

Beyond Recitation: Supporting Teacher Candidates and Early Career Teachers in Developing Dialogic Teaching Practices

Symposium Overview and Objectives

Despite considerable research on the pedagogical power of dialogically organized instruction for learning and for democratic participation, recitation discourse pervades United States classrooms. This critical problem motivates the symposium, which explores two questions: a) What approaches, theories, and methods can teacher educators mobilize to support teacher candidates (TCs) in moving beyond recitation discourse toward the goal of better serving diverse students and pluralistic classrooms in a democratic society? and b) How, with support, do teacher candidates move beyond recitation discourse in the earliest experiences of their careers to broaden their repertoires for managing classroom interactions? The presenters are scholars of classroom discourse who are also English and social studies teacher educators.

Background and Significance

Teachers who organize classroom interactions dialogically design and orchestrate multi-vocal discourse that meaningfully engages student voices, ideas, and responses. Although *open discussion* is one celebrated way to organize instruction dialogically, researchers identify many variables for studying and developing dialogic classroom interactions: a) turn-taking patterns (e.g., Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), b) qualities and types of questions posed by teachers and students (e.g., authentic vs. test questions; questions incorporating uptake of previous utterances) (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991), c) ratio of teacher to student questions (Nystrand et al., 2003) d) conversational genres, such as responsive narrative or participant example, that entail extended student turns (Author 1, 2008; Wortham, 2006), and e) substantive student-to-student interactions, often in the form of *discussion* (Nystrand, 1997; Langer, 1995). Conflict is often central to dialogically organized classroom discourse (Enciso, 1997; Author 2, 2009).

Dialogically organized instruction can achieve valued outcomes. Large-scale correlational studies link discussion and other dialogic indicators to achievement gains and to student engagement (e.g., Applebee et al., 2003; Kelly, 2008) Participating in discussion can help students build important conceptual understandings, analyze multiple and competing ideas, and formulate clear descriptions and arguments. Discussion is also an outcome itself, since it can help students develop skills for engaging in public discourse and dispositions to value such participation (Author 2, 2009).

Despite an established research base on discussion and other dialogic practices in classrooms of experienced teachers, little research focuses on how – through designs and practices in teacher education – early career teachers can move beyond familiar recitation practices. Since TCs rarely experience dialogically organized instruction as secondary students or in field placements, they face the challenge of developing dialogic practices from descriptions in methods class or

professional literature. Even among experienced teachers, dialogic instruction remains rare in English and social studies classrooms, especially those serving low SES students in poorly resourced schools (Applebee et al, 2003; Author 2, 2009).

Advocates of dialogically organized instruction are infusing teacher education with opportunities for teacher candidates to learn how to manage discussion and other forms of classroom interaction and researching their efforts. The symposium offers a dialogue across distinct approaches.

Symposium Organization

After an introduction by the chair, one conceptual paper will be followed by two empirical papers. A discussant will respond to the papers and pose questions to open dialogue.

Paper 1: Teaching New Social Studies Teachers how to Teach With and For Discussion

Just as it is widely understood that students do not learn how to participate in discussions without instruction, pre-service teacher educators and professional development experts have come to understand that teachers need to be taught how to teach with and for discussion. To that end, three different approaches to teaching social studies teachers about discussion teaching will be presented, compared, and critiqued in this conceptual paper. All are similar because they provide an orientation to the existing empirical literature on discussion in social studies education. But there are significant differences among the three that warrant careful consideration by teacher educators.

The first approach is a skill-based sequence for social studies methods classes that builds conceptual understanding about what discussion is (and is not) and provides Teacher Candidates (TCs) immersion in various forms of discussion, practice in designing and leading discussion in middle and high school classes, and opportunities for reflection. This approach is quite introductory, but has worked well with teacher candidates (Author 2, 2006).

The second approach is a 20-30 hour course for early career teachers. Using a form of collaborative lesson study, professional development experts guide early career teachers through design, experimentation, and reflection on teaching discussion in their own context, focusing their attention on what their students are learning and why. In this approach, teachers videotape their teaching and survey their students regarding the nature of the classroom climate and what students think they are learning (or not, as the case may be).

The third approach is a new model to be used with teacher candidates or early-career teachers. It focuses on the *ethics* of leading classroom discussions (Kunzman, 2006). Even though there is now a more robust (although still small) body of empirical evidence about how to teach with and for discussion in social studies classes, there are many ethical dilemmas

inherent in this form of teaching about which empirical evidence alone provides scant guidance. For example, should teachers share their own political views with students during discussion? Should some issues be stricken from the curriculum because they are especially sensitive for some students? What criteria should be used to determine whether a topic is presented as a closed or open question? What are the best aims for discussion teaching? This new model engages TCs and teachers in deliberations about these questions using materials developed for and from a year-long series of dialogues among educational philosophers and educators.

Paper 2

Dialogic tools and instructional scaffolding: Building student interaction into language arts lessons

Objectives

Moving novice teachers beyond familiar routines of recitation takes careful instruction, powerful alternative models, and collaborative support for repeated opportunities to practice. This empirical paper analyzes video clips and related documents from English teacher candidates attempting dialogic instruction and using video and Web 2.0 technologies to study their efforts over the course of a year-long internship. We ask: Given a teacher preparation program that promotes dialogic instruction, a) In what planning practices do teacher candidates (TCs) engage, b) What interactional patterns are visible in TCs' classrooms? And c) How are (a) and (b) related to each other and to the contextual factors of TCs' teaching environments?

Theoretical Framework

The focal preservice English education program in the study grounds work with teacher candidates in dialogic theory. We respond to work of scholars who articulate the implications of dialogic theory (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986) for English Education and study classroom interactions using this frame. We also draw on research and theory regarding the effective sequencing of instruction and practice in preservice teacher education, viewing it as a recursive process (Author 1 et al. 2010; Grossman et al., 2009).

Method

Data generation. 82 secondary English TCs in diverse placements took part in a two-year study. Four times throughout their placement year, all TCs recorded themselves teaching and submitted a 5-minute clip of the lesson to a Web-based platform, Voicethread. Each clip was accompanied by a document containing contextualizing material, lesson plans, transcript, and a reflection. The present analysis studies the text-based material accompanying approximately 280 video posts.

Analysis. Each chain of communication was coded for 26 variables organized into three categories: contextual factors, planning, and discourse

patterns. Patterns across and relationships among variables were identified with descriptive statistics, which provided an overview of instructional practices across the corpus and enabled us to isolate a smaller sample of TCs particularly successful at using dialogic instruction for follow-up case studies.

Findings and Significance

Most research literature on preservice teaching relies on data from the teacher education classroom, on anecdotal accounts, or on observations of placement classrooms. Our paper illuminates how, across a large program, TCs engineered interactions so that student voices formed an integral part of classroom discourse. Although this study was designed so that TCs' intentionally selected video clips to share with others, their proportion of authentic questions to non-authentic questions of 2.8:1 is orders of magnitude above previous studies of experienced teachers. While contextual factors such as grade level and school type were related to classroom discourse patterns, teacher planning was more significantly associated with more interactive patterns. TCs' use of dialogic tools (documents and practices intended to scaffold dialogic interaction) was significantly related to high student-student interaction, with runs of student turns associated with the deliberate use and sequencing of these tools. By drawing upon a substantial corpus of transcripts of talk from teacher candidates' classrooms and related documents about classroom interaction, this work provides evidentiary scope that is often lacking in research on the impact of preservice teacher education.

Paper 3: Developing strategies for dialogic discussions of multicultural literature with early career teachers

Background, Problem, and Objectives

Multicultural literature is a critical component of the English curriculum. The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (1996) call for students to “read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world” (p. 3). This call to action assumes that multicultural literature instruction should include more than rote knowledge of literary conventions or authoritative interpretations and should instead involve students in dialogic discussions promoting exploration of diverse perspectives. However, research suggests that prominent discussion strategies used to engage students in multicultural literature are limited in their ability to move students toward dialogism.

Students are often encouraged to discuss multicultural texts by voicing personal connections between their own experiences and those represented in texts. This response strategy is problematic given that students often (a) resist engagement with characters to which they cannot directly relate or texts that are emotionally difficult to manage (e.g., Moller & Allen, 2001) or (b) over-identify with unfamiliar characters, thus simplifying or universalizing complex experiences of discrimination and oppression (e.g., Grobman, 2007).

Research is needed that investigates strategies for discussing multicultural literature that encourage students to embrace productive conflict and tension (Bakhtin, 1981) and to “explain, elaborate, and defend one’s position to others” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 158). In response, this paper presents research on a model premised on three principles:

1. *Multicultural literature discussion should encourage the consideration of alternative perspectives and value stances* (Author 3 et al., 2007).
2. *Multicultural literature discussion should encourage students to acknowledge similarities, differences and “differences within difference”* (Grobman, 2007).
3. *Multicultural literature discussion should encourage students to “talk back” to problematic constructions of difference* (Enciso, 1997).

Design, Methods, Results, Significance

This on-going study is grounded in the paradigm of design-based research, which aims to refine innovations through multiple cycles of design, enactment, analysis, and redesign (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). Participants include four early career English teachers participating in five cycles of design, enactment, and analysis that each enact classroom discussion of multicultural literature incorporating the design principles. The teachers and researcher meet to evaluate videotapes of the discussions and refine the design principles following each classroom discussion enactment.

Primary data sources include videotapes of classroom literature discussions. Analysis investigates the dialogic quality of classroom discussion of literature through evidence (or lack thereof) of uptake and authentic questioning (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991), as well as extended stretches of interaction among students (Langer, 1995). The work also pinpoints alignment (or not) between the evolving design principles and students' discussions, pinpointing moments when students try on alternative and multiple perspectives, talk back to texts, and problematize constructions of difference. This presentation ends with a discussion of the refined design principles and effective discussion strategies to which they are linked. This analysis contributes to refiguring the goals for discussing multicultural literature, arguing for developing critical thinking necessary for understanding all texts as culturally imbued in an increasingly globalized world.

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