

DIVERSIFYING DIALOGIC DISCOURSES. INTRODUCTION TO A
SPECIAL ISSUE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIALOGIC
THEORY AND PRACTICE

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The broad church of dialogic practices embraces a wide range of themes, and the ways in which dialogic practices are explored, analysed and theorised are many and diverse. During the past decade, dialogic pedagogies have enjoyed extensive attention in international educational circles and across disciplines concerned with education. Dialogic teaching has been defined in various ways, but for the purposes of this special issue, we understand “the dialogic” broadly as a set of approaches to and stances toward classroom communication in which teacher and students, through purposeful classroom talk (alongside other semiotic means), engage in an ongoing, relationally & interactionally contingent process of co-constructing feeling, value, and knowledge about curricular material (Alexander, 2008; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Mortimer & Scott, 2003; Wegerif, 2010; Black, & Wiliam, D. 1998).

Scholars in language and literacy studies have in recent years been interested in such questions as how linguistically and racially diverse students can be better served through dialogic talk practices and stances (Campano, Ghiso, Yee, & Pantoja, 2013); how various kinds and purposes of writing interact with classroom talk (e.g., Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, and Heintz, 2013); how teacher candidates can be brought into dialogic teaching (Caughlan, Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Kelly, & Fine, 2013) in an era of instrumentalist curriculum and standardized assessment. Many would agree that in a global era, learning to dialogue with, listen to, and learn from others who are different from oneself (whether linguistically, racially, socioeconomically, religiously, etc.) is an important and necessary skill for work, family life, and citizenship in a globalized world (e.g., Appiah, 2007). More practically, recent teaching and learning trends such as flipped classrooms (Strayer, 2007) and personalized learning initiatives in countries such as Canada and Scotland (Robinson, 2006; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2012) have publicized dialogic approaches and brought them into popular discussion.

Nevertheless, research in the past two decades has documented that more monologic approaches remain the most common form of classroom communication (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Nystrand, 1997), and in recent years such “monologic” approaches seem consistent with the implementation of standardization movements and processes (e.g., the Common Core State Standards in the US). In light of such developments, changing the communication structure of the classroom towards the dialogic appears difficult to achieve (Alexander, 2004; Lyle & Thomas-Williams, 2011).

Given what is known about the difficulties of dialogic approaches, yet given the current popular and scholarly interest in dialogic techniques and stances, continuing study of the practices of dialogic teaching and assessment is crucial (Lyle, 2008). Research into dialogic teaching focusing on this learning process is scarce, especially in the context of secondary education (Higham, Brindley, & van de Pol, 2014), yet research in the field of dialogic practice is needed to map the nature of the ‘new’ classroom, and guide teachers and learners as they develop different ways of relating.

1. DIALOGIC AND POWER DYNAMICS

Given the diversity of ways in which dialogic practices intersect with teaching and learning, we decided, in this special issue of **L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature**

to focus on one theme which we felt key to all dialogic enterprise: power dynamics in dialogic teaching and learning. As editors, we were interested in how the dialogic seeks to address issues of inequality, whatever the source (e.g., in this volume, social inequities, access to knowledge and to digital technology, and access to language as 'case studies' of dialogue and power) and in how such issues play out. In bringing the articles together in this volume, we have sought to organise them into an internal dialogue addressing key themes. We begin with the article by Rupert Wegerif which frames the theme of power - an overarching perspective which serves to position the articles that follow, each of which has differing contexts and with differing actors but enact the main theme of power dynamic.

In his lead article to the special issue, **Rupert Wegerif** offers a theoretical paper arguing -- we think rightly -- that "literacy education for relationship and engagement" is "the kind of literacy education that corresponds to the demands of the Internet Age." In many ways, Wegerif's ideas structure the set of papers in this issue, because relationships lie at the heart of dialogic approaches to education, whether one takes an epistemological, ontological, or more mechanistic (i.e., tool-based) approach to dialogic teaching and learning processes. If relationships indeed mediate language practice, it follows that, as Wegerif argues, "Words, written or spoken, do not mean on their own but only have meaning in the context of a relationship and the nature of that meaning depends upon the quality of that relationship." It further follows that if language and literacy practices and learning are about relationship, then they necessarily create and are created by different kinds of communities (Freire 1972) or, to use a term more appropriately to the "internet age," "affinity spaces" (Gee, 2005).

Wegerif adds another layer, as well, to bring thinking into the discussion, by following scholarship on orality and literacy (from Socrates through the experiments of Luria and Vygotsky through recent work in the neurosciences). Wegerif suggested that just as literacy fundamentally changed the nature of thinking, so the Internet Age offers yet another fundamental shift in thinking -- in a more dialogic direction that combines "aspects of print-literacy with aspects of oracy in a way that is distinct from both." One issue we take with this line of argumentation is that the constructs of "orality" and "literacy" have been roundly questioned within the tradition of the New Literacy Studies (e.g., scholars like Shirley Brice Heath, Brian Street, and James Gee) at least since Scribner & Cole's [1982] study of Vai literacies, and indeed Wegerif notes that orality and literacy almost always interact with one another. Evoking this dualism at all, however, can be deeply problematic, however, because reified constructs of "orality" and "literacy" have so often been used in the history of schooling to devalue "orality" and the groups of people labeled as "oral cultures" - oftentimes people of colour, people who live in poverty, people in the East (vs. the West), people in the South (vs. the north), those beyond the borders of "empire," in short those who are "not us." This disagreement aside, it seems nonetheless indisputable that new technologies for communication and literate activity do indeed require and introduce new ways of thinking in human collectives. We would just note that the divide between orality and literacy has always been more dialogic and more "slippery" than Socrates or Ong or any of the "Great Divide" theorists might have us believe. And indeed Wegerif arrives at very close to this point himself when he writes that "It is this focus [by Bakhtin and Levinas] on the dialogic relation as a kind of difference rather than a kind of

identity that most clearly distinguishes the metaphor of thinking as 'dialogue across difference' from Socrates' original version of thinking as face-to-face dialogue."

The kind of thinking, and literate practice, Wegerif finally advances as necessary for the Internet Age is a kind of open-ness to the other -- to the unknown other which transcends one's own understanding: "The idea of a dialogic relation with the Infinite Other is another way of referring to the infinite openness at the heart of dialogue, an openness that needs to be embraced if we wish to think and write creatively." Drawing as it does on Bakhtin's notion of the superaddressee and the Levinasian notion of the "Infinite Other," this concept takes on an almost spiritual dimension in how it construes the dialogic relationality of thinking and literate activity and learning in the age of the Internet. This notion of openness to "all that is other" points to an idea of literacy teaching as building students' capacity to "listen to, engage with, and respond to other voices, visible or invisible." Wegerif believes that such teaching, which promotes empathy and curiosity more so than certainty and (moral) superiority, will best prepare students for participation in the kind of literacies and the attendant kinds of thinking requires in the New Media World.

While we fully embrace this vision, and we think it plays out interestingly in the different papers in the issue, it is also important to note that processes of "Othering" are wrapped up in histories of inequity and oppression, in which academics and institutions of schooling are implicated. One implication is that building such a capacity of "openness," "empathy," and "curiosity" for students who are part of historically marginalized communities -- such as those studied in the papers by Ghiso and colleagues -- will undoubtedly look different than it does for those who have historically enjoyed privileges such as whiteness, affluence, and historically valued oral and literate practices.

Our next grouping is with a paper by Aliza Segal and Adam Lefstein and a second by James Chisholm and Adam Loretto, looking at how issues of authority and power are negotiated in primary and high school classroom dialogues. These authors speak to one another through their close, Bakhtinian examination of talk as it unfolds in particular classroom interactions, Segal and Lefstein at the primary level in an Israeli classroom and Chisholm and Loretto at the secondary level in a United States classroom

Aliza Segal and **Adam Lefstein**, in their paper "Exuberant Voiceless Participation: An Unintended Consequence of Dialogic Sensibilities," address an issue that we have encountered in our teacher education work: how to support the contributions of many student voices (what Alexander calls the "collective" dimension of dialogic teaching) with temporally sustained, intellectually coherent and deep exploration and engagement with curricular content (what Alexander calls the "cumulative," and most difficult, dimension of dialogic teaching). Segal and Lefstein put the crux of the issue in epistemological terms, because their data set show a tension between "co-construction of knowledge and presentation of information," although the idea of cumulative discourse seems to us go quite a bit deeper than only the "presentation of information". The article explores the example of a primary grade discussion, in a grade 4 classroom, about the concept of flooding, which occurred in the middle of an instructional unit about the environment. They note a sort of competition between a "constructivist epistemology, in which the teacher is supposed to elicit and work with student ideas" and a "relatively absolutist epistemology, according to which there is an official definition of a flood" (based on the prototypical example or "authoritative paradigm" of the sort of desert flash flood which commonly occurs in the region of the classroom).

Thus, Segal and Lefstein suggest, the aims and goods of dialogic teaching may not simply be accomplished by shifting from fewer teacher turns to more student turns (e.g., as Caughlan, Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Fine, and Kelly (2013) assume), because students may simply be parroting what they perceive the teacher wants them to say, perhaps even with great enthusiasm. What on the surface appears to be teacher “uptake” of student ideas (Collins, 1982) may simply be “test uptake” (Nystrand, 2004), where the teacher simply prods students to articulate or animate her own narrow agenda. In exploring this tension, Segal and Lefstein observe and critique the phenomenon of “exuberant, voiceless participation” (a label they draw from Rampton) in which students simply animate the party line or the pre-planned script of the teacher, textbook, or other available authoritative discourse. They argue that the dialogic imperative of multiple student voices (the collective dimension of dialogic teaching) may be coming into conflict with the cumulative imperative to engage student in sustained and intellectually deep, and deepening, talk.

The article makes several contributions to the literature on dialogic teaching. First, it argues for a conceptualization of student “voice,” grounded in the work of Hymes and Bakhtin, and its “realization” through processes of classroom discourse. We ourselves would prefer a verb such as the “emergence” or “unfolding” of voice through classroom discourse; otherwise, there seems a danger of assuming that language occurs “after the ideational fact” (as Nystrand [1986] puts it), that student voice is somehow a pre-existing entity possessed by the student and then manifest through the discourse, rather than a contingently negotiated interactional accomplishment, as Bakhtin would teach us. Segal and Lefstein identify four conditions for student voice to emerge in classroom discourse: a) an opportunity to speak, b) the expression of one’s own ideas, c) the expression of one’s own ideas on one’s own terms, and d) the ratification -- or “heeding by others” -- of one’s contribution. As Segal and Lefstein observe, these criterion for student voice makes quite tricky the question of authenticity (what is authentically student voice vs. some authoritative discourse being channeled through the student), given that “boundaries between one’s own and another’s voice are not at all clear cut.”

A second contribution relates to the goal of cultivating and inviting students voices into the classroom conceptualized as a multivocal, polysemous sea of language, a metaphor suggested by both Bakhtin (1981) and by Britton (1970). This metaphor and goal has been articulated through the work of scholars studying historically marginalized groups (e.g., in the Israeli context, that might be Palestinian students) and seeing classroom discourse as a site where issues of equity play out each day, where some student voices are routinely dismissed and devalued, while others are honored, ratified, and generally heeded (e.g., Kirkland, 2013). While scholars focused on equity in education express legitimate concern about the devaluing of certain student voices over others, Segal and Lefstein are legitimately pursuing the goal and the good of expanding students’ linguistic repertoires. They wonder whether students’ appropriation of official voices in the phenomenon of “voiceless, exuberant participation” might have a place in some sort of developmental process of making curricular “words and ideas their own.” We find the two perspectives here -- one focused on development or expansion of linguistic repertoires, the other (not represented in the article) on the equity implications of which students’ voices might be ratified and which might go unheeded. That question, while beyond the scope of the article, is one that Maria Paula Ghiso and her colleagues take up explicitly.

Chisholm and Loretto ask, “What makes a teacher’s practice ‘dialogically-accomplished’, and how is such practice educationally effective?”. In a close analysis of discourse in a high school English Language Arts classroom, the authors explore one teacher’s experiences in promoting inquiry through dialogue, and expose the challenges and benefits of this approach to teaching literary analysis. They mobilize Bakhtin’s concept of centripetal and centrifugal forces (Bakhtin, 1981) to elucidate how dialogic methods enrich students’ understanding of works of literature. The article offers teachers a critiqued example of dialogic practice, and ends with a fascinating and practical summary of the key skills required for successful implementation of a dialogic approach to teaching ELA.

Chisholm and Loretto start from the premise that traditional discourses in ELA classrooms form and progress in an “orderly but lifeless” fashion (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, p. 278) centred on the privileged interpretations of teachers of literature, Chisholm and Loretto. They describe the recitation pattern of “initiation-response-evaluation” (a pattern no doubt familiar to ELA practitioners worldwide) that seems to be the inevitable teaching approach. The authors argue the case that the positioning of interpretative authority in the teacher alone creates the inertia that centers ELA practice on recitation approaches. Using Bakhtinian theory as a lens, they go on to identify exactly how the dialogically accomplished teacher can share interpretative authority by ‘tensioning’ classroom inquiry between the authorised or accepted interpretations of the work (Bakhtin’s centripetal force) and the individual interpretations of the class participants (Bakhtin’s centrifugal force).

Their study focuses on two 45-minute recordings taken in an East Coast US high school during an ELA class taught by Adam Loretto. The authors originally used these recordings for a baseline assessment of Loretto’s practice prior to a study testing the impact of dialogic interventions in the class; thus, the recordings offer particularly intriguing material for analysis, representing as they do the day-to-day practice of a dialogically minded educator. Chisholm and Loretto subjected this material to a rigorous cycle of discourse analysis, seeking evidence of the students and teacher ‘tensioning’ meaning between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of interpretation (Landay, 2004). In this way, they demonstrate the dialogic co-construction of meaning in progress by pinpointing the aspects of Loretto’s practice that support the development of tensioned (co-constructed) analyses. This article therefore presents the reader with a detailed example of dialogic teaching and learning that at once lays bare the processes involved and provides advice for the development of personal practice in dialogic education.

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Our next article, **Maureen Boyd’s** “Connecting ‘Man in the Mirror’ Developing a Classroom Dialogic Teaching and Learning Directory” follows on with an exploration of students, multiple voices and engaging those voices so that they are heard. Boyd directs our attention in the dialogic to issues of context and connectivity. The dialogic is not simply a set of strategies that are imposed on the classroom but rather involves commitment to a world view which prioritises what Boyd refers to as ‘coherent knowledge building and purposeful understanding and use’. It is a positioning which should permeate both teacher and students classroom behaviours if it is to be successful, and involves mutual respect

and awareness of the validity of multiple perspectives and voices expressing views about those perspectives.

Boyd's research takes her into an understanding of dialogic which explores classroom talk patterns where context includes examining not just place but also use across time, 'as part of a repertoire of past, present and anticipated discourse practices'. The connectivity is to be found in the interlinking of these with the ways in which pedagogical choices enable connections knowledge building as a dialogic, community activity.

In her article, Boyd takes the example of a classroom based strategy, the use of a weekly song as part of a classroom Morning Meeting where students listen, discuss and read the lyrics as a literacy building activity connected with a Writer's Workshop unit. Using sociocultural discourse analysis Boyd demonstrates how both teacher and student enable dialogic practices as part of a 'classroom trajectory' of learning, where student and teacher demonstrate and embed shared purpose in learning. The close analysis of one session engagingly reveals how teacher and student are jointly focused on a shared learning activity which enables them effectively to negotiate ways through errors and difficulties within the context of a dialogic classroom.

Boyd ends with three questions which she poses to us as the reader, challenging us to consider both substantive and methodological issues within this type of research. In so doing, she creates a conclusion that is in and of itself a dialogic event evincing both context and connectivity. Our shared purpose in understanding dialogic classroom practices should position us well, as readers, to respond.

In our next grouping, articles by **Ghiso, Campano, Player and Rusoja**, and **Aukerman et al.**, engage with diverse and historically excluded voices, and they explore the assessment of effectiveness of the dialogic approach with such learners.

In an important piece of research, **Ghiso, Campano, Player and Rusoja** explore the extent to which dialogic techniques can prove useful in promoting the educational inclusion of historically marginalised groups. Ghiso et al use Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser, 1997) to define their study group: US immigrants of Latina/o and Indonesian ethnicity taking classes in the community centre of a Catholic parish church. They analyse the experiences of the students (adults and children) as they participate in language classes and local research projects conducted on dialogic principles, reflecting upon the issues surrounding the implementation of dialogic learning in a situation where the participants are reluctant to engage in dialogue.

The disenfranchisement of migrant people from educational opportunity through social status or language barrier is an issue of increasing concern to society as a whole, but especially to those working in education. The authors' use of the term "multilingual counterpublic" (Fraser, 1997) and its associated theoretical framework (Asen, 2000; Warner, 2002) provides a useful starting point from which to consider both the construction of exclusion, and the response to it. The authors explore the benefits of the dialogic approach in the post-monolingual setting, demonstrating ways in which dialogic teaching and learning can validate such practices as translanguaging, thus empowering the migrant learner by supporting the construction of identities outside the negative discourse of the dominant ideology.

Ghiso et al designed and implemented two curricula organised to provide dialogic learning experiences: an ESOL class for Latina/o families, and a class called "the Community Researchers Project" (CRP) aimed at Latina/o and Indonesian youth. In an approach that

combined ethnographic methods with practitioner research, the authors immersed themselves in the Catholic Parish, sharing their identity and aims openly and transparently with the community. In this manner, they gathered extensive field notes that they then subjected to discourse analysis with the aim of identifying patterns of negotiation, underlying ideologies, and the recognition of knowledge amongst members of the multilingual counterpublic.

This ethnographic approach to data gathering is complemented by the authors' "inquiry stance" towards dialogic pedagogy: an investigative evaluation of the methods of dialogic practice in the multilingual counterpublic, enabling the identification of conditions necessary for the initiation of dialogue in this learning group. This interesting article emphasises the trust, respect and solidarity that underpin the dialogic approach when implemented in a counterpublic setting. In fact, one might recognise that such interpersonal factors are a prerequisite of a dialogic education in any setting, rendering this article of relevance to all practitioners.

Following a similar theme of second language learners, **Aukerman, Martin, Gargani and McCallum** make a powerful and persuasive case for dialogically organised reading teaching (instruction), primarily, though not solely, for second language learners ('English learners') and in so doing challenge the accepted pedagogical wisdom that students with poor reading skills need explicit and focused teaching with skills centred approaches. What we see here instead is a reading programme which validates notions of authenticity, contingency and student driven dialogue. The power relations within such a classroom shift in ways which centres student and text: the driving tenet is not that of teacher directed single meaning of text but rather the recognition that meaning making and the discourse which surrounds that is the central value of reading. As such, students with low test results are usually recipients of strategies which assume, in Yeats' terms, that it is the 'filling of a bucket' rather than 'the lighting of a fire' as the principle required. Yet as demonstrated here, the dialogically organised classroom which values the lighting of reading fires meant that these students anticipated their reading lessons with enthusiasm and energy – surely a pre-requisite for any definition of effective reading.

The article reports on the authors' SHEP project – Shared Evaluation Pedagogy, a dialogic alternative to the usual reading comprehension intervention programmes that dominate the reading landscapes of many teachers and low attaining students. Aukerman, Martin, Gargani and McCallum are careful to distinguish between dialogic and those pedagogies that share text as a reading activity. The former, they claim, is characterised by the discussion by students of ideas which they actively believe in, with teacher questions being generated as genuine follow up to student ideas, not rooted in a pre-approved answer which the students has somehow to guess at, but not necessarily share or even understand. Marking out a dialogic classroom as one where 'learning to engage thoughtfully with others around text by responding to peer ideas as one develops one's own', they note that it is not simply about what to do with text but rather 'what one can do in conversation with others around text, that matters'.

Yet these exciting claims about reading comprehension are made more compelling by the choice of methodology: the use of randomised control trials, an approach not usually associated with dialogic encounters, as the authors themselves point out. In using RCTs, Aukerman, Martin, Gargani and McCallum are seeking to establish whether dialogically organised reading classrooms have short term and long term impact on readers and their

reading comprehension. They considered five outcome measures: two reading assessments administered following SHEP intervention and three standardised measures (in reading, spelling and language) one year later. Without wishing to offer a spoiler alert, the results are both convincing and challenging. Whilst acknowledging in good scholarly form the limitations of their study, including a decision not to record or analyse the language patterns of teachers, the authors nevertheless produce an article which invites a reassessment of conventional reading intervention programmes in ways which might lead not only to a more effective way of teaching reading, but one which actively leads to the holy grail for any teacher – students who read – and discuss text - for pleasure.

In this volume, then, we present articles which we hope you find stimulating, and which, in illuminating the relationship - current and putative - of the dialogic with power dynamics, validate the reality of authentic dialogue as empowering for all. The articles can be read as we have grouped them - and we thus invite you to engage with the dialogue we have created; but each is a stand alone paper too, and the invitation there is to render each article as a voice which invites conversation with you, as reader, and as Other.

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