc.) and others (perspective taking, empathy, etc.).

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COLOR MY CONVERSATION
SOCIAL LANGUAGE-BASED CURRICULUM

Color My Conversation - Edition Two (2016) is a multisensory social language-based curriculum that is intended to take children from a basic greeting to the most complicated conversation that they are capable of having. The art of conversation unfolds like a blueprint allowing the children to hone their verbal and nonverbal interactions with others as they experience multiple opportunities to make social and emotional connections with the significant people in their lives.

Color My Conversation is primarily intended for children aged 5-14 years however, it is easily adaptable for children and teens outside of this age range. The CMC program can be implemented in a variety of settings (i.e. individual, small group, classroom) within a variety of locations (i.e. classroom, clinic, home). The CMC materials, provided within the kit, include the following: 12 Stepping Floor Graphics, 100 Picture Cards, 50 Game Tokens, 50 Dry Erasable Wall Display Cards, 2 Dry Erase Pens, Cloth Ribbon (approximately 9.5 ft), Game Board, CMC Ball, Classroom Poster, Instructional Manual, Music and lyrics.

The CMC program is flexible in relation to its length of use. It is typically implemented over a 14 to 16-week period however, it can easily be extended and adapted so as to be used in curriculum throughout the school calendar year. The CMC program is rooted within pragmatics primarily within the first 8 lessons however, the full curriculum also addresses many other significant features of a child's social and emotional development (i.e. language processing, social cognition, and social interactions) as well.

Teaching concepts within the Beginner Level (Lessons One to Three) focus on the following three basic social interactions: greetings, chitchat, and longer conversations with embedded topics. Lesson One addresses greetings and farewells. These social acts are the easiest and fastest way to engage in an interaction with another individual. They are unique because they can be done with or without words through our use of eye contact, facial expressions (i.e. smiles) and body gestures (i.e. waves). Lesson Two focuses on the use of chit chat or small talk. This conversational act typically consists of a greeting, some conversation starters (i.e. How are you?), some conversation stoppers (i.e. Well, I'd better be on my way! Nice chatting with you!) and a farewell. Greetings or chit chat are relatively easy to do because they tend to be predictable. They are predictable because they are redundant; we tend to say and/or do the same kinds of things.

A skilled conversationalist will know how to adapt their verbal and nonverbal communication to meet the needs of others. When we say and do things that are expected, our conversation partners are more likely to feel comfortable and safe with us. As adept conversationalists we will say and do what is expected by adapting ourselves appropriately to meet the needs of our conversation partner and the setting with which we are engaging.

Greetings and chit chat are vital social interactions that allow us to initiate and maintain social relationships. From a relational standpoint, these two social interactions bring us into proximity with others and allow us to connect with them through our use of words and actions (i.e. eye contact, smiles, waves, hugs, etc.). Within families, these simple social acts are a way to show love and affection to those we hold most dear. Within an academic setting, these small gestures of kindness provide opportunities to initiate or sustain social connections which can then foster a warm and inviting atmosphere within the school community.

Embedded within our longer conversations, are opportunities to engage in a variety of topics with our conversation partners. In Lesson Three, the children learn about topics of conversation and how to engage on these topics for three conversational turns. They have an opportunity to explore their personal topics of interest and those held by their conversation partners. Through this process there is the opportunity to learn more about self and others. Often the children will discover that they have common areas of interest. From a relational standpoint, this discovery of shared topics is a significant part in initiating deeper social connections. Common interests are often foundational in nurturing relationships.

The Intermediate Level (Lessons Four to Nine) of the CMC program addresses a number of vital conversational tools (i.e. questions, comments, topic transitions, nonverbal communication) that are needed to stay engaged on a topic of conversation. Lesson Four focuses on the use of the five WH questions (i.e. Who, What, When, Where, Why) and Lesson Five focuses on the use of Yes/No Questions. For younger children, these two lessons are combined however, for the older children, they have opportunities to learn how to best use their questions to elicit conversation with others. From a relational standpoint, questions allow us to explore and discover more about our conversation partners. Follow up questions are of particular value as conversationalists who use them are considered to be more likeable and caring (Huang, 2017).

Lesson Six addresses the use of comments (i.e. Cool!, Good for you!, I'm sorry to hear that!). Like questions, comments have the potential to move conversations forward in such a way as to show that we are listening to our conversation partners and interested in what they have to say. From a relational standpoint, comments also have the potential to help others feel cared for and valued. Lesson Seven focuses on the use of topic transitions (i.e. By the way …). The use of topic transitions may be of less relational value compared to other conversational features however, they are very important. When topic transitions are used correctly, it is unlikely that others will notice. In contrast, if they are used incorrectly or not used at all, it is highly likely that it will be noticed. Adept conversationalists take others perspective in mind when using topic transitions. They think ahead about what will be needed to help their conversation partner follow their train of thought. They will say (i.e. That makes me think of …) and/or do things (i.e. sigh, look away) in order to prepare their conversation partners for the transitions.

Lesson Eight introduces some basic concepts that focus on emotional literacy and nonverbal communication. An adept conversationalist has the ability to think about self, think about others, and think about how others might be thinking about them. Reading nonverbal communication and knowing how to manage one's emotions is a very complex process. The intent in Lesson Eight is to simply introduce some basic concepts so as to increase the children's awareness of emotions and nonverbal communication. From a relational standpoint, being able to manage oneself in relation to self and others is a vital component in becoming an adept communicator.

Lesson Nine is a celebration for the end of the Intermediate Level. The children have a craft party with snacks and beverages. The craft that they make (i.e. beaded bracelet, book mark) can be used as a visual/tactile reminder for the conversational features that they have learned about within the Beginner and Intermediate Level lessons. For the Conversation Coach, Lesson Nine represents an opportunity to do a re-assessment of the children's use of conversation features within a natural environment. This information can then be used to drive instruction within later lessons.

The Advanced Level (Lesson Ten) of the CMC program focuses on honing conversational turn taking (i.e. my topic, your topic, shared topics) and the use of one's social filter (i.e. tending to what we say out loud). This is also where the Conversation Coach might consider introducing some basic tools for developing

conversational narratives. Adept conversationalists know how to be engaged listeners who understand the importance of sharing talking time. They also know how to filter information (i.e. facts, opinions, stories) in such a way that what they say and do is well received by others. From a relational standpoint, these skills are vital in the development and fostering of strong interpersonal relationships.

The Expert Level (Lessons Eleven and Twelve) provides opportunities for the children to practice their conversation skills in increasingly more natural settings. In Lesson Eleven, the children do carryover assignments outside of the structured learning environment (i.e. school community, greater community). In Lesson Twelve, they practice specific conversational acts (i.e. receiving a compliment, entering a conversation that is underway, etc.) that have not been previously addressed within earlier lessons. From a relational standpoint, these experiences allow the children to be part of the planning process in determining how best to practice, evaluate and adjust their skills so as to use them within naturally occurring situations.

In addition to the 12 basic lessons, Section Two of the CMC program provides adaptations that simplify the Beginner Level of the program for children who have significant cognitive challenges. For the more adept conversationalists, the Supplementary Section of the manual provides specific interactive activities that focus on the development of character and leadership skills. Also provided in this section are additional activities (i.e. Fifty Questions I'm Glad You Asked!), questionnaires for reporting on self and others, the CMC Assessment Rubric, and a selection of data keeping forms.

The primary purpose of the CMC program is to support conversation skills for all children however, embedded within the lessons are multiple opportunities to create social and emotional connections with self and others.