NAVIGATING PRODUCTIVE DOMAINS OF DIALOGIC WORK

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dialogic pedagogies—variously called dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2020), dialogically organized instruction (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997), and other, similar names—have long been a subject of study and theorizing. The student-centered discussion practices associated with these approaches have been shown to be effective both for student learning outcomes (e.g. Kamil et al., 2008; Resnick et al., 2018) and in developing and maintaining communities of learning (e.g. Bielaczyc et al., 2011). Some scholars in particular highlight the inherently democratic nature of dialogic learning (Michaels et al., 2008; Segal et al., 2017), and emphasize its importance in enabling students to manage the conflicts which this generation will inherit (Alexander, 2020). However, studies continue to demonstrate a lack of dialogic engagement in the typical classroom (Applebee et al., 2003; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997; Swanson et al., 2016).

Theorists and researchers have constructed a variety of frameworks and tools to enable teachers to shift their classroom practices and to help guide students into dialogic work. The guidance provided most often requires teachers to plan (or replan) their instruction around recommended techniques or protocols, guiding teachers and students into specified talk moves intended to engender learning and collaboration (Alexander, 2020; Michaels et al., 2010; Reznitskaya & Wilkinson, 2021; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011).

With their focus on teacher practice and talk structures, these approaches rarely explicitly engage students in the shaping of this work, instead relying on the teacher's authority to alter the structure and nature of interactions in the room.

While these expert recommendations provide a wealth of resources to work with, their narrow focus on technique and their book-length treatments may contribute to what Sedova et al. (2020) refer to as the "unbearable complexity of change" (p. 31) inhibiting broader implementation of dialogic teaching. Numerous teacher professional development programs have also been generated to support dialogic instruction (e.g. Barak & Lefstein, 2022; Michaels & O'Connor, 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2017) with varying levels of success (Sedova et al., 2020), and broader uptake of dialogic practices remains elusive.

The goal of the instrument designed for this thesis is to provide teachers a tool for exploring and advancing their own dialogic practices through reflection, information gathering, and action, without necessarily needing to engage in extensive and sometimes difficult to procure professional development programs. Rather than providing a narrowly proposed, almost monologic vision of how dialogic instruction ought to be enacted, I aim to pose questions and highlight areas of challenge and potential shift for teachers, allowing readers to choose their own areas of focus and action based on their and their students' needs.

Review of the Literature

Dialogic Pedagogy

Dialogic pedagogy (DP) is an umbrella term broadly encompassing instructional practices and stances focused on encouraging extended student talk in the pursuit of learning goals. While examples of such instruction can be seen throughout history (as with Socrates or Confucius), its modern conceptualization is often framed within the concepts of theorists like Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and Freire. As Kim and Wilkinson (2019) have pointed out, though, the existing theoretical frameworks of DP are far from unified and often suffer from a lack of agreement among writers regarding basic terminology and definitions.

Alexander (2020) has provided some of the most extensive explanations of dialogic teaching, cataloging its qualities and identifying a "repertoire" of teaching moves that accompany this work. According to Alexander (2020), "*Dialogic teaching* is a pedagogy of the spoken word that harnesses the power of dialogue…to stimulate and extend students' thinking, learning, knowing and understanding, and to enable them to discuss, reason and argue" (p.128). Work within a dialogically organized classroom adheres to six key principles: it is *collective*, *supportive*, *reciprocal*, *deliberative*, *cumulative*, and *purposeful* (Alexander, 2020, p. 131). Other definitions, descriptions, and labels compete for common use, with Mercer's (Littleton & Mercer, 2013) concept of exploratory talk and Resnick's (Michaels et al., 2008) Accountable Talk serving as prominent examples, as well as Murphy's (Wilkinson et al., 2010) Quality Talk. Though each model is distinct, there is significant overlap in their goals and values, and the labels

themselves emphasize that regardless of the framework, the dialogic classroom is not focused on just *any* kind of interaction, but rather specific kinds of thoughtful, deliberate conversation, discussion, and argumentation.

One reason for researchers' sustained interest in DP is the wide range of traditional, school-related benefits associated with DP. Examining the connections between discussion-based instruction and student literacy performance, Applebee et al. (2003) found that "high academic demands and discussion-based approaches were significantly related to spring performance" and "were effective across a range of situations, for students of varying levels of academic ability, whatever classrooms they were in" (p. 719), regardless of race or ethnicity. These findings have been echoed by others (eg. Aukerman et al., 2016; McKeown et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2019). In addition to DP's apparent contributions to student literacy, it has also been drawn upon to positive effect in math instruction (e.g. Attard et al., 2018), science instruction (e.g. Haneda & Wells, 2010), language learning (e.g. Haneda & Wells, 2008), and other disciplines. Capturing some of the breadth of positive results, Resnick et al. (2018) described findings indicating that dialogic teaching can result in *better initial learning* for students, stronger *retention* of learning gains, greater likelihood of *far transfer* of learning, and even increases in *general intelligence* (p. 323).

Beyond the focus on learning gains, some authors have chosen to emphasize other perceived strengths. Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) and Matusov (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2014), for example, stressed the democratic nature of dialogic participation and the centrality of student agency; others illustrated connections to identity and self-concept (e.g. Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2015; Snell & Lefstein, 2018). Bielaczyc et al.

(2011) placed many of these practices in the center of their recommendations for creating a community of learners. Alexander (2020) highlighted the importance of dialogic thinking in modern society, noting that "[d]emocracies, and institutions at every level within them, need people who can argue, challenge, question, present cases and evaluate them; and who can test the argument and rhetoric of others" (p. 130; see similar arguments from Segal et al., 2017 and Michaels et al., 2008). Broadly speaking, these researchers and theorists have argued that in addition to DP's positive effects on student learning, it is also supportive of students' well-being and may help prepare them to participate in other learning communities and engage meaningfully in the public sphere. Moreover, students and teachers appear to simply *enjoy* DP (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997).

One area of tension in the literature is the conceptualization of DP as either primarily a set of observable practices one engages in in the classroom—essentially a technique or method of instruction—or as primarily a broader instructional stance (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). Methods and stance are of course closely related, with each reciprocally affecting the other: as Boyd & Markarian (2011) describe, "Instructional stance is made visible in the patterns of talk – turn-taking norms, types of questioning and response, and time students have to talk; the subject of talk – who gets to select and control it and who has interpretive authority; and illocutionary force – the degree to which the intentions of the speaker are taken up into the stream of discourse" (pp. 516-517). However, even as stance makes itself known in the visible practices of the classroom, Boyd & Markarian (2022) caution against a decontextualized focus on observable, surface-level elements such as isolated speech patterns or practices, instead

arguing that "dialogic teaching is not defined by discourse structure so much as by discourse *function*" (p. 274). Alexander (2020), seeking to make a similar point, quotes Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) at length:

> Authentic questions, discussion and small group work have important instructional potential, but unless they are used in relation to serious instructional goals and, more important, unless they assign significant and serious epistemic roles to students that the students themselves can value, they may be little more than pleasant diversions" (as cited in Alexander, 2020, p. 113).

Sparseness of Dialogic Pedagogy in Classrooms

For all of its documented benefits, extended student discussion remains the exception rather than the rule in most classrooms. Nystrand and Gamoran (1997), over the course of over 450 classroom observations in more than 100 8th and 9th grade English classes, found that "[d]iscussion and small-group work were rare. On average, discussion took 50 seconds per class in eighth grade and less than 15 seconds in grade 9" (p. 42). More recently, Swanson et al. (2016) found that 80.7% of the classes they observed contained no class or small-group discussion at all and that more than half of the ELA teachers they studied "were never observed conducting or facilitating discussions" (p. 14). Instead of collective, reciprocal, cumulative dialogue engaging multiple participants, what researchers have seen in classrooms tends to be a pattern of interaction referred to as IRE—initiation, response, and evaluation (Mehan, 1979)—in which the teacher poses a question intended to test students' knowledge or retention of information, calls on a

single student for their response, and then either explicitly or implicitly evaluates that response as correct or incorrect. Of these patterns, Sedova et al. (2020) wrote:

> Student responses are in accordance with the nature of teacher questions: they are short and not elaborated, often amounting to just one word. . . . Students only rarely have the opportunity to express elaborate talk with reasoning that they have reached after performing thinking processes of high cognitive levels. (p. 4)

Although many acknowledge that IRE patterns may still exist within larger dialogic encounters in the classroom (e.g. Boyd & Markarian, 2022), the dominance of this mode of discourse is interpreted as reflecting a traditional, monologic instructional stance—that is, a belief that the teacher holds sole authority over what counts as valid knowledge and reasoning in the classroom (Sedova et al., 2020). Regardless of one's conceptualization of DP as practice or stance, research has indicated that both classroom practice *and* teacher stance are difficult to shift. Sedova et al. (2020) identified the barriers to shifting practice as *organizational constraints* (such as the perceived need to cover a certain amount of curriculum content within a limited timeframe), *teacher mindset* (including beliefs about how knowledge is imparted and what students are capable of doing), and the perceived *complexity of change* which inhibits teachers' sustained growth in the practice. However, a number of studies have demonstrated that changes in both practice and stance are possible (Adler et al., 2003; Alexander, 2017; Barak & Lefstein, 2022; Murphy et al., 2022).

Teachers seeking to engage in dialogic work have no shortage of resources available to them: Accountable Talk (Michaels et al., 2010), Quality Talk (Murphy et al., 2022), and Alexander's dialogic teaching (2020) are all examples of models meant to be

enacted with significant corresponding professional development. A number of practitioner-focused texts are also available, each targeting a particular aspect of teacher practice or classroom organization for reform (e.g. Dillon, 1988; Reznitskaya & Wilkinson, 2017a; Sherry, 2021; Walsh & Sattes, 2015; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Teachers may consult these works for instructional recommendations, rubrics, models of open-ended questions and follow-up prompts, dialogue protocols, and other tools; however, they tend to be framed as instructional techniques for improving particular student outcomes or developing discussions as a general feature of classroom instruction, rather than as instruments aimed at shifting both teachers' and students' stances toward, and participation in, instruction itself.

Theoretical Framework

Despite definitional disagreements within the field, both dialogic pedagogy and the instrument designed below are supported by existing theory. Vygotskian (1978) sociocultural theory posits that learning occurs as the result of social interactions, and that this learning is demonstrated through a shift in one's social participation. The interactions which give rise to learning experiences are primarily mediated via speech, which places spoken language at the crux of learning: because a person's spoken language also structures their *internal* thoughts, the shifts in social structures, motivations, and participations which shape a person's interactive speech also come to shape their internal thought processes (Sedova et al., 2020). Reznitskaya and Gregory (2013) illustrated this process using the example of a student who only realizes the vagueness of her idea when peers press for greater detail. This experience is internalized, and prior to subsequent interactions, the same student anticipates the questions and responses of her peers and

shapes her speech accordingly in advance. “What began as interpersonal interaction,” they write, “becomes an intrapersonal cognitive habit” (p. 118). Bakhtin’s (1981) concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia help further illuminate the forms of discourse believed to be productive: the dialogic classroom is a site where multiple voices interact in a dynamic tension which, ever unresolved, calls forth further dialogue (Nystrand, 2006).

Understood this way, learning is thus inextricably connected to the community and the contexts which give rise to these interactions. Lave and Wenger (Lave, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991) described the shifts in identity and interaction that take place during “legitimate peripheral participation”: less experienced newcomers engage in activities alongside old-timers and fully-fledged participants, apprenticing themselves to the habits and methods of the community in the course of their own participation, rather than through formal education. The patterns of interaction within the community persist through the force of social expectation and motivation. Boyd and Markarian (2011) showed that these patterns of *expectation* within a classroom can shape speakers’ dialogic practices even more than the precise construction of the immediate question or response, and used this to argue for the prioritization of dialogic stance over mere adherence to certain practices such as asking open-ended questions.

Rogoff et al.’s (1996) Community of Learners model is also instructive to the work of the dialogic classroom, particularly as it organizes the roles of the teacher and the students. The authors argued that in the community of learners, neither the teacher nor the students exclusively lead the direction of the learning work, nor does it involve “a patchwork of adult-run and children-run events” (p. 397), but rather both work actively

and in collaboration with one another. Even when there is a need for “strong leadership or extensive explanations to assist the group,” the teacher is “still carefully coordinating with and assisting the others in a shared endeavor” (p. 397). Such learning organizations emphasize the development of internal motivation, the consistency of collaboration throughout the program, and the process of learning over the creation of specific products (Rogoff et al., 1996).

Extending the focus on the classroom as a community, Bielaczyc and Collins (1999) named metacognition as a key principle in the design of an effective learning community, and described a model of collective self-monitoring in which the community periodically reflects on its knowledge, goals, and practices. The recursive benefits of metacognition are paralleled by the potential benefits of metadialogue or metatalk (Hackett-Hill, 2022). Kuhn et al. (2013) explored methods of examining students’ metatalk, or talk about the discourse itself rather than the topic of the discourse, as an indicator of their understanding of the norms of argumentation, also finding positive effects of metatalk on the uptake of these norms. Kuhn et al. (2020) also documented a correlation between group metatalk and success in coordinated action. One of the benefits of an emphasis on metacognition and metatalk is that the incorporation of these practices in the classroom further serves to center student contributions and to increase student ownership of the classroom discourse. “[C]hanging teacher talk,” wrote Edwards-Groves and Davidson (2019), “is not sufficient in itself to bring about more dialogic spaces. Students can and must be informed change agents in the process” (p. 135).

Finally, one cannot discuss learning communities and dialogic interaction without acknowledging the significance of participants’ racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural

identities. Models of culturally responsive (Gay, 2018) and relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2009) teaching emphasize that the teacher has a responsibility to be personally aware of their own and their students' cultural contexts in order to teach "*to and through* [students'] personal and cultural strengths" (Gay, 2018, p. 32), maintaining high expectations and orienting their work toward empowering, transformative, and humanistic goals. These models, including Milner's (2020) opportunity-centered teaching model, frame an ethic of instruction that is grounded in warmth and care for all students, a deep knowledge of student communities, and an obligation to deliberately work against racism and injustice.

The above descriptions of culturally responsive communities of practice grounded in Vygotskian and Bakhtinian understandings of socialized, language-based, dialogic learning constitute the primary theoretical foundations for this work.

CHAPTER II

PRODUCTIVE DOMAINS: A GEOGRAPHY OF DIALOGIC SPACES

An Introduction to the Tool

I'm glad you've chosen to take a look at this. I trust that you will find something useful in this work, and I feel secure in that trust not because of my own knowledge or experience, but because of yours—or rather, because this can be a meeting place for your own experiences and the experiences of many other educators, and in these meeting places we are challenged to grow. This is the nature of dialogue: It requires a response, and the act of responding shapes us, and our response calls for another in answer.

Before you go any further, and before I risk becoming even more florid in my writing about the power of dialogue, I want to provide some context for the categories, the prompts and reflections, and anything else that I've managed to fit in here. Essentially, the germ of this idea was born in some of my own experiences as a classroom teacher, and it began to grow as I continued a career in curriculum, coaching, and professional development. It began, as many things do, simply as a question that always rolled around in the back of my mind—the way a half-empty water bottle might roll around the back of your car every time you turn, reminding you that sometime, *sometime* you need to remember to pick it up. This was my question:

> *How can I have such an amazing conversation or discussion in one class period, and experience such absolute, soul-sucking drudgery in the next?*

Variations of this question include thoughts like, “Why is no one talking today?” or, “What am I doing wrong?” or, “Maybe this actually *is* a boring book and I am a boring person and I should go be boring somewhere else instead of here in front of these students, every day.” Other teachers I have met voice this in other terms, like, “I’m not sure my students are ready for this kind of discussion,” or “They just prefer to do their work on their own, so I give them question sheets.”

Before expanding into terminology and definitions, theory, research, and other areas that I truly do get a kick out of, I just have to say that at the core, I am simply here to talk and think about *dialogue*, and if you are here with me I take for granted that you care about dialogue as well: You want students who are engaged in conversations with you and with one another (whether in literal face-to-face encounters or through other means), and you want those conversations both to *do good work* and to *feel good* as well, like a green smoothie that’s a little heavy on the kale and ginger—even when it stings a little bit you feel like you’re getting something your system needs. Good dialogue makes you sit up and take notice, and then lean in.

So, I am sorry to inform you that I do not have an answer to my question about what makes one class’s chemistry click easily into place while another’s grinds like sandy gears. This is a text full of possibilities and open pathways, but it is not an answer book or a checklist, even if some parts of it may bear a passing resemblance. There are other books that are those things, and several of them are quite good and useful for the particular area they choose to focus on. For this, though, one metaphor that I keep returning to is that of a map—not a map to a destination (for I’ve no idea where you are

or exactly where you aim to be), but a crude map of the territory that may help us orient ourselves in useful ways, toward useful ends.

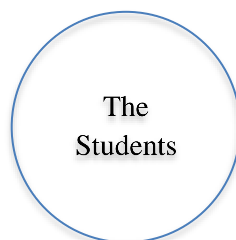
Using This Map

In recent years, particularly as SEL has become a more prominent focus in classrooms, the use of the Feeling Wheel (Willcox, 1982) has proliferated. The basic idea is that it is important to name how we feel so we can accurately recognize our emotions and respond to them productively; however, many people are quite unpracticed in this and benefit from some guidance. The wheel allows us to start with the basics: If I can say that I am *angry*, that is a start—and from there, I am encouraged to consider more specifically whether I am feeling *frustrated* or *bitter*, or perhaps even *humiliated*. If *humiliated*, I can consider further whether that is best described as feeling *disrespected* or *ridiculed*—or perhaps both.

Figure 1. Feelings Wheel. From Roberts, 2015.

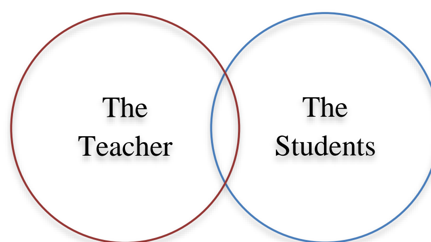
The simplicity of this tool is its highest virtue. Merely by naming and orienting a few familiar terms, it invites the reader to reflect on the valence and intensity of their feelings, whether perhaps it is appropriate that they feel *enraged* about an incident on the road or whether *annoyed* might be more proportional to the situation, and so forth. Strictly speaking, the emotion wheel *does* nothing: We bring ourselves to it, and in its reflection we consider ourselves. What matters is that things have been *named* which might have been *obscured*.

When we are thinking about the changes we hope to see in our classrooms, particularly in terms of dialogue and interaction amongst all the people therein, we have a tendency to look at the issue through a single lens:



If dialogue—or, more broadly and more to the point of this work, *dialogic instruction*—isn't coming together in our classroom in a satisfying way, many times our first inclination is to think, *something must be wrong with these students*. Perhaps they don't know the right things, or they haven't been raised the right ways, or they take things for granted, or they don't know how to behave, or they just talk too much as it is. Or maybe it's just because of Steven, whose incessant low-key bullying puts everybody off and stinks up the room like a fart.

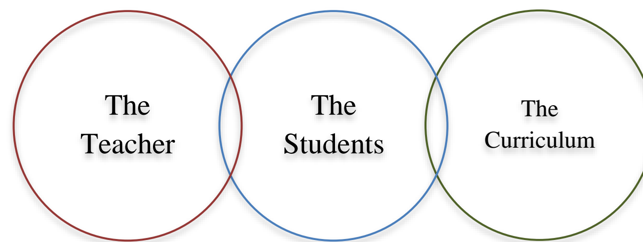
If we are more introspective by nature, we might have a second lens that we use to consider the situation:



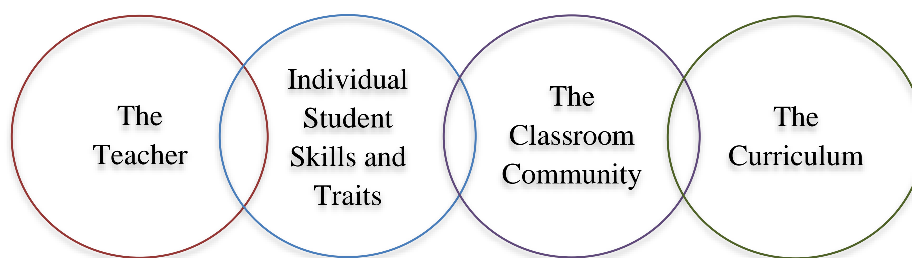
That is, we consider ourselves and the changes we might effect on the classroom through our teaching, or the things we might learn and change about ourselves. Between the two of these things, that actually covers quite a lot, and as best I can tell, the majority of

literature aimed at helping create more dialogic classrooms focuses primarily on the teacher, specifically. If the teacher can plan things in better ways, use more deliberately dialogic responses, attempt to draw students into conversation with one another using recognizable "talk moves," the rest (it is implied) will follow.

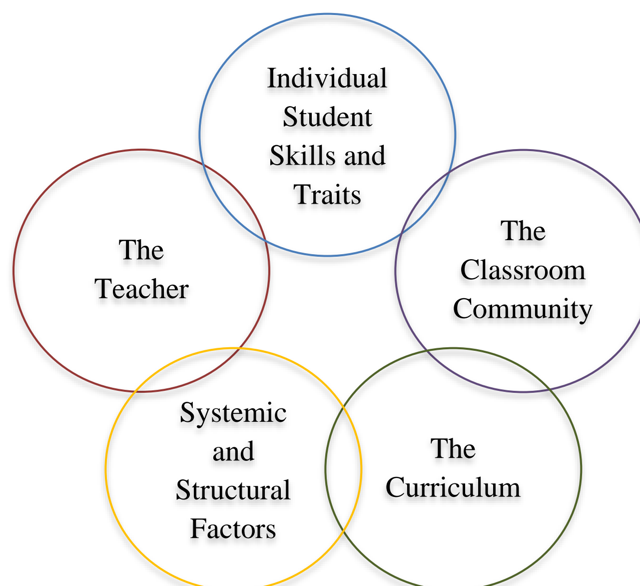
Mediating many of the interactions between the teacher and the students, though, is a third factor: the curriculum (in this case the *enacted curriculum*, regardless of whether it is drawn from a formal, published provider or not). The curriculum shapes the daily rhythms of class and carries with it expectations both explicit and implicit; it sets boundaries meant both to guide and to contain the learning of the classroom.



Moreover, we might reflect that "The Students" can be considered as individuals (in which case, we examine their skills and abilities, their personality traits, their education backgrounds, etc.) *and* as a group, a classroom community. For the community in a room is something more than and different from the sum of its individuals: Students share bonds with one another, they have rivals, they belong to cliques, they share moods, they generate a shared "classroom identity," and so forth. In short, the chemistry of the group is an important lens of its own, one that should not be subsumed within the category focused on the skills and knowledge of individual students.



Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the entire classroom and all who enter its doors exist within a larger context, a department inside a school inside a community. Far from being a private oasis, the classroom is in constant interaction with forces exterior to it: Testing schedules, administrative mandates, school policies, department goals, legal obligations, classroom observations, and curriculum adoption cycles, to name only a few. Teachers build instruction around these intrusions the way an oyster builds a pearl around an irritant, and many of us have become so accustomed to them we cease to examine their effect on our classroom efforts (or perhaps it is because resisting them has sometimes seemed futile and the effort required, overwhelming). Existing within a context is inescapable, yet while some elements can feel frustrating, there are numerous ways the structures within a school setting can positively support teachers and students.



Clarifying the Goal

This resource exists because classroom dialogue matters, but that statement merits unpacking. First, researcher Robin Alexander (2020) clarified that "dialogue" can be understood to mean *conversation*, *discussion*, *deliberation*, or *argumentation* (p. 37). While conversation certainly plays a role in the classroom, it is the latter three forms that tend to carry the weightier academic load: we *discuss*, we *deliberate*, and we *argue* in the service of what Engle and Conant (2002) referred to as "productive disciplinary engagement"; while dialogue can affect students' recall of information (Resnick, Asterhan, Clarke, et al., 2018), we're more typically interested in dialogue as a method of engaging in the *types of thinking* one does as a writer or literary critic, as a scientist, as a mathematician. Dialogue allows our students a socially-supported and incentivized arena for engaging in discipline-specific ways of thinking and knowing. It is also enjoyable (e.g. Nystrand & Gamoran, 1990) and effective across a variety of domains (Resnick, Asterhan, Clarke, et al., 2018), when thoughtfully approached.

"Thoughtfully approached." These words might act as a caveat to nearly any pedagogical trend. Excited proponents of a method promise results based on observations in carefully controlled studies, schools create new mandates based on these results, teachers receive an oversimplified set of requirements with little context or training, and students might make it through the experience without realizing that anything has changed at all. Making new practices easy to implement is a valid goal, but the very humanity of our students pushes back against simplicity: We have somewhere between 20-30 unique individuals in the room, and if we are going to effect change we must

possess greater flexibility in our knowledge and thinking than is permitted by a simple checklist of new requirements.

We can start by complicating our thinking about *dialogue* right now: We've said that discussion, deliberation, and argumentation are academically productive forms of dialogue that help students learn the "ways of knowing" within a subject-area community, and for some, that is enough—with that in mind, they are ready to pursue effective questioning and talk strategies and to teach students new protocols and relevant sentence stems. No disrespect to these teachers: these are fair goals and are each included within this resource.

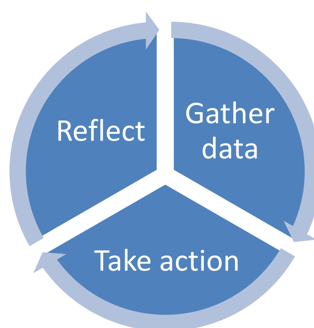
However, beyond mere dialogue is the further horizon of *dialogic teaching*, a term which incorporates dialogue but also implies much more. In a dialogic classroom—that is, a classroom which prioritizes the exchange of thinking and ideas between all of the humans inside it—certain traditional structures have been upended. While the teacher still leads this work and students rely on the teacher's expert guidance, the teacher's pedestal has been considerably lowered: they are no longer the sole source of information and knowledge in the room, and their approval is not the only approval that carries weight. Dialogic teaching does not eliminate hierarchies in the classroom, but it does flatten them and change how participants relate to one another (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007). And a change in these *relationships* necessarily results in a change in the *curriculum itself* (Elmore, 2008). If we transition from a classroom in which the teacher primarily lectures while the students take notes to one in which discipline-specific questions are put before students to think through and discuss, we must acknowledge that students are not learning precisely the same things. While the teacher must still be an expert in the subject

area, their declarative knowledge becomes less immediately useful; instead, they are likely to find themselves, like their students, grappling more with the larger problems and questions within their field rather than reciting information about it.

Dialogue is predicated on student agency and voice, it is knowledge-in-action (Applebee, 1996), and its practice aligns with our higher ideals about learning and education in ways that many monologic practices fail to. It is critical thinking, alive and active.

How Each Section is Organized

If our diagram containing the five different categories is the start of a reflection process, where does it go from there? In the specifics, it depends in which area you choose to begin, but in the general layout there is a deliberate design. It is loosely based on the cycle of action research, though it could also be seen as the simple cycle of instruction: reflect on what you have observed already, gather more information about areas of interest, take some kind of action, see what happens.



First, the idea is that you might look through some of the work within a category and reflect on whether it stands out to you in some way, noticing areas that are current strengths or areas of need in your classes. It's worth examining your own assumptions

about strengths and needs—you might think of a particular student behavior as one, when it's actually the other, for example. But while getting started, it seems simplest to look into an area that seems likely to have an impact on your classroom and to reflect on your own attitudes and practices in that area (or what you have seen from others, where applicable). You may find specific questions or even structured tools for reflection in a section: try them out.

Some of those reflection tools might generate data to examine (for example, you might record a section of your class and code the interactions you observe in that time); in other areas, collecting more information might require additional steps, such as student surveys or questionnaires included in the section. These tools are not intended to be comprehensive measures by any means, and if you get an idea of how you might add to one or change it or create something new to fill a gap, follow that instinct and give it a try. Moreover, you are likely to find that some tools in different sections overlap with one another for the simple reason that each of these areas is deeply connected and interrelated with every other one. There is no need to attempt every suggested tool or action herein; in fact to do so would bog down the vital work of your classroom.

As for that next critical step, taking an action, you will find suggestions and practices to look into, but this area is necessarily limited at this time. The broad strokes painted here are meant to give a sense of some things that might be helpful, but in truth there are almost innumerable possibilities, and the best response is likely one that you develop in thoughtful dialogue with your students and colleagues.

I close this introductory section with this: If you are hesitating to engage in more discussions and to do more dialogic work in your classrooms, the best thing to do is

simply to do it, and then to keep doing it. If having a text like this in your hands makes you feel like there is an elaborate set of steps to take before you give it a try, then drop the resource and instead go have a good conversation. Whatever you do, don't let this set of prompts and questions and ideas intimidate you into slowing down; instead, flip through and find things in here to revitalize your work or to open up new and productive pathways.

Section 1: Tending to the Classroom Community

Section Introduction

There's no wrong place to begin—in theory, you might see more immediate results by tweaking your tasks, and there's an argument to be made that you have more direct control over your own *personal* knowledge and skills. But there are several reasons for beginning with community. Notably, it can be considered a goal in itself—all of this work is meant to support the learning community, and a strong learning community amplifies constructive classroom dialogue like a megaphone: the changes that come when a group of students A) feels like they know and respect one another, and B) works collectively toward dialogic ends, are noticeable. "Good vibes" in the classroom can bring more students on board than a handful of high performers.

Teacher and student personalities differ, and cultural contexts affect many factors, but strong classroom communities seem to share certain traits. They are marked by trust and interdependence among students and a sense of safety, and the students have confidence in their teacher. Conversely, the sense of community can be damaged if

classes do not feel productive or reasonably orderly, if destructive behaviors go unaddressed, and if students do not believe they are learning.

Garrison et al. (1999), writing specifically about online learning communities, described the components of a Community of Inquiry (CoI) in terms of three overlapping "presences"—students' social presence, their cognitive presence, and the teaching presence.

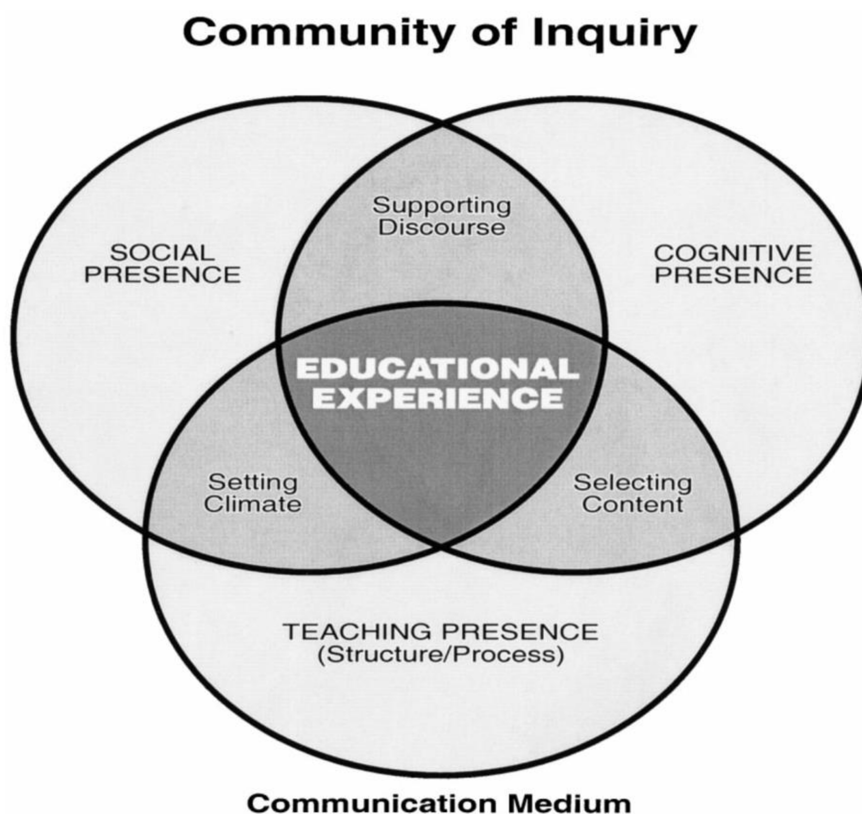


Figure 2. Community of Inquiry Model. From Garrison et al., 1999, p. 88.

Pollard et al. (2014) and others have argued that a fourth category, instructor social presence, belongs in the model as well. Though developed for understanding online learning, the model provides a strong fit for the classroom community as well. *Social presence* speaks of the ways students (and teachers) show up in the class as their authentic selves, coming across to others as "real people"—something they can only do if

the structures of the class permit and promote this. *Cognitive presence* is the critical thinking work of the classroom and all that accompanies it, while *teaching presence* is conceived of in terms of certain facilitative functions: less direct instruction, more curation of educational structures and experiences.

While other measures described below provide specific insights into the classroom community, the helpfulness of the CoI model is the simplicity of being able to ask questions like,

- What opportunities do students in my classroom have to show up as authentically socially present—to bring their full personality into the learning situation? Do I, as their instructor, come across as a “real person”?
- What is the overall cognitive atmosphere of my classroom? Do students engage readily with new ideas and with the ideas of their peers? Do *I*?
- How do I make use of my “teaching presence” in my classes, and how does this affect students’ ability to show up authentically and engage with new ideas? In what ways does my teaching presence enhance or inhibit these other areas?

Reflect

In addition to the questions included in the introduction above, consider:

- What are some examples of communities you have belonged to in your life? You might consider groups organized around interests or activities, beliefs, group membership, shared employment, or other factors. What positive aspects of your experiences in these groups would you hope students feel or experience in your classroom?

- What 3-5 words would you use to describe the current community in your classroom? What strengths can you point to? Where do you think those strengths originate—for example, if you sense that your students truly care about one another, how do you think that came to be?
- Taken together, do you believe the actions of your classroom community work toward learning and growth?
- In what ways have you witnessed your students learning from one another in your classroom?

Gather Additional Information

Different measures of a sense of community have been developed over time, but Cho et al.'s (2014) integrated measure incorporates the strengths of earlier surveys, such as Rovai's (2002), while including additional context-specific elements. In administering the Integrated Sense of Community Scale, respondents are given the questions below and asked to respond using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," though for the simplicity of your own administration you might consider a 5-point scale. Questions 14, 15, and 17 are reverse-coded, meaning that while you hope to see students *agreeing* with most statements, you hope to see more students *disagreeing* with these particular statements.

As with most measures included here, you may find it instructive to fill out a copy of the survey yourself in order to compare it with student responses. If you choose to use this measure with the class, tools like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey will make it

easier both to administer and to study student responses, and you may get extra mileage from the survey by asking an open-ended response question at the end, such as, “What else do you want me to know about the sense of community in this class?”

Integrated Sense of Community Scale Items

Shared Goals and Responsibility.

1. Students in this class know they can depend on each other should they need help.
2. Other students in the class make you feel good for helping.
3. Students in this class share responsibility.
4. There is a feeling that students in this class are willingly looking out for other fellow students.
5. Students in this class know they can get help from each other.
6. There is a clear sense of shared goals in this class.
7. Students in this class share common values.

Relationship With Instructor.

8. The relationship between the instructor and students is comfortable.
9. The instructor supports student comments.
10. Interactions with my instructor are generally positive.
11. The instructor gives me positive feedback when I make a comment in class.
12. My instructor respects each student in this class.

Shared Student Engagement.

13. Students are genuinely interested in the topics in this course.
14. The course content is not very interesting to me personally. (R)
15. Students do not seem engaged in this class. (R)
16. In this class everyone seems to be interested in the discussion topics.
17. I do not see the value of learning about this course content. (R)
18. The goals of this class are important to the students in the class.
19. The goals of this class are meaningful to the students in the class.
20. Students of this class have a clear understanding of mission and purpose.

Peer Valuation.

21. Students in this course treat each other with respect.
22. I respect my classmates.

Figure 3. Integrated Sense of Community Scale Items. From Cho et al., 2014, p. 734.

A strength of Cho et al.’s (2014) scale is that it specifically includes statements related to the instructor in the room, but another frequently used scale is Rovai’s (2002) Classroom Community Scale (CCS). While focused on the sense of community, the

statements in the CCS are focused on the respondent's *individual experience* of that community rather than their perception of what other students, in general, feel.

	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral (N)	Disagree (D)	Strongly disagree (SD)
1. I feel that students in this course care about each other	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
2. I feel that I am encouraged to ask questions	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
3. I feel connected to others in this course	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
4. I feel that it is hard to get help when I have a question	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
5. I do not feel a spirit of community	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
6. I feel that I receive timely feedback	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
7. I feel that this course is like a family	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
8. I feel uneasy exposing gaps in my understanding	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
9. I feel isolated in this course	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
10. I feel reluctant to speak openly	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
11. I trust others in this course	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
12. I feel that this course results in only modest learning	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
13. I feel that I can rely on others in this course	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
14. I feel that other students do not help me learn	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
15. I feel that members of this course depend on me	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
16. I feel that I am given ample opportunities to learn	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
17. I feel uncertain about others in this course	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
18. I feel that my educational needs are not being met	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
19. I feel confident that others will support me	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)
20. I feel that this course does not promote a desire to learn	(SA)	(A)	(N)	(D)	(SD)

Figure 4. Classroom Community Scale. From Rovai, 2002, p. 209.

Action Steps

As described in the introduction, the recommendations included here are only meant to cover a few possible actions or areas of need; your examination of your own classroom might take you in entirely different directions.

- Deliberately educate yourself about your students' languages and cultures, and seek to include aspects of these in meaningful and respectful ways within the coursework (Pérez, 2011). Students cannot bring their full social presence into the classroom if they do not feel it is welcome.
- Increase students' exposure to one another—let them get to know each other. While this will happen through engagement in dialogic coursework, it is worth the few minutes' investment to have students work through an occasional icebreaker in pairs and to insist they learn and use one another's names. Icebreaker activities can even be directly related to the content ("Explain to your partner which character you most relate to and why," for example). Keep these brief, but consider using them more frequently with classes in which students seem hesitant to share with one another.
- Set and maintain consistent expectations around respect and idea-sharing. There are many proposed sets of norms to choose from; however, Walsh and Sattes's (2015) proposed participation norms for discussion are excellent:
    - Speak as you are motivated to speak, without raising your hand.
    - Talk to one another, not to the teacher.
    - Share what you are thinking so others can learn from you.
    - Monitor your talk so as not to monopolize the conversation.

  - Listen to others respectfully, asking questions to understand.
  - Encourage others to speak, particularly those who are not participating. (p. 29)

  You might also explore Littleton and Mercer (2013), Resnick et al. (Resnick, Asterhan, & Clarke, 2018), and Reznitskaya and Wilkinson (2017a) for other proposed norms to draw from for use in your classroom.

- Flood the room with invitations for students to speak and share. There are, of course, ways to *compel* students to speak, but think carefully about your options.

Section 2: Minding the Curriculum: Texts, Tasks, Topics

Section Introduction

What do you expect students to talk about, and why? What medium or format for this dialogue will serve these goals best? Do students have access to enough information, and is the topic rich enough, to sustain a conversation about it? Having clear answers to these questions will solve a lot of problems before they begin: unproductive conversations often start with unproductive questions and unclear expectations.

Acknowledging that serendipitous discussions can and do arise, you'll be much better served with a clear plan in mind, and you'll want to consider the larger matter of what kinds of questions are appropriate for sustaining deep thinking within your discipline. To that end, Engle and Conant's (2002) construct of Productive Disciplinary Engagement (PDE) helps provide guidance. PDE, Engle (2012) writes, begins with *problematizing*, creating a situation in which students must navigate "disciplinary uncertainties" (p. 168). A good problem for students to work on is one that creates

“genuine uncertainty” (p. 169) in learners, is constructed in a way that connects to students’ motivations, and that embodies “’big ideas’ or other central aspects of the discipline in question” (p. 169), even if those aspects are not immediately clear to students.

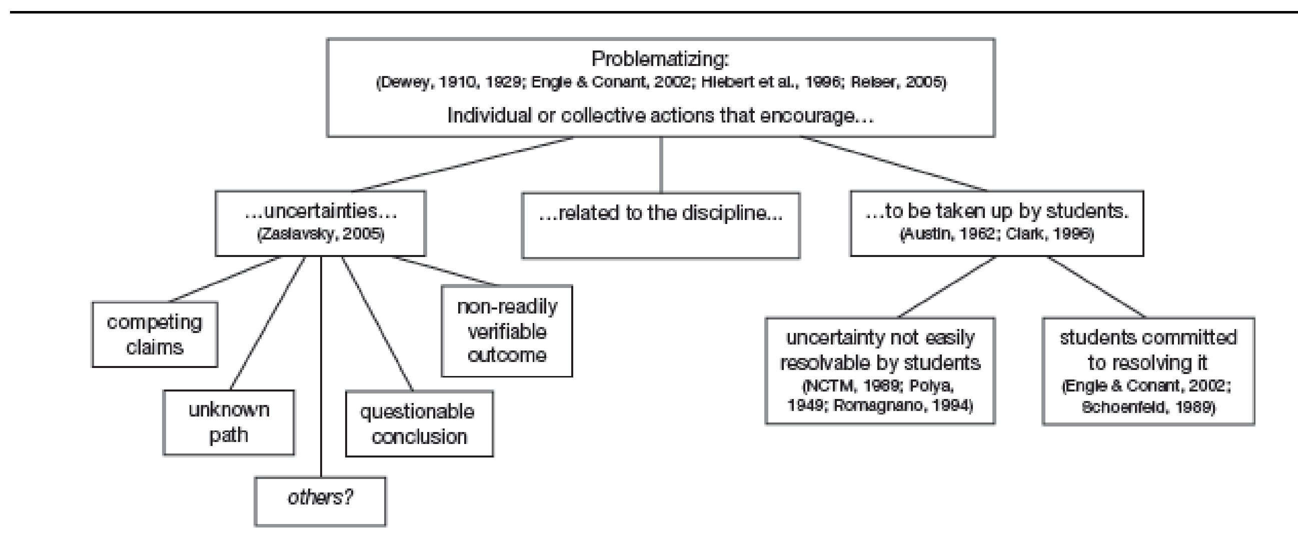


Figure 5. The process of problematizing. From Engle, 2012, p. 169.

Reznitskaya and Wilkinson (2017b), focusing especially on argumentation, explain what this might look like in an ELA classroom:

> In our language arts classrooms, inquiry dialogue starts with a big question that is contestable, relevant to students' interests, and central to the major themes raised in a text previously read by the students. In fiction texts, big questions often focus on moral dilemmas faced by the characters (e.g., Should Rosara have gone to the party? Did the boy deserve a second chance?). In informational texts, the questions typically address policy decisions (e.g., Should students have the right to wear what they want to school? Should the rangers have killed the bear?). Big

> questions prompt students to examine complex concepts such as friendship, justice, individual freedom, and animal vs. human rights. They invite students to carefully study information in the text, or, in other words, to engage in close reading (p. 35).

Good questions do a lot of work: they draw students in, they push students to think carefully about the disciplinary topic at hand, and they require students to process relevant information and ideas in thoughtful, responsible ways. On the other hand, bad questions (or questions that are bad for setting up discussions) can do all of the opposite things. Questions that have a clear, identifiably right answer that is presented in the materials are an obvious dead end (and even if you think it will take students time to arrive at that answer, you'll inevitably have a student in class who knows it immediately and blurts it out). However, open-ended questions for which there is little or no basis in the text or the data at hand can be equally ill-suited: if you ask students to take a stance on an issue about which they have little knowledge or ready information, they'll quickly be forced to make groundless claims or to weakly suggest that it's all a matter of opinion.

As described in the introduction, making a shift toward dialogic teaching changes more than just who does the talking in the classroom. To shift a significant amount of class time *away* from such teacher-directed tasks as note-taking, filling out pre-planned organizers, or responding to series of questions building toward pre-conceived interpretations, and *toward* the discussion of confounding problems or tangled interpretive issues in texts, is to shift one's definition of what *matters* in the classroom. Even if students were to complete the teacher-directed tasks together—say, filling out an

organizer in a small group—the goal of that type of classwork is not necessarily thinking as much as it is to perform just enough administrative tasks to arrive at the "right" answer. Dialogic work, on the other hand, is inherently less interested in arriving at a fixed point of understanding and more focused on the quality of the process—the learner's actual thinking and processing of information.

Reflect

To do this work in your classroom, you'll need to explore your own understanding of what kinds of thinking define your discipline: How does an expert reader of literature read for interpretation differently than a novice reader? How does a historian approach a primary source differently from a typical high school student? You'll also need to think about what opportunities exist for students to practice this type of thinking: what can be, or already is, problematized in your field? What might it look like to attempt that in the classroom, and how might a prompt be crafted around it? Below is a list of questions to get you started:

1. Think of your subject area's professional field and some of the roles people take within it. List a few of these out. Then consider people in these roles: When they are going about their professional work, what kinds of thinking and problem solving are they engaged in? Take a few minutes to list or describe as much of this thinking as you can, then review what you've written. Acknowledging that professionals work at greater levels of complexity, where do students have opportunities to think and problem solve in analogous ways in your classroom?

Which types of problem solving do you tend to emphasize? Are there others that make no appearance in your classroom? Why?

2. Educational theorist Jerome Bruner (1977) wrote that

> intellectual activity anywhere is the same, whether at the frontier of knowledge or in a third-grade classroom. What a scientist does at his desk or in his laboratory, what a literary critic does in reading a poem, are of the same order as what anybody else does when he is engaged in like activities—if he is to achieve understanding. The difference is in degree, not in kind. The schoolboy learning physics *is* a physicist, and it is easier for him to learn physics behaving like a physicist than doing something else. That "something else" usually involves the task of mastering…a "middle language"—classroom discussions and textbooks that talk about the conclusions in a field of intellectual inquiry rather than centering upon the inquiry itself. (p. 14)

   Reflect on a recent unit of instruction you have delivered. How much of the work allowed students to enter into "the inquiry itself" of the discipline, taking on the role of the practitioner? How much of the unit was focused on the "middle language," requiring students to memorize or arrive at foreordained conclusions?

3. Both of the above questions focus on the types of thinking and inquiry that students engage in. If your goal is to invite students into these modes of thinking and inquiry, what models of this type of work are students asked to engage with in your classroom? Do you model this thinking? Do you offer examples of genuine artifacts for study (professional literary criticism, scientific experimentation,

etc.)? What feedback from you, their peers, or themselves (in self-reflection) do students receive focused on their thinking and reasoning?

4. Walsh and Sattes (2015, p. 17) use the following chart to compare questions for recitation and questions for discussion:

Characteristics of Questions	
In Recitation	For Discussion
• What is in question is whether the students know the teacher's (or the "correct") answer. • The teacher poses questions for which there are "right answers," which students have had the opportunity to learn. • Questions prompt students to recall or remember and/or to demonstrate understanding. • Questions are aligned with standards and learning targets.* • The teacher usually poses many questions. *This applies to both recitation and discussion.	• Questions are "true" or authentic questions. • Questions are open-ended and divergent—not convergent. • Questions stimulate responses at higher cognitive levels (Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create). • Questions engage students personally and emotionally. • The teacher poses one question for discussion; other questions emerge from both the students and the teacher.

Figure 6. *Characteristics of questions. From Walsh & Sattes, 2015, p. 17.*

Both types of questions, of course, play a role in the classroom: while in our everyday life we do not typically ask our peers recitation questions, in the classroom we have a specific responsibility to know whether students know or can explain certain given information. However, many teachers will believe that they regularly have discussions in their class, only to realize that the discussions they are thinking of look more like what is described in the recitation column: a series of many questions originating from the teacher, to which the teacher already knows the answer, designed either to test students' knowledge or to lead

them to a specific conclusion. Take a moment to reflect on the discussions you have had recently in your own class and, in particular, the questions that drove them: which of these descriptors best fits?

5. Reflect on a discussion or an inquiry-based project your class has engaged in recently, something that called for divergent thinking and for which there should have been an interesting range of possible responses or approaches. Did your students' responses reflect this range, or did you feel that their responses tended to group around a common idea or a low-level solution? Either way, what factors do you think contributed to the range of responses you received?

Action Steps

1. Explore what has been written about disciplinary literacy in your field in order to learn what others view as important features and thought processes unique to it. Focusing on these disciplinary habits can help clarify opportunities to "problematize" elements of the curriculum and help frame the work of discussions. Considering literary scholars, for example, Rainey (2017, p. 60) identifies the following habits of thinking and reading as specific to the field:
    - Seeking patterns to make meaning from texts.
    - Identifying strangeness to notice important moments or features in texts, in order to make meaning.
    - Articulating a puzzle—that is, posing questions about the text and the choices the author makes, and thinking about them as a problem to be puzzled through.

- Considering possibilities within the text, examining different possible responses to the questions posed.
- Considering contexts in which the text was written to help prioritize possible interpretations.
- Making a claim about the text in response to the interpretive puzzle in order to help others understand the text in new ways.

These practices mark ways of thinking about texts that are qualitatively different from other subject areas; it would make sense for an ELA teacher to thoughtfully consider how these habits were brought to life in their classroom and to make space for these kinds of thinking in class discussion.

2. Resnick et al. (2018) created a brief set of recommendations for apprenticing students into disciplinary knowledge:
    a. Model how valid arguments are made in a discipline.
    b. Show students how to look for appropriate resources that could serve as valid evidence in a particular discipline.
    c. Provide students with authentic tasks.
    d. Provide knowledge resources—that is, places to find facts and other information needed to formulate sensible claims (p. 28).

   These and other recommendations are expanded on within the resource.
3. As you prepare for the next discussion in your class, take some time to truly craft your question for students. Dillon (1988) stresses the importance of this act:

> A single question is sufficient for an hour's discussion. But to conceive of that question will require thought; to formulate it requires labor; and to pose it, tact.
>
> The teacher's first act is not to ask the question but to think about which question to ask. Long before class starts, you devote yourself to pondering the issue that will serve purpose and circumstance. . . . Your next act is not to ask the question but to formulate it for the asking. Long before class starts you write the question out on a piece of paper. You immediately discover that not one but several questions come to mind about the matter that you have selected for discussion; whereupon you are faced with selecting that one which shall be the question for discussion. . . . You laboriously write that question out until satisfied that the sentence before you expresses the issue that you have in mind (you may in the process be changing your mind for the better), in such a way as to provide for a range of alternative, competing answers or otherwise fruitful contributions to discussion. Thus, what had appeared to be a simple question hardly calling for the trouble of writing turns out to be a laborious matter needing to be written down before you can even know what the question is (pp. 127–129).

Walsh and Sattes (2015) offer practical steps for developing questions:

a. Identify an issue both significant to the content and likely to be meaningful or relevant to students.

b. Develop and revise your question carefully, utilizing appropriate academic vocabulary, strong verbs, and clear sentence structure. Provide context or focus for the question, as necessary.

c. Anticipate likely student responses to the question. This can help you check whether the question does, in fact, support the discussion of a range of responses, and it also allows you to plan for student needs. If you can imagine a variety of on- or off-target responses, you can prepare ways to respond to students in those moments that push their thinking in productive ways.

4. Once you have crafted your question, attend to logistical details: What do students need to know about the purpose of the discussion or about next steps—for example, should they be taking notes in order to prepare for writing work to follow? Are there time parameters that should be made clear? Does your class have existing norms for discussion that should be revisited at the beginning? When the discussion comes to a close, how will students capture their thinking or reflect on their participation?

5. As your class engages in discussions, make note of which questions "work" and which ones seem to misfire. Reflect on commonalities between the questions that work. For those that don't work as well, reflect on whether the question itself contributed to that. Was it too narrow or too broad? Did students have enough knowledge and information to respond to it? Did it connect with students' beliefs or commitments in ways that would aid engagement?

Section 3: Teacher, Know Thyself

Section Introduction

It would be natural to think that starting in this section might be the simplest: after all, if this section is about you, the teacher, don't you have complete control over the domain? Can you not simply create a change by willing it? Alas—not all change is so easily accomplished, and as most people can attest, changing one's habits and internalized ideas can be some of the most challenging work.

This section addresses multiple teacher-related factors: teaching stance and disposition toward dialogic work, skill in facilitation and questioning, and knowledge of text, topic, subject, and discipline. The categories roughly correspond to the "will, skill, knowledge, and capacity" that education coach and consultant Elena Aguilar (2013, p. 52) has described as prerequisites for change, and the initial focus on stance and disposition is deliberate: while teachers can try new strategies out anytime they desire, enduring change in practice is more likely to come about when it aligns with our underlying beliefs—or when those beliefs themselves evolve to match our new goals (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

"Belief," as nebulous as the word may seem, matters greatly. As described by Fives and Buehl (2012), a person's beliefs influence their perception of and response to the world around them, acting as *filters* for what they notice and attend to, *frames* for how they prioritize and define the issues at hand, and *guides* for how they act in response. In the classroom, these beliefs can also create expectancy effects, whereby student growth is directly affected by the teacher's expectations for those students (van den Bergh et al.,

2010) or by the teacher's confidence in their own ability to implement a technique or strategy (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Yet we cannot always articulate our own complex beliefs, which can have overlapping layers and varying levels of specificity, and which can be highly context dependent.

Because beliefs and practices can have a complex and reciprocal relationship with one another, beliefs do not necessarily *have* to change first; a change in practices can itself lead to a change in beliefs, as when a teacher experiences success with a new strategy and begins to incorporate it into her understanding of how students learn (Buehl & Beck, 2015). Thus you could, for example, rationalize skipping the section about stance and work straightaway on facilitation and questioning—though stance would be well worth returning to.

The goal of this section is to help you examine your own attitudes and practices through reflection, self-survey, student-survey, and video review in order to help you decide what areas might be most productive for you to focus on within your own sphere of control. You might find some misalignment between what you claim to believe and what you actually see yourself doing in the classroom: use this as an opportunity to make deliberate choices and to grow.

Teacher Stance and Disposition

People talk regularly of "taking a stance" on an issue, but treating *stance* in physical terms may provide us a compelling image to consider: when we take on a literal, physical stance, we stand or hold ourselves in a certain way, often in relation to another person. We adjust our posture toward them, making a choice to bring ourselves to their

level or to set ourselves above or below. The face we wear can be open or skeptical, warm or cool, our muscles loose or tense. The metaphor from the physical example carries over to the ideological—we can arrange ourselves in similar ways toward ideas or different beliefs about teaching—but in the classroom our teaching stances are often defined by our minute-by-minute decisions about how to position ourselves in relation to our students, how to regard them and their ideas, how to hold ourselves in relation to them, what posture to take.

"Stance" will often manifest in the power dynamics of the classroom. A dialogic classroom is one in which, to some degree, "traditional" dichotomies of teacher/student have been flattened (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007): students are elevated and their contributions are expected to play a vital part in the community's learning, and teachers become learners, too—they do not lose their expertise, but they dethrone themselves from the position of absolute authority, acknowledging and accepting variance. They invite discussion and enjoy their *own* learning experience, one which travels perhaps parallel to the students'. These teachers see themselves as *still* learning about their subject—not as novices, but aware that they can at times learn from their students—as when, for example, a student asks a beautiful question of a text.

However, for this stance to function in the classroom, all involved have to be able to recognize this shift and, to some degree, embrace it. If the teacher or the students perceive an unhealthy power dynamic at play, genuine dialogue becomes more difficult. These dynamics can enter from a number of directions. A teacher who has been criticized by administrators for a perceived "lack of classroom management skills" may feel pressured to maintain a "traditional" kind of order in the class, or may feel they cannot

“give in” to students’ wishes. A classroom filled with students of color may feel suspicious or distrusting of a White teacher who is new to the school based on their previous experiences with similar teachers; this White teacher, in turn, may lack the cultural knowledge and facility to recognize this dynamic and misconstrue students’ responses as disrespectful, disinterested, or reflective of a need for basic skills practice (Gay, 2018).

If dialogic work is of interest to you, then at some point you will have to interrogate your own beliefs and actions. Do you know what your own stance is? Are you certain whether your classroom actions actually align with the values you hold? Within this subsection, you will find opportunities to reflect and gather information from students. In the following subsection, the reflection tools for reviewing video of your own instruction will also connect and overlap with issues of stance.

Reflect

1. First, how do you feel about your students? Answer this question honestly—we all have ideas of what we are “supposed” to feel, but what are the actual feelings you experience as you pull up to school in the morning, or as the bell rings for your next class to begin? Check in with your body: are you holding tension in your stomach or clenching your jaw? Do you get excited about the possibilities of where your students might go with a lesson or assignment? Why?
2. What actions of yours—in your speaking, your planning, your lessons, your interactions, your demeanor—indicate that you believe your students are **capable**

of engaging in thoughtful, meaningful dialogue? How would students in your class *know* that you believed they were capable?

- If you do **not** believe your students are capable…
    a. Why not? Don't provide generalizations—be specific.
    b. Can you think of counterexamples—times when your students have shown you that they *can* engage successfully in this type of work, even if it was not focused on a topic you personally valued?
    c. What instruction might you provide to help students *become* capable? Consider what is included in the later section about students. If you addressed any of these areas, would you believe students were then capable?
    d. To what degree is the *classroom environment*, rather than individual student aptitude, a part of the reason you feel this way? Review the section about classroom community for more things to consider.

3. What actions of yours—in your speaking, your planning, your lessons, your interactions, your demeanor—indicate that you believe your students **have important things to say** and are worth listening to? Examples: You actively listen to students' comments and responses during class and respond thoughtfully; you write down students' ideas and contributions during discussions and display them for the class; you display student work prominently throughout your room; you communicate to the class the expectation that everyone present is expected to listen respectfully to student speakers; you have changed your lesson plan–

perhaps even on the fly–or your unit plan, etc. in response to information or feedback from students (for example, adapting to their interests, reconsidering a canonical text, sanctioning additional modes of response, etc.).

4. Do you have a positive relationship with *each student* within the class? Evidence of positive relationships might include knowing each student's name, knowing specific details about them such as their interests and tastes, knowing something about their family, having experiences of shared jokes with different students, etc. With which students do you feel you have the closest connections? With which students do you have the most difficulty connecting?
    - What stands out to you as you reflect on this? Are there certain groups of students you find it easier or more challenging to connect with? To what do you attribute this?
    - What have you done to connect with students? Do you make a habit of learning about them? There are many simple ways of doing this which can become a matter of standard practice for you; there are also an infinite number of possibilities unique to each student in the class. For some ideas…
5. Do you have a generally positive relationship *with the class as a whole*? What are the strengths and unique characteristics of this specific group of students? Perhaps the quickest judgment here is, "What's the vibe in the room?" Is there laughter? Is there a sense of genuine interest between humans? Is there empathy and compassion? An air of mutual respect?

- If the answer is *no*, to what do you attribute this? Consider that a number of factors are at play:
    a. Your own interpersonal connections and emotional intelligence.
    b. Students' interpersonal connections with one another (or lack thereof).
    c. The inherited history of the building, the specific class that you teach, the subject area—all of which influence the assumptions you, and your students, enter the class with.
    d. Unexamined traits within your own identity that may present barriers to some students.

6. Consider the use of power within your classroom. Aguilar & Cohen (2022), borrowing from and slightly updating the terminology of French and Raven (1959), discuss six sources of social power:
    - position (in this case, your role as the teacher),
    - coercion (your ability to punish),
    - rewards (your ability to provide rewards, including grades and public praise),
    - expertise (your perceived knowledge and experience),
    - relationships (the trust and respect others have for you), and
    - information (your access to information or knowledge that others desire).

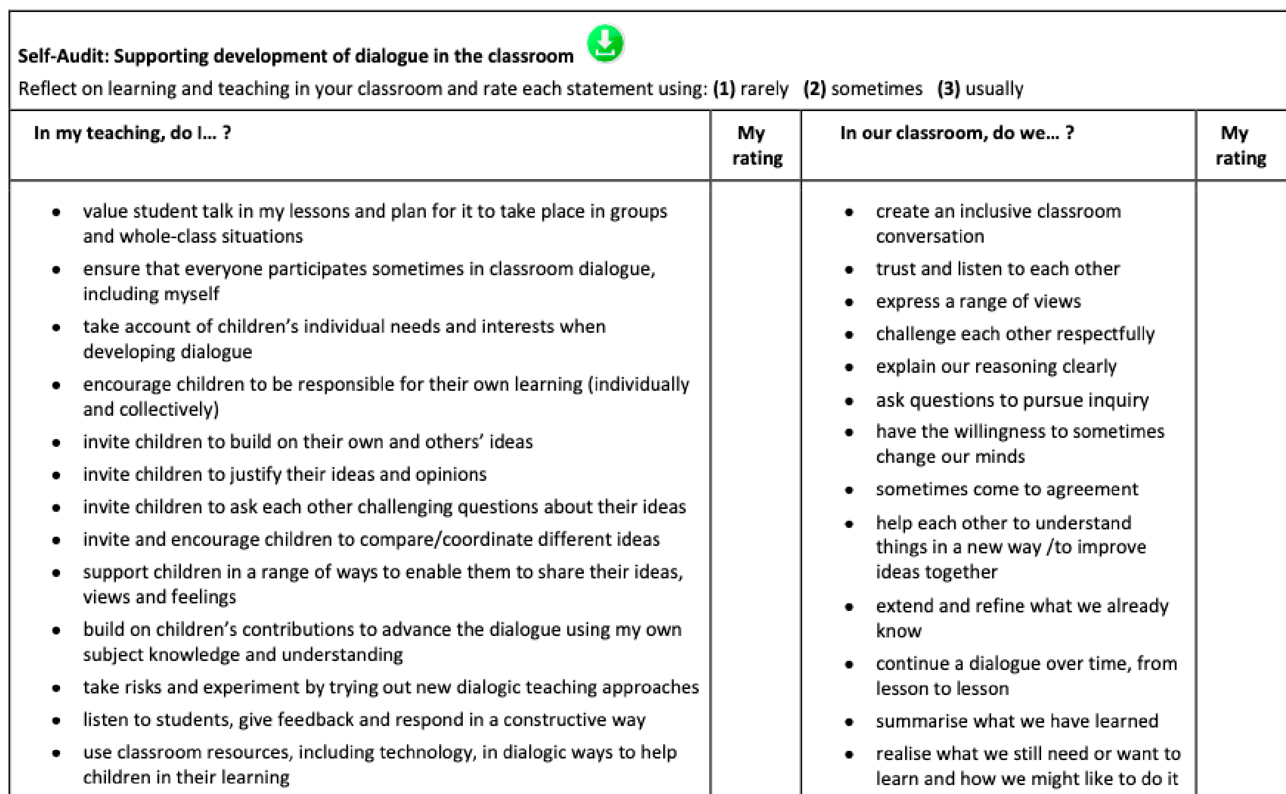
    Power is always present in the classroom, and teachers will at times rely on almost all of these sources of social power. However, the goals of a dialogic classroom require the judicious use of one's power and, in particular, of the

various sources of one’s power: neither coercion nor its mirror-image, rewards, can long sustain what is, at its core, a deeply *relational* pedagogy.

a. When you imagine yourself using each of these sources of influence in the classroom, which of these do you feel align most closely with your own values and your ideas of what “good teaching” looks like?
b. When you reflect on your classroom, which of these sources of social power do you feel you most frequently rely on? Does it match your ideals? Why or why not? How do you feel about that?

Gather Additional Information

A group of researchers from Cambridge University, in collaboration with practicing teachers, developed a suite of materials to help teachers develop their dialogic teaching practices. Organized under the name T-SEDA—the Teacher Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis—the resources provide a host of useful tools and information briefs (Kershner et al., 2019). One of the first tools provided is a self-audit for the teacher, a way of checking one’s practices against one’s intentions. It is worth noting that the second column of statements (“In our classroom, do we…?”) could be delivered to students as well to gather their perspective on the classroom:



Self-Audit: Supporting development of dialogue in the classroom

Reflect on learning and teaching in your classroom and rate each statement using: **(1)** rarely **(2)** sometimes **(3)** usually

In my teaching, do I… ?	My rating	In our classroom, do we… ?	My rating
• value student talk in my lessons and plan for it to take place in groups and whole-class situations • ensure that everyone participates sometimes in classroom dialogue, including myself • take account of children's individual needs and interests when developing dialogue • encourage children to be responsible for their own learning (individually and collectively) • invite children to build on their own and others' ideas • invite children to justify their ideas and opinions • invite children to ask each other challenging questions about their ideas • invite and encourage children to compare/coordinate different ideas • support children in a range of ways to enable them to share their ideas, views and feelings • build on children's contributions to advance the dialogue using my own subject knowledge and understanding • take risks and experiment by trying out new dialogic teaching approaches • listen to students, give feedback and respond in a constructive way • use classroom resources, including technology, in dialogic ways to help children in their learning		• create an inclusive classroom conversation • trust and listen to each other • express a range of views • challenge each other respectfully • explain our reasoning clearly • ask questions to pursue inquiry • have the willingness to sometimes change our minds • sometimes come to agreement • help each other to understand things in a new way /to improve ideas together • extend and refine what we already know • continue a dialogue over time, from lesson to lesson • summarise what we have learned • realise what we still need or want to learn and how we might like to do it	

Figure 7. Self-audit. From Kershner et al., 2019, p. 10.

Other tools for gathering information, such as those found in subsections below and in the classroom community section, can provide meaningful information about how one's stance shows up in the classroom and is experienced by students.

Take Action

In working on your own stance and disposition, you will want to make a habit of both reflecting and seeking additional information. If you do not share a common cultural

or linguistic background as some of your students, one of your first priorities might be to gather information about your students, the community, and your students' experiences. This is, of course, assuming that you have put in the work to examine yourself and your own identities. Aguilar (2020) provided one tool for beginning that journey in *Coaching for Equity*, partially reproduced below and accessible online here.

Reflecting on Identity Markers

	Which of these were you aware of as a child?	Which ones feel important to you now?	Which three are the most important to you?	Which ones do you prioritize sharing about yourself?	Which ones do you think others typically notice about you?	Which ones do you tend not to think about?
Age						
Education						
Ethnicity						

Figure 8. Reflecting on Identity Markers. From Aguilar, 2021, p. 17.

Teacher skill in facilitation and questioning

We would like our students to be immediately capable of taking up an interesting question and building on it successfully. However, given that dialogic teaching and open discussion remain the exception rather than the rule in most classrooms (Applebee et al., 2003; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997; Swanson et al., 2016), many students will enter the classroom unpracticed in the particular genres of academic discussion. "Unpracticed" does not mean unskilled or incapable: students enter the classroom with the habits of discourse they have learned at home and in their communities—certain patterns of argumentation, evidence-making, and persuasion that serve their needs in various

contexts. Thus, in the service of productive disciplinary engagement (Engle & Conant, 2002), the teacher must both seek to understand students' existing repertoire of skills and to invite them into discipline-specific modes of dialogue.

Some of these elements related to students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions will be addressed in the following section; however, one of the teacher's roles is to develop skillful methods of facilitation that encourage participation, draw out student thinking, and enable participants to clarify their reasoning for their peers (Howe et al., 2019). Hennessy et al. (2021) examined which elements of discussion had the most significant effect on student learning, finding that students who both a) participated throughout the dialogue and b) either elaborated on their own or someone else's thinking, or queried, challenged, or disagreed with another's ideas were the ones who benefited most. Teachers of classes that regularly demonstrated such participation had "create[d] a supportive, open classroom climate for learning through dialogue" and "devised numerous successful strategies for encouraging more reticent students to participate (Sedova et al. 2019) and to express agreement/disagreement" (Hennessy et al., 2021, p. 22).

These things are not accomplished by accident: they are the result of specific actions taken by the teacher, from the design of lessons and discussion prompts (discussed in "Minding the Curriculum") to the teacher's in-the-moment responses to student utterances. Though the specific recommendations for how teachers might best facilitate academic discussion vary, there is general consensus that teachers should have an extensive set of facilitative tools on which they can rely to address different needs and goals (Alexander, 2020). These might include particular discussion protocols, methods

for following up on student thinking, nonverbal gestures and cues that help shape a conversation, and other practices.

Recall that beliefs and practices reciprocally affect one another (Buehl & Beck, 2015): skillful facilitation can be expected, then, not only to directly affect students' participation and learning in the specific instance of a particular conversation, but also over time to affect their general understanding of the classroom as a dialogic space. Boyd and Markarian (2011) have argued that this is the real work of dialogic teaching: not the strict enactment of specific talk rules, but the dynamic embodiment of a dialogic stance which shapes "what talk means and does within the context of the classroom" (p. 518). While students will certainly "hear talk structures vocalized" the meaning and impact of these structures is understood within the "sociohistorical classroom patterns" (p. 518).

As you use the following section to reflect on your own use of questions, protocols, and other facilitative moves, please consider these aspects in that same spirit—not as a set of iron-bound rules, but, in Alexander's (2020) terms, as part of a flexible repertoire of talk moves which together help one enact a dialogic stance.

Reflect

1. Think through some of the following scenarios. What are your typical responses when some of the following things happen? Are there any that you feel especially stumped by? Are there some for which you feel you have several strategies at the ready?

   Imagine that you have begun a whole-class discussion, and…

a. No one is offering an idea to start, or to get the conversation moving again after an idea has run aground.

b. Students are offering individual ideas but not engaging with or building on one another's ideas, leading to a list-like performance.

c. Students respond mostly in generalities, sharing broad reactions to a topic or identifying a few large but imprecise ideas.

d. The same few students are carrying the entire conversation; most other students have "checked out" and are not participating in the dialogue.

e. The majority of students appear engaged, but are blocked from participation because a few students are dominating the conversation.

f. The quality of ideas varies greatly: some students offer strong, compelling ideas grounded in evidence, while others have loosely connected, tenuous threads.

g. A student says something demonstrably wrong, yet no one appears to be speaking up about it.

h. A student responds with an extremely compelling response and the entire class seems to fall into unquestioning agreement with it.

2. Reflect on a time recently when one of the above scenarios actually happened in your classroom. What initiated it? What did the student(s) do or say? What did **you** do or say? What happened as a result? Would you do it essentially the same way if it happened again?
3. Describe a time when you noticed that something was "off" in a discussion—perhaps the mood had shifted, or the topic no longer seemed like the right fit, or a

topic petered out faster than expected, or a student's comment created a strong emotional response from the class.

a. How did you know there was an issue?
b. How did you respond?
c. What did this experience help you understand about facilitating discussions in the classroom?

Gather Additional Information

One of the best ways to gain insight into your own facilitation of classroom discussion is to do what might at first be one of the most *uncomfortable* things for many teachers: that is, to film oneself and carefully review one's instructional decisions. T-SEDA (Kershner et al., 2019), discussed in the previous subsection, has provided a number of resources to do this thoughtfully, including a detailed set of labels with which a teacher can examine and code interactions over the course of a lesson. The authors argue that this type of reflective practice or self-audit can help teachers "effectively understand what is happening in any talk situation" by helping "break down individual contributions [to] consider what functions they serve" (p. 20), and point out that teachers can use a coding scheme to analyze and compare multiple examples of instruction over time in order to understand their or their students' growth. In this case, one might record a discussion for "baseline data" before making deliberate changes in one's practice.

T-SEDA provides video resources to help understand how to use the coding, and suggests teachers start by looking only for one or two codes at first (for example, reviewing a discussion to examine where students build on ideas or where you prompt

students to make their reasoning explicit). A fully coded transcript of a conversation would include the name of each speaker, their comment (or "turn"), and the codes. Each turn is numbered for reference.

The uses for this information are many, and reviewing one's practice can both prompt a particular focus and provide information on a topic already of interest to you. What are students doing or not doing? What categories are used frequently? Which codes do you notice make up the bulk of your own turns?

T-SEDA dialogue coding scheme

Dialogue categories	Contributions and Strategies	What do we hear? (Key Words)
IB – Invite to build on ideas	*Invite others to elaborate, build on, clarify, comment on or improve own or others' ideas / contributions*	'Can you add', 'What?' 'Tell me', 'Can you rephrase this?' 'Do you think?' 'Do you agree?'
B – Build on ideas	*Build on, elaborate, clarify or comment on own or others' ideas expressed in previous turns or other contributions*	'it's also', 'that makes me think', 'I mean', 'she meant', 'following on…', 'building on…',
CH - Challenge	*Questioning, doubting, disagreeing with or challenging an idea*	'I disagree', 'But', 'Are you sure…?', '…different idea'
IR – Invite reasoning	*Invite others to explain, justify, and/or use possibility thinking relating to their own or another's ideas*	'Why?', 'How?, 'Do you think?', …'explain further'
R – Make reasoning explicit	*Explain, justify and/or use possibility thinking relating to own or another's ideas*	'I think', 'because', 'so', 'therefore', 'in order to', 'if...then', 'it's like...', 'imagine if...', 'could',
CA - Coordination of ideas and agreement	*Contrast and synthesise ideas, evaluate, express agreement and consensus; Invite coordination / synthesis*	'agree', 'to sum up…', 'So, we all think that…', 'summarise', 'similar and different'
C – Connect	*Make pathway of learning explicit by linking to contributions / knowledge / resources / experiences beyond the immediate dialogue*	'last lesson, 'earlier', 'reminds me of', 'next lesson', 'related to', 'in your home'
RD – Reflect on dialogue or activity	*Evaluate or reflect "metacognitively" on processes of dialogue or on learning activity; Invite others to do so*	'dialogue', 'talking', 'sharing', 'work together in the group / pair', 'task', 'activity', 'what you have learned', 'I changed my mind'
G – Guide direction of dialogue or activity	*Take responsibility for shaping activity or focusing the dialogue in a desired direction or use other scaffolding strategies to support dialogue or learning*	'How about', 'focus', 'concentrate on', 'Let's try', 'no hurry', 'Have you thought about…?'
E – Express or invite ideas	*Offer or invite relevant contributions to initiate or further a dialogue (ones not covered by other categories)*	'What do you think about…?', 'Tell me', 'your thoughts', 'my opinion is…', 'your ideas'

Figure 9. T-SEDA Dialogue Coding Scheme. From Kershner et al., 2019, p. 5.

Not everyone is ready to dive right into dialogue analysis. T-SEDA also includes in their materials a Dialogic Teaching Questionnaire, similar to that in the self-audit, that allows

a more specific examination of one's practices throughout a lesson. A separate student-facing questionnaire is also included to supplement the information.

(1) Dialogic Teaching Questionnaire – Teacher (self) rating of a lesson

This questionnaire will help you (or a colleague or external observer) to analyse your teaching within a lesson, considering three important domains of dialogic teaching: creating an **Openness for Dialogue** (A - Items 1-4), inviting **Students' Contributions** (B - Items 5-8) and fostering **Dialogic Participation** (C - Items 9-15). You can also give your students the Student version (validated with students aged 13 to 18) to gather their opinions. You could then discuss both perspectives with your class. How do your and their observations of dialogic teaching and learning during the lesson compare?

Consider the following statements with regard to the lesson you just taught, and mark your level of agreement from **(1) "completely disagree"** to **(6) "completely agree".** **In this lesson, I... /In this lesson, the teacher...**	(1) Completely disagree	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6) Completely agree
A. Openness for Dialogue						
1. offered time for questions so that students could understand the learning objective(s).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. allowed enough time for students to contribute at length.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. posed open questions and waited for students to respond.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. listened appreciatively to students and responded in a constructive way, including giving formative feedback.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Aggregated rating Dimension A: Openness for Dialogue (add up your ratings)					/ 24	
B. Inviting Students' Contributions						
5. invited students to share their ideas, views, thoughts, interests or feelings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. invited students to elaborate and build on their own and others' ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 10. Dialogic Teaching Questionnaire. From Gröschner et al., 2021, p. 2.

Take Action

If one wants to work on developing their talk moves and facilitation techniques, there is no shortage of resources and possible frameworks to dive into. The practical, teacher-friendly texts below are excellent places to begin:

- Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic conversations: Classroom talk that fosters critical thinking and content understandings*. Stenhouse Publishers.

- In this text, Zwiers and Crawford supply numerous frameworks, techniques, and recommendations for developing academic conversations in the classroom. Among the most useful are their list of five core academic conversation skills, which includes a visual symbol for each skill, sentence frames for prompting each skill, and frames students can use to respond to these questions. The five skills they identify are *elaborate and clarify, support ideas with examples, build on and/or challenge a partner's idea, paraphrase,* and *synthesize conversation points* (pp. 32-33).

- Michaels, S., O'Connor, M. C., Hall, M. W., & Resnick, L. B. (2010). *Accountable talk sourcebook: For classroom conversation that works*. University of Pittsburgh Institute for Learning.
    - Accountable Talk is a well-established framework and many articles could be referenced here, but this sourcebook is particularly helpful for teachers. The authors catalogue a variety of talk formats and discuss the merits of each; they also include a "Teacher Moves" section for unpacking specific rhetorical moves the teacher should attend to when guiding discussion: marking ("That's an important point"), challenging students, modeling, recapping, keeping channels open ("Did everyone hear that?"), keeping everyone together ("Who can repeat what…?"), linking contributions ("Who wants to add on…?"), verifying and clarifying ("So, are you saying…?"), pressing for accuracy ("Where can we find that?"), building on prior knowledge ("How does that connect?"), pressing for reasoning

("Why do you think that?"), and expanding reasoning ("Take your time; say more."). Many of these overlap with the T-SEDA coding model, but the discussion of each is useful. A list of questions on pages 11 and 12 that teachers might think through while planning is itself worth the effort of downloading the guide from the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning.

- Walsh, J. A., & Sattes, B. D. (2015). *Questioning for classroom discussion: Purposeful speaking, engaged listening, deep thinking*. ASCD.
    - Walsh and Sattes lay out an accessible guide for developing classroom discussion. A significant portion of the text is devoted to examining how the teacher might support discussion at each stage of the discussion process: preparing, opening, sustaining, closing, and reflecting.

Other recent publications worth the read include the following:

- Alexander, R. (2020). *A Dialogic Teaching Companion* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Reznitskaya, A., & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (2017). *The most reasonable answer: Helping students build better arguments together*. Harvard Education Press.
- Sherry, M. B. (2021). *How to facilitate meaningful classroom conversations across disciplines, grade levels, and digital platforms*. Rowman & Littlefield.

It is also worth noting that an enormous collection of discussion and group work protocols (*Protocols*, n.d.) can be accessed through the School Reform Initiative's

website. Some are immediately applicable to the classroom while others would require adaptation.

Teacher knowledge of text, topic, subject, and discipline

Sheridan Blau (2003) proposed that teachers occasionally put themselves in the interpretive hot seat to model for students what it looks like to piece together meaning and wrestle with uncertainty. In this activity, teachers would work alongside students "on a poem or short story that the teacher has never read before and with which the teacher is likely to experience difficulties in understanding—difficulties that will enable the teacher to collaborate authentically with students in the construction of meaning" (p. 22). The intention would be not only to model the complex disciplinary practices, but also to contribute to the overall zeitgeist of a classroom community in which all participants were learners and not even the teacher simply processed a text with immediate understanding.

The key detail here is that this was intended as an *occasional* activity done for deliberate effect; if you are showing up to classes regularly without having deeply familiarized yourself with the content, it is an abdication of responsibility and in some cases risks harm to your students.

Planning thoughtful questions requires meaningful personal interaction with the texts or topics under discussion (see the action steps under "curriculum" for more discussion of this). The goal isn't to arrive to class as the sole arbiter of knowledge, ready to teach everyone what you have learned; rather, the depth of your own interactions with the text will help you facilitate productive discussion and engagement. Setting aside the

curricular aspect of the work, expert facilitation is only possible when you have a larger, bird's-eye-view of the topic and its various connections to students, to the class, to other texts. How can you challenge a student's thinking, for example, if you are not sure of the details in the text yourself? As a knowledgeable other, you'll have a better sense of when their claims are groundless (or at least flimsy), but also a better sense of when an interesting perspective has entered the chat (in which case you might "mark" it, as in Michaels et al. [2010]).

You also have a duty to remain aware of the emotionally charged issues connected to the content you bring into the classroom. This is not to suggest that you eliminate these materials—any text worth talking about in the first place is likely to touch on some type of controversy or to create deep emotional resonance—but you cannot ask students to discuss them without having considered how students might respond, how you plan to create a safe environment, and how you might address a range of student remarks. At the very least, know when you will need to review your norms for discussion and interaction and how you might give students space to process strong emotional responses.

At a much broader level, your role as a teacher means that you are not only responsible for helping students navigate the specific discussion of a specific topic, but also for helping students situate that discussion in the larger context of your content area and its disciplinary habits. These elements are discussed in greater detail in the curriculum section, but it merits reflection here as well: how might you continue to develop your own disciplinary expertise in ways that are personally interesting and engaging to you, as well as in ways that help you understand how to apprentice students

into the sensemaking and argumentation unique to your field? Your own depth of knowledge will affect your ability to provide students with quality feedback as you apprentice them into increasingly advanced work.

Take Action

1. Read texts in advance and annotate them with your own thoughts, questions, and reactions as you read. Read them authentically ("as yourself"), and read them as you imagine a student might, searching for moments that might create confusion or introduce misconceptions.

   Use your notes to consider the inherent problems posed by the text—unresolved questions, tensions, or ambiguities. What are the possible *implications* of the text? In what ways might it connect to your own life, or to the lives of other readers in the room? If historical, in what ways does it foreshadow the present? What is surprising, or strange, or unsettled? In fact, what are the gaps in your *own* understanding? It may be that you need to seek out additional information in some cases, or it may be that you are hitting upon interesting and unresolved questions in the text or topic.
2. Whether your knowledge of your class's texts and topics is something you consider a strength or an area of growth for you, create opportunities to engage your own peers in open discussion about them. This can help both develop and extend your knowledge as well as challenge your existing assumptions—exactly as we hope our own dialogic work does with students. As you do so, reflect on

your own interpretation: how did you develop it? How did it shift over the course of your interactions, and why?

3. Familiarize yourself—deeply if you are an ELA teacher, at least generally if you teach another subject area—with the qualitative elements of text complexity. Knowing what makes a text challenging can help you anticipate elements that might create confusion for readers; these elements are often productive discussion topics, as they likely connect with students' genuine questions and relate to key ideas within a text.
4. Make time to add to your own content area knowledge and disciplinary literacy. Read, watch films, seek out articles. Haunt online forums of experts and hobbyists. Sensitize yourself not only to the questions that experts pursue, but also to the growth and development of novices.

Section 4: Student Beliefs, Behaviors, Skills, and Knowledge

Section Introduction

Teacher talk moves, creative protocols, and well-constructed discussion questions don't make a bit of difference if students simply *don't show up*. They might be physically in the room, of course, but the nature of dialogic work means that students need to take an active and thoughtful role in the process—and sometimes, they just choose not to. This

presents an obvious problem: we cannot *force* students to engage with the dialogic model[1] for very long without undermining the very sense of community at its foundation.

Teachers experiencing difficulty enacting dialogic teaching in their classroom—or who imagine they *will* experience difficulty—often gesture toward their students: "These kids just don't know how to have a discussion," they might say, or, "That's something I feel like I could do if I was at another school, but *these* kids need more structure, more of the basics."

I want to be unequivocal here: if your students are capable of producing either speech or writing, they are capable of discussion. If students are not engaging and bringing their full, authentic selves to the table, or if we have concerns about skills they seem not to know, we have a responsibility to reflect on why that might be the case and what can be done about it.

There are many reasons students might not dive right into dialogic work, and the first is simply that they might not have much experience with it. Asking a group of students to pivot from a pattern of teacher/student interaction they have grown used to over many years of schooling is not always going to feel like the refreshing change we imagine. As Michaels and O'Connor (2015) wrote when describing the shift *teachers* experience, "All tools belong to a tool kit that is associated with an identity. If we ask teachers to take on a new set of tools, in a sense we are asking them to take on a new identity that embodies particular values and beliefs" (p. 351). This is equally true of students, who may find that the tools they had developed for "doing school" in the past

[1] Of course teachers do have tools to force student behavior, especially the paired threats of grades and disciplinary action. However, discussion which exists only under the threat of compulsion is a mere shadow of authentic dialogue.

are no longer as effective or valued in this setting. If they do not view their identity as well-aligned with what is being called for by the teacher—if they have internalized negative self-concepts about their abilities, for example—they may choose to opt out rather than face the social risk of trying and failing. Nor do all students recognize dialogue as a worthwhile educational activity. Tikva (2010) described a study in which 36 students aged 13-15 were shown videos of direct instruction and of a Socratic discussion. All 36 students described the direct instruction as an example of "teaching"; not a single respondent labeled the Socratic discussion as teaching.

As with teaching stance, student beliefs about themselves, about their skills, and about teaching have significant effects on whether and how they show up to a discussion, and we must face not only their beliefs but also their *actual* skills in speaking and listening, working with texts, and thinking in discipline-specific ways. Additionally, students arrive to our classes already enmeshed in patterns of behavior and social interaction that long predate our first encounters with them, all of which affect students' modes of participation and interaction.

One goal of this section is to increase our knowledge of and compassion for our students; as we know more, we are better able to plan in response to students' needs, whatever they might be. A second goal is student self-awareness: ultimately, growth and change will always require reflection and deliberate effort from students, so students must reflect on their attitudes, dispositions, skills, behaviors, and practices in order to set goals for themselves and take ownership of their learning. For dialogic teaching to be more than just another empty strategy aimed at students, the work must be shared by all.

Student Beliefs

As stated above, what students believe about themselves and their abilities in the classroom—their academic self-concept—matters enormously. Even students who possess a high level of pre-knowledge can disengage from classroom interactions if their *perception* of their ability in the subject area is low (Jurik et al., 2013). Clarke (2015) addressed the issue of engagement and self-concept when examining student interactions in a high school class whose teacher had been undergoing professional development with Accountable Talk. Over the course of an instructional unit, 4 of the class's 17 students provided more than half of the overall contributions to discussion, while "nearly half of the class was silent for the 6-week period" (p. 168). It would be easy to dismiss these silent students as lazy or unmotivated, but subsequent interviews with students revealed links between their understandings about the purposes for discussion and their views of their own ability:

> Students' narrative accounts show that they conceptualize discussion primarily as the site in which one displays knowledge, rather than the space in which understanding is enriched through co-construction. . . . students do not perceive themselves as having *the right to speak or be heard* unless their utterances conform to what they believe is correct (Clarke, 2015, p. 178).

Students who saw themselves as "knowers" participated freely; students who did not experienced "anxiety and shame about not being able to join in the discussion process," and their understanding of discussion as a monologic venue focused on correctness contributed to their negative self-concept (p. 176).

Many other studies have linked self-concept, participation, and achievement (e.g. Böheim et al., 2021; Díez-Palomar et al., 2020; Weil et al., 2020). The effects of negative self-concept on student participation directly interfere with dialogic teaching, as the benefits of discussion-based methods are most pronounced in students who take an active role throughout the lesson (Hennessy et al., 2021).

Student Reflection Questions

Unlike other sections, these reflection questions are intended for students. A few questions for teacher reflection follow once you have responses to consider.

The list of questions below is constructed to elicit students views of themselves, their academic identity, and the work of classroom discussion. As much as possible, it is intended to position students as knowledgeable, capable, and agentive participants in the classroom while also opening space for them to share their genuine affective responses to topics.

These questions can be integrated into the classroom in different ways, but delivering them all at once seems likely to result in only quick, surface-level responses. One sensible method might be to use them as in-class journal-style responses done at the beginning of class, working with one question (or possibly one pair of related questions, as in questions 5 and 6) at a time. Be sure to let students know that you will be reading their thoughts carefully in order to better understand them, and that processing their own thinking on these topics can be helpful to them as well.

Another option, if you are up for managing the number of cards involved, would be to have students write their response to one question a day on an index card. The

benefit of this approach is that with each stack of student responses, you can sort and group them in different ways. Which students have similar attitudes toward a topic? What do you notice about the responses from students who speak up frequently versus students who seldom do? What other groupings come to mind as you review responses?

1. What are you an expert in? This does not need to be school-related (though it can be). It can be a hobby, an interest, a subject area, a sport, an activity, a fandom, or anything else you have in mind.
2. What is school like for you? How do you see yourself, or think of yourself, when you are at school?
3. How do you believe teachers or other school personnel see you or think of you?
4. How do you believe your peers and classmates see you?
5. What classes or parts of the school day do you enjoy most? Why?
6. What classes or parts of the school day do you enjoy least? Why?
7. Sometimes classes have a lot of individual work, where students are given an assignment and are asked to complete it quietly on their own. Sometimes, classes have work that involves a lot of conversation and collaboration, whether through discussion, group tasks, or shared projects. Which do you usually prefer? Why?
8. Describe your typical behavior or actions in a class. What stands out to you? What are your interactions with others? What effect do your choices have on others around you? What effect do you *hope* to have on others around you?
9. Describe a positive classroom environment, the kind you would hope to be in and participate in. What does it look like? What is it characterized by?

10. Do you feel you learn or understand things better when you can talk about them with your peers?
11. When you are in a class discussion, do you feel that you have ideas or insights that are worth sharing? Explain.
12. When you are in a class discussion, do you feel your peers have ideas or insights that are worth listening to and responding to? Explain.
13. When you are in a class discussion, do you feel that students listen to one another's ideas and respond appropriately? Explain.
14. Look back through all you have written in response to the previous reflection questions. What is one thing you are proud of, or that you think is especially important for your teacher to know about?
15. Once again, look back through all you have written in response to the previous reflection questions. What is one goal you have for yourself in the classroom this semester?

Teacher reflection in response to above:

- What are you learning about your students from their responses? Is there anything that has surprised you?
- What do students feel experts in? Proud of? In what ways might you be able to bring students' expertise into the classroom?
- What types of goals are you seeing? How might you help support students in their goals?

- Is there anything in student responses that provides insight into student performance or behavior in your class? How?
- Questions 10-13 all relate to talk and discussion. What are some of the different attitudes you see toward discussion in students' responses? Do student responses reveal any clear areas of need in your classroom?

Gather Additional Information

The questions above call for more open reflection from students; the tools included here tend toward scaled responses. You may feel you have all of the information you need right now from the reflection questions, but some of the items here can more specifically target a particular area, and all of them can provide numerical data. Such data may lack the texture and personality of an open response item, but they are excellent for providing an at-a-glance view of student attitudes. Additionally, surveys and questionnaires like these can be given more than once a year, potentially allowing for comparison of student responses over time. None of these is necessarily better than another; seek out the one which best fits your needs, and if possible, use an online survey platform to collect responses for ease of use and tabulation.

The first item is the self-efficacy questionnaire for children (SEQ-C), which joins measures of academic, emotional, and social self-efficacy into a single survey (Muris, 2001; Suldo & Shaffer, 2007); a tool like this may help surface the difference between students who choose not to respond because of their academic concerns and students who are reluctant because of social concerns. Respondents use a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *very well*.

SEQ-C

1. How well can you express your opinions when other classmates disagree with you?
2. How well do you succeed in cheering yourself up when an unpleasant event has happened?
3. How well can you study when there are other interesting things to do?
4. How well do you succeed in becoming calm again when you are very scared?
5. How well can you become friends with other young people?
6. How well can you study a chapter for a test?
7. How well can you have a chat with an unfamiliar person?
8. How well can you prevent yourself from becoming nervous?
9. How well do you succeed in finishing all your homework every day?
10. How well can you get along with your classmates while working together?
11. How well can you control your feelings?
12. How well can you pay attention during every class?
13. How well can you tell other young people that they are doing something you don't like?
14. How well can you give yourself a pep talk when you feel low?
15. How well do you succeed in passing all school subjects?
16. How well can you tell a funny story to a group of young people?
17. How well do you succeed in satisfying your parents with your schoolwork?
18. How well are you able to remain friends with other young people?
19. How well do you succeed in holding back unpleasant thoughts?
20. How well do you succeed in passing a test?
21. How well do you succeed in not worrying about things that might happen?

Figure 11. SEQ-C. From Suldo & Shaffer, 2007, p. 346.

Subject-specific self-concept is particularly closely connected to achievement (Marsh et al., 2005). A tool for measuring it is included here, adapted for English classes. "Reading and writing" is sometimes substituted for "English" in order to prevent confusion between the class and the language itself:

English Language Arts Self-Concept

1. I would much prefer English class if it weren't so hard.
   (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)
2. Although I make a real effort, reading and writing seem to be harder for me than for my fellow students.
   (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)
3. Nobody's perfect, but I'm just not good at reading and writing.
   (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)
4. Some topics in English class are just so hard that I know from the start I'll never understand them.
   (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)
5. Reading and writing just isn't my thing. (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)

Figure 12. English Language Arts Self-Concept. Adapted from Marsh et al., 2005.

Lastly, I include the Psychological Sense of School Membership questionnaire (Goodenow, 1993). This set of questions will likely have strong connections to classroom community (Section 1), but the questions are constructed to uncover students' personal experience of school membership (for example, "I feel…" rather than "Students here are…"). Note that questions 3, 6, 9, 12, and 16 are reverse-coded (and do not include the "R" when using with students).

Psychological Sense of School Membership
Not at all true 1 2 3 4 5 Completely true

1. I feel like a part of my school.
2. People at my school notice when I am good at something.
3. It is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school. (**R**)
4. Other students in my school take my opinions seriously.
5. Most teachers at my school are interested in me.
6. Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in my school. (**R**)
7. There is at least one teacher or adult I can talk to in my school if I have a problem.
8. People at my school are friendly to me.
9. Teachers here are not interested in people like me. (**R**)
10. I am included in lots of activities at my school.
11. I am treated with as much respect as other students in my school.
12. I feel very different from most other students at my school. (**R**)
13. I can really be myself at my school.
14. Teachers at my school respect me.
15. People at my school know that I can do good work.
16. I wish I were in a different school. (**R**)
17. I feel proud to belong to my school.
18. Other students at my school like me the way that I am.

Figure 13. Psychological Sense of School Membership. From Goodenow, 1993, p. 84.

Take Action

Academic self-concept is not immutable. As Marsh and Martin (2011) have shown, achievement and self-concept are reciprocally related, meaning that while negative self-concept can act as a drag on achievement, increases in achievement can buoy academic self-concept.

Part of the work of the dialogic classroom is constructing an alternate vision of what "achievement" looks and sounds like. Clarke (2015), in the study described at the beginning of this subsection, posited that creating the *opportunity* for dialogic engagement (by changing the types of questions asked, for example) was not enough: what students needed was to experience the shift in what types of talk were *valued*. In her

estimation, this might be accomplished through attention to how one responds to student ideas, through more explicit communication about the practices and purposes of reasoning together, and through more deliberate activation of peers as a resource, decentering the teacher as the "only source of knowledge" (p. 179), points also emphasized by Edwards-Groves and Davidson (2019). Students needed to know that "correctness" was not the focus of the work, but rather participation in the co-construction of understanding.

In part, this speaks again to the importance of the teacher's stance: it is not enough simply to tweak talk format if the teacher maintains a primarily monologic stance toward knowledge and instruction. Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2015) found that a dialogically organized classroom had significant positive effects on students' concepts of reading and of themselves as readers, while a monologically organized classroom appeared to encourage negative self-concepts in low-achieving readers. Similarly, Weil et al. (2020), Böheim et al. (2021), and Díez-Palomar et al. (2020) all demonstrated positive effects of dialogic classroom practices on student attitudes, engagement, and self-concept. Böheim et al. (2021) described their results:

> [S]tudents whose teachers adopted a more dialogic discourse practice showed a higher increase in activation during classroom discourse. Tapping into some of the central features of dialogic teaching (i.e., being encouraged to participate, being encouraged to listen to each other's ideas, and sharing ideas without having to worry about mistakes), this result indicates that students notice when teachers change their practice toward a more dialogic pedagogy (p. 10).

Zaretta Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015) offers a number of concrete strategies for helping students develop their academic self-concept, including recommendations like the following:

1. Use images, quotes, and poetry to ignite students' imaginations about what's possible.
2. Notice and acknowledge students when they are acting according to the elements of academic mindset (taking intellectual risks, asking thoughtful questions, putting in effort, learning from errors).
3. Help students connect with their current expertise and competencies.
4. Help students interrupt negative self-talk (pp. 117-118).

Many of these recommendations connect to additional protocols, like the asset-based feedback protocol, the success analysis protocol, and the back talk strategy (in which students confront their own negative statements about themselves with evidence to the contrary). Hammond's book includes a wealth of resources for teachers—it is a highly-recommended resource.

Student Skills and Knowledge

We have already established the significant reciprocal connection between students' beliefs (about themselves and the classroom) and their achievement, and discussed the shift from achievement as "arriving at the correct answer" to "participating in the co-construction of knowledge." Yet students must still believe they are equipped with the tools needed to participate, a statement even more true for linguistically diverse

students who may feel uncertainties about entering classroom conversations with their peers.

Dialogic work requires discipline-specific skills and knowledge as well as student facility with the general moves of academically-productive talk. If the goal is for the class to discuss a story and develop an understanding of the author's implicit arguments, the work inherently includes students' abilities to decode and comprehend the text, prioritize key details, make valid inferences, summarize, assemble the text into a coherent whole in their minds, and return to the text to locate relevant information—to name but a few elements of skilled reading. Discipline-specific skills and knowledge should of course be a part of your work with students and are addressed in "Minding the Curriculum"; the nice thing about dialogic work, though, is that students do not necessarily require a comprehensive understanding of the text or topic in order to enter the conversation. In fact, genuine perplexity and the need to know or understand more are primary motivators of authentic discussion (Dillon, 1988)—students who believe that they already know everything there is to know about a topic have little internal incentive for participating in the dialogue.

Once the class is engaged in dialogue about the topic, students must then draw on fluid sets of social and linguistic skills, as well as what Zwiers and Crawford (2011) describe as the "five core skills of academic conversation" (p. 31), which they characterize as the abilities to:

- Elaborate and clarify
- Support ideas with examples
- Build on and/or challenge a partner's idea

- Paraphrase, and
- Synthesize conversation points (p. 31).

Walsh and Sattes (2015) expand their own list of discussion skills into social, cognitive, and use-of-knowledge skills, as well as a set of dispositions toward each of these areas. Their list of collaborative skills conveys a number of the social and behavioral elements we hope to see students demonstrate:

- Elaborating on classmate's ideas
- Actively seeking to include classmates who are not participating
- Responding to classmates' questions and rebuttals nondefensively
- Remaining open to ideas that are different from one's own
- Actively seeking to understand a different point of view
- Disagreeing in a respectful manner (p. 42).

Gather Additional Information

Perhaps the best way to get a sense of who is participating in your classroom, how they are doing so, and what skills they are demonstrating is to use the set of tools from T-SEDA (Kershner et al., 2019) discussed in "Teacher skill in facilitation and questioning." Recording a video of classroom discussion allows you to code student dialogue according to the items listed. It is not suggested that you do this with each discussion; however, the act of coding one discussion will likely generate a number of ideas for elements to focus on. You may also record and code a discussion later in the year for comparison.

Take Action

The same T-SEDA toolkit containing the coding scheme for discussions also contains a model of the reflective inquiry cycle (Kershner et al., 2019). This excellent model can serve as a framework for taking action in other domains, so feel free to adapt it however you see fit:

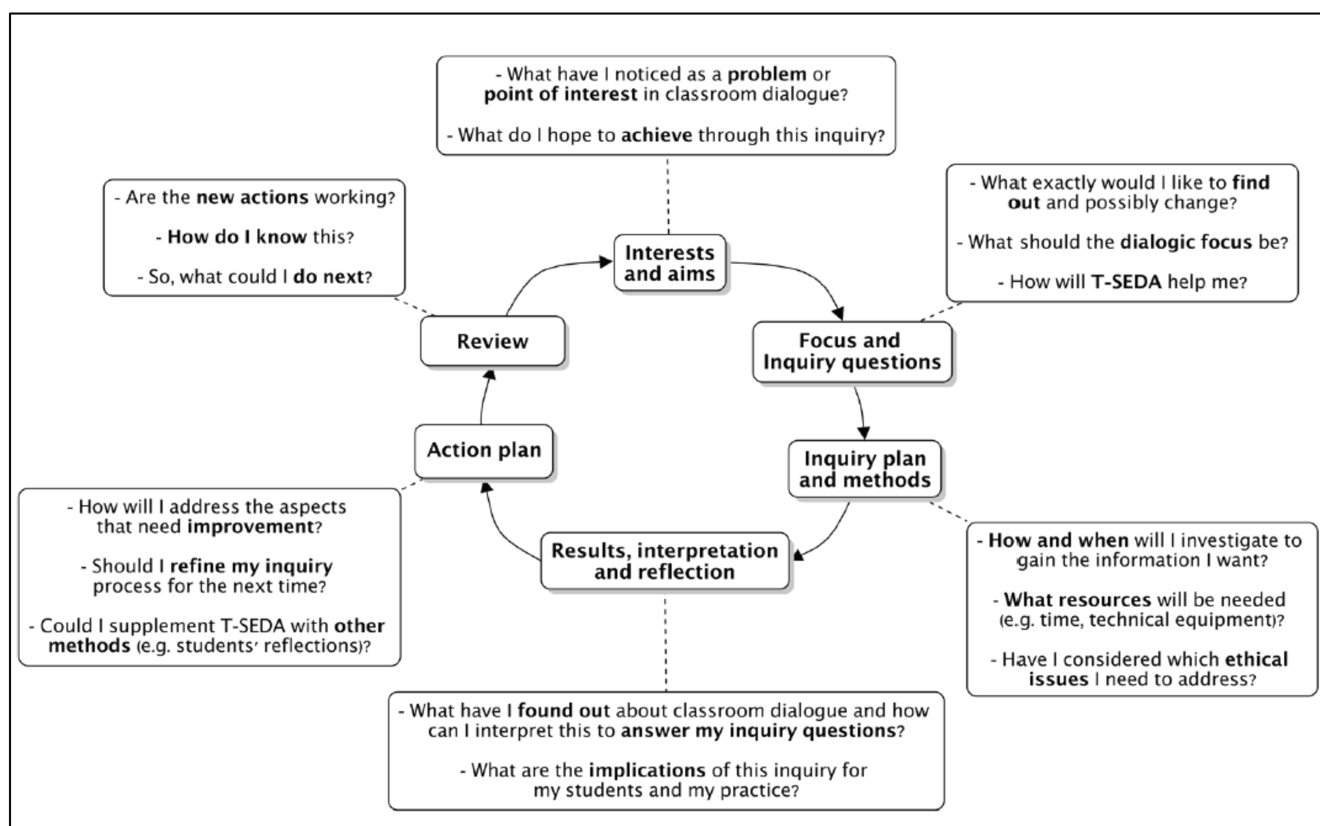


Figure 14. *Reflective Inquiry Cycle. From Kershner et al., 2019, p. 13.*

The kinds of dialogic skills described by authors like Zwiers and Crawford (2011) can be explained and modeled for students, but are developed primarily through practice in the context of genuine dialogue. Helping students learn these talk moves is different from helping students recall factual information—the knowledge is more procedural and

logical in nature than declarative (Farnham-Diggory, 1990). McKeown et al. (2009) have argued that instruction in reading strategies is less targeted and effective than simply asking students thoughtful questions of a text during reading, thereby causing students to *engage* many of those strategies naturally. We can make an analogous observation that creating an extended unit focused on "talk moves" is less efficient than asking thoughtful questions which prompt the skills we aim to develop—the goal isn't for students to learn "about" the moves, but to *actually use them* and take up a sense of when and how they are appropriate.

Zwiers and Crawford (2011) planned a simple tool for exactly this purpose: the academic conversation placemat with prompts.

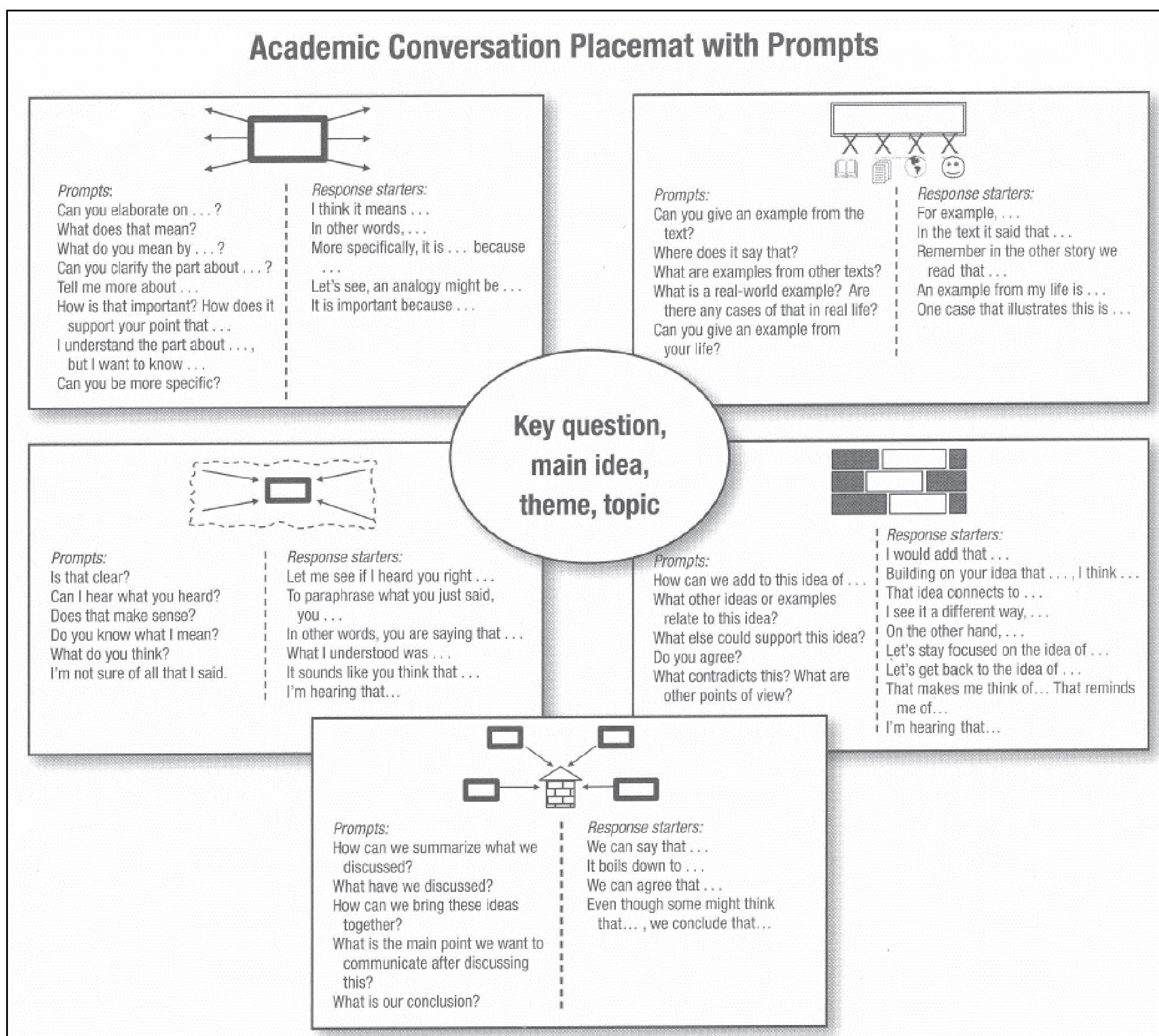


Figure 15. Academic Conversation Placemat. From Zwiers & Crawford, 2011, p. 211.

Each box corresponds to one of the five core academic skills, and contains questions that *prompt* the skill on the left as well as sentence stems to help *respond* to the prompt on the right. In addition to being a handy reference for teachers, this resource is meant to be shared with every student to help make the talk skills more accessible in the moment.

Students can continue to consolidate their developing skills by analyzing their interactions and reflecting on or assessing them. Hackett-Hill (2022) included the following list of metacognitive reflection prompts corresponding to key talk skills (the blocks and towers discussed in the "uptake" column refer to an activity in which students stacked physical blocks for each contribution they made to a discussion).

Summarizing	**Uptake**	**Questioning**	**Incorporating Divergent Perspectives**	**Personal Reflection**
How many times did you hear someone accurately summarize what some-one else was saying? Did you hear any clarify-ing questions? Did you find it challeng-ing to summarize what someone else said before adding your own idea? Why or why not? How did summarizing what someone else said make the discussion better?	How many towers did your group build? How many blocks did each tower have? Which topic did you discuss the most, and what is a new idea you learned from that discussion? Why did adding onto each other help you have a better discus-sion?	What was the most thought-provoking question you heard today? What was the most thought- provoking question you wrote? How would you revise a question that was asked to make it even more thought- provoking?	What were some other perspectives that were brought into the discus-sion? Which sentence frames were used most fre-quently? How did looking at other perspectives change your thinking about the topic you discussed?	What is something new you learned during today's discus-sion? What feedback would you give to yourself after watching the video? After discussing the video with your group, what is the most helpful feedback you received from your classmates?

Figure 16. Metacognitive Reflection Prompts. From Hackett-Hill, 2022, p. 46.

For a significantly more detailed evaluative tool, Reznitskaya and Wilkinson's (2017a) Argumentation Rating Tool expands a rubric into 11 key practices divided into both teacher and student behaviors and described at 3 levels of proficiency. The rubric itself could prompt a year's worth of classroom practice and instruction in rigorous discussion.

Section 5: Systemic and Structural Factors

Section Introduction

For all that they might sometimes seem to be a world to themselves, our classrooms are inextricably connected to the school itself—literally, of course, when considering the physical space we are able to work within and the affordances of our classroom seating and equipment, but also through policies, common practices, organizational structures, bell schedules, and widely-held beliefs. We have a responsibility to consider the effects of these structures on our classroom. While these factors may be the furthest removed from our direct control, any positive changes that happen at a structural level can pay dividends to many more teachers and students over a much longer period of time.

A ready example can be found in any school placed on academic probation for low test scores. Structures outside of the school itself begin to shape the student experience: pressured to reach certain achievement numbers or risk severe consequences, the school leadership engages in curriculum narrowing, squeezing out class time and funding for non-tested subjects and reshaping other content areas in ways meant to support reading and math ("If we cut the orchestra teacher we can afford another specialist who can pull students from social studies to work on…"). Far from benefiting from this increased attention, reading and math teachers are instead pressured by administration to define instructional success as *passing the state test*, and what administrators want to see when they visit a classroom is something that seems to them, based on their brief time in the room, to be helpful in meeting that specific goal.

Objectives begin to shift, and with them, instruction. A little more time–and then in the spring, a *lot* more time–is spent on practice questions connected to short passages. There are always a few questions on literary terms, so teachers start throwing those into opening activities, and the students should probably know what iambic pentameter is in case that comes up again. A review of last year's data shows that students lost a lot of points on questions about sentence-level editing, so teachers start printing off practice worksheets or sticking students in front of adaptive computer programs, hoping to capture a few of those points back.

Time for thoughtful meaning-making work, especially the unpredictable, collaborative type, is cut away little by little: it is after all faster to *tell* students something than it is to allow them to talk about it, and there is so much still to cover before the tests. The rich readings the teacher had already selected for students are now approached through the lens of frequently tested terms and question types, and writing, if it is done at all, is done to formula: *here* is how you turn the question into a claim, *here* is how you organize three clear points, and *here* is how many times you need to quote the text.

In hardly any time at all, the student's experience of school has been upended. Music had been their favorite subject, but the orchestra class is no longer available, and instead during that class period they're now required to sit in front of a laptop completing district-approved math tutorials. Utterly uninterested, they click through screens haphazardly and come to think more and more that school is a boring place built primarily to contain them: English had once been an okay class, but with all the practice questions they're doing, it's now beginning to feel like the math tutorials. None of it seems to matter, anyway: one day they're talking about commas again, the next they're

learning about *hyperbole*, and then they're going to read another passage about two boys who played basketball so they can explain the *main idea*. There's even a graphic organizer with sentence frames for them to use when they write–all they have to do is drop in a few phrases and quotes.

We could keep pulling at this thread if we wanted—it makes sense to think about what happens to classroom behavior and to teacher retention rates as this trend continues—but already we can imagine that this classroom environment has become hard soil for genuine dialogue to take root in, not only because of the ways teachers feel pressured to adapt their instruction but also because of the shifts in students' views of what school is and does. If students' sense of trust that their voices matter is perpetually eroded, when the opportunity to speak does arise they may ask themselves whether it is worth the effort at all.

We must examine the systems within which we are teaching. At the very least, it can inform our assessment of what is happening in our classroom: It helps to consider whether you are pushing against the grain in your dialogic work with students or building on skills and habits that have been intentionally developed over multiple years. And while many elements in this area will remain outside of your control, it is important not to use that fact as an excuse to avoid the work. There are always ways to advocate for change—to challenge, resist, subvert, or circumvent.

Reflect

The scenario described in the section introduction is so common you may already recognize your institution in it. Similar patterns, or components of this pattern, have been

described by Davis and Vehabovic (2018), Ho (2008), Schildkamp and Datnow (2020), Booher-Jennings (2005), and Watanabe (2008), among many others. However, these are not the only constraints to dialogic teaching in our schools—consider, for example, recent conflicts regarding the content of books assigned in classrooms. Below are a few suggestions to consider as you reflect on the school setting and the larger system you work within.

1. Do you feel you have time in your class to engage in regular discussion or similar work?
    a. How long is your class period?
    b. What is your perception of the "curricular time" available to you? Do you feel pressured to cover so many skills or standards that you don't feel able to engage in periods of extended talk?
    c. If so, from what direction does that pressure come? Is this something that leadership voices to you, or is this a feeling that comes from your own sense of the requirements?
2. Does your class experience more-than-typical levels of interruption—for example, regular announcements, knocks on the door, or calls to the classroom phone that take up time and impede thoughtful work?
3. Does school leadership appear to value student agency and voice? In what ways do they (or do they not) show this?

4. Is the school focused on high levels of apparent compliance (for example, a schoolwide focus on SLANT, Cornell notes, quiet students, etc.)? If so, are they still focused on this once they see quality instruction going on in a classroom?
5. If you have a department head, what are their practices and what are their attitudes? How do their practices affect your sense of what is permissible or appropriate?
6. Are students who use their voices—in the school, in the community—celebrated? Are students expected to take an active role in the community and to speak to issues that affect them?
7. If there is an adopted curriculum in use, is it one that provides regular opportunities for classroom discussion, or is it one that inherently values a monologic or authoritative stance? Examples of monologic qualities include a focus on test-like questions and questions meant to push students to adopt preconceived interpretations of texts.
8. What is your school's current relationship to "accountability measures" like standardized tests? How do the tests (or any other measures the school is focused on, such as the number of AP classes offered) affect the stances of teachers, instructional leaders, and administration in the building?
9. Does anything about the school's status—a wealthy prep-school, a Title I school, a school primarily serving students of color, etc.—play a role in leaders' view of dialogue and discussion in the classroom? Explain.
10. What is the physical space available to you and your students? Does it allow for comfortable interpersonal interaction?

a. Is it easy for participants to *see* and address one another?
b. Is it easy for participants to *hear* what their peers are saying (few interruptions, not overly loud, etc.)?
c. Are basic environmental factors attended to (heat and air conditioning, accessible restrooms, water, etc.)?
d. How many students are in the room? Is the room appropriately sized for the number of students within it?
e. Are student desks or tables…
    i. Easy to move into helpful arrangements (groups, whole-class discussions, etc.)?
    ii. Easy to maneuver around without stumbling?

11. If students' parents sat in on your class, do you imagine they would be happy to see students engaged in discussion, or do you imagine they would push for more "traditional" forms of direct instruction?
    a. Be careful: consider the assumptions you make in thinking about this question. What concrete reasons do you have for thinking parents would respond one way or the other?
12. How has your community—including local parents, the school board, and your own school administration—responded to concerns about specific books or concepts being taught in classrooms? Are there laws or policies in place that bar specific concepts or topics from your classroom? What is your perception of students' view of the situation? How has it affected your own selection of materials or delivery of instruction?

Take Action

1. If you find that you are constrained by rigid curriculum policies, test preparation, or teacher evaluation rubrics that seem opposed to dialogic work, the first action you can take—one that you must sometimes take on behalf of your students and in the interest of sound and humanizing pedagogy—is to personally, privately subvert systems that do not serve students. Many teachers do this already in a variety of ways—leaving the same teaching objective on the board every day is a common example. But caution is merited: Aside from "getting in trouble," these actions may isolate you from your teaching peers in some situations (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2017). More importantly, you should closely and earnestly examine your reasons for resisting: Sometimes we are faced with new mandates that can create discomfort but that are vital work for schools, as when digging deeply into matters of equity.
2. Whatever the systemic constraint you are facing, be it a need for classroom supplies, an odious testing schedule, or a short-sighted policy regarding school rule enforcement in the classroom, you should seek dialogue with those who have authority over these matters. By "seek dialogue," I do not mean, "unburden yourself of all of your pent-up frustrations." In fact, you should probably start by asking them about the matter: "I've noticed that this semester, we have three different benchmark tests on the calendar, which seems like a lot to me. Can you tell me more about the changes?" It may become clear that some matters are completely inflexible, while others are more open to discussion than you might have guessed.

3. Meet with your peers and discuss the issues you are facing together. Gather specific information, look up research on the issue, collect data. This may result in being able to plan thoughtful adaptations to a district-mandated curriculum, being able to bring your concerns to an administrator with more clarity and information, or, at the very least, being able to navigate the constraints with the social support of your peers. It may also actually result in *change*—even when administrators and district leaders adopt positions different from our own, they can be open to change when there is a persuasive rationale for it.
4. Recognize that many of your direct administrators are themselves constrained within a larger system, and seek ways to influence that system. You might be able to attend school board meetings and advocate for changes, or since the life of a teacher is often overwhelmingly busy as it is, you might be able to help *others* attend and speak to the issues by describing your needs and experiences. Join local organizations that share your concerns. Contact lawmakers. Organize. Vote.

One of the difficult things about teaching is that so many of the decisions affecting daily life are made by people many miles away who have never once stood at the front of a classroom. The further away the decision is made, the harder it can be for us to do anything about it. We cannot take on the burden of single-handedly changing the system—but in some cases we cannot let up pressure, either. A maxim passed down in Judaism seems vital here: "You are not required to finish your work, yet neither are you permitted to desist from it." While much of this reflection tool has focused on changes

you can make in your own classroom, creating system-level changes, even small ones, has the potential to positively affect many, many more teachers and students.

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