TENSIONING INTERPRETIVE AUTHORITY DURING DIALOGIC DISCUSSIONS OF LITERATURE

JAMES S. CHISHOLM * & ADAM J. LORETTO **

** Department of Middle and Secondary Education, University of Louisville, ** Department of English, Grove City College*

Abstract

This analysis of classroom discourse offers a dialogic perspective on interpretive authority—the argumentative assertion of meaning—by mobilizing the Bakhtinian concepts of centripetal and centrifugal forces to analyze how one teacher and his students co-constructed literary meanings during two 45-minute whole-class discussions of the text *Grendel* in two secondary English classrooms in the United States. Discussion transcripts were segmented into interpretive episodes and coded for the form and function of students' (a) *interpretations* (e.g., how students made meanings in interaction by dialoguing with other students, texts, and ideas) and (b) *source of authority* (e.g., how students asserted text-based meanings that either validated or disrupted conventional or locally ratified interpretations). Micro-level discourse analyses revealed how participants co-constructed interpretive authority by tensioning talk between centripetal tendencies to unify, centralize, and standardize text meanings and centrifugal tendencies that reimagined, expanded, and disrupted standard interpretations of the text. Critical to the development of students' dialogic construction of interpretive authority was the teacher's stance as listener and discussion participant, teacher and student tensioning of standard and non-standard literary meanings, and a classroom environment in which students' colloquial language could be used to support literary sensemaking. Rethinking interpretive authority as a dynamic concept tensioned between centripetal and centrifugal forces may shed light on how dialogic practices are enacted given the complexities that inform how students and teachers participate during literary discussions.

Keywords: dialogism, centripetal, centrifugal, discussion, response to literature

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Corresponding author: James Chisholm, Department of Middle and Secondary Education, University of Louisville, 292 Porter Education Building, 1905 South 1st Street, Louisville, KY 40292, USA. email: james.chisholm@louisville.edu

1. INTRODUCTION

> "Discussions depend on and are vulnerable to the contingencies of social interaction" (Anagnostopoulos, Smith, & Nystrand, 2008, p. 7)

A vast body of literature on the role of discussion in English/language arts (ELA) instructional environments has shaped a number of widespread beliefs among educators including the notions that (a) engaging in dialogic discourse promotes democratic participation in society (Beach & Myers, 2001; Fecho, 2011; O'Donnell-Allen, 2011), (b) authentic discussions create classroom environments that are conducive to critical thinking (McCann, Johannessen, Kahn, & Flanagan, 2006); and (c) discussing texts dialogically matters, to the extent that it provides an alternative to traditional recitation in which the teacher holds the interpretive authority over texts while students attempt to learn from, not with, the teacher (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Reznitskaya, 2012).

Researchers have identified the positive potential of such inquiry-based and dialogic discussions in promoting comprehension (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003) and meaning-making (Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz, 2013), developing argumentative writing practices (Reznitskaya et al., 2001), and promoting critical consciousness about the world through the close reading of the word (Martínez-Roldán, 2003). Additionally, scholarship on inquiry- and discussion-based instruction has investigated how preservice and inservice ELA teachers learn to enact dialogic discussion practices (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002; Caughlan, Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Kelly, & Fine, 2013) and how inservice teachers unlearn traditional aspects of recitation practices (Aukerman, 2007). Despite all of the evidence that supports the use of "high-leverage practices" (Ball & Forzani, 2009, p. 504) such as inquiry-based discussions, talk about literary texts in ELA classrooms continues to be dominated by the teacher's authoritative voice as "discussions" are equated with recitations (Nystrand, 2006). Although some researchers have proposed innovative models for preparing teachers to lead dialogic discussions in their classrooms (Caughlan & Juzwik, 2014; Grossman, n.d.), other researchers have uncovered the difficulty some teachers have in realizing their roles during discussions when their voice is no longer privileged (Williamson, 2013), or when they struggle to turn over control and time to students (Basmadjian, 2008).

Thus, although researchers have documented the instructional affordances of classrooms in which dialogic practices persist and obstacles that may exist en route to establishing dialogic instructional contexts, talk in many classrooms continues to be governed by discursive patterns that situate the locus of knowledge within the teacher (Aukerman, 2013; Nystrand, 2006). Because dialogic practice depends on an ongoing process in which teachers and students co-construct meanings in social interaction (Boyd & Markarian, 2011), the concept of interpretive authority—the argumentative assertion of meaning that is taken up by others as a viable and valid contribution (Flint, 2000)—represents a critical lens through which dialogic practice can be studied. This approach to interpretive authority also foregrounds its social

construction, highlighting, therefore, the function of interpretive authority (e.g., building a critical dialogue) over the form of interpretive authority (e.g., using text-based evidence to support a claim).

Some researchers have conceptualized interpretive authority as a relatively static concept—something that someone either possesses or does not possess (e.g., a teacher who has taught a poem for many years is said to have interpretive authority over the poem [Smith & Connolly, 2005]). The purpose of this study is to offer a dialogic perspective on interpretive authority by mobilizing the Bakhtinian concepts of centripetal and centrifugal forces to analyze how one teacher and his students co-constructed literary meanings. To understand how these dimensions of dialogue inform meaning making in one secondary English classroom, we posed the following research question: How do one teacher and his students work between centripetal and centrifugal forces in language to construct interpretive authority dialogically during whole class discussions of literature? We first review the literature on the role of whole class discussions in shaping dialogic pedagogical practices. Then, we present our discourse analysis of two 45-minute whole-class discussions of the text *Grendel* among 17- and 18-year old students and their teacher in two secondary English classrooms in the United States. Finally, we draw on these analyses to discuss *how* students co-constructed particular interpretations about a literary text during the enactment of literary discussions. We conclude this article by theorizing interpretive authority as a dynamic concept tensioned between standardized interpretations and innovative understandings of text meanings, and suggesting that such a reconceptualization of interpretive authority may shed light on how inquiry is accomplished given the "contingencies of social interaction" (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008, p. 7) that shape this complex and responsive literacy practice.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON INQUIRY-BASED LITERARY DISCUSSIONS IN SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

An artifact of an assembly-line approach to teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009), recitation techniques like the initiation-response-evaluation (I-R-E) pattern of classroom discourse do not consistently encourage students to interrogate texts, understand multiple perspectives, or engage in dialogue about complex issues—all literacy practices that characterize successful participation in inquiry-based discussions in ELA (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011; Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2012; O'Donnell-Allen, 2011). Perhaps more than any other scholarship, Nystrand's collaborative research (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Nystrand, 1997; Nystrand et al., 2003) has leveraged Bakhtinian concepts to develop a critical stance toward the recitation practices that pervade too many ELA classrooms and to illuminate the possibilities for learning that emerge when recitation becomes dialogue. From this body of work, Nystrand and

colleagues have identified the following characteristics of an "orderly but lifeless" (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, p. 278) ELA classroom in which the teacher's interpretive authority over text meanings is the only one that counts: (a) inauthentic questions, (b) I-R-E patterns of dialogue, (c) a lack of "uptake" of student ideas in the formulation of new questions or responses, and (d) low-levels of evaluation based on student responses (e.g., "okay" or "good"). Decades of research studies have revealed the persistence and pervasiveness of recitation in which less than one minute per class lesson involves authentic discussion (as characterized by evidence of dialogicality): (a) open discussion among students without consistent teacher evaluation, (b) authentic teacher questions, and (c) questions with uptake in eighth- and ninth-grade ELA classrooms (Nystrand, 2006). These and other studies (e.g., Alexander, 2004; Applebee et al., 2003; Sherry, 2010; Smith & Connolly, 2005) contribute to a substantial research base that has evidenced how dialogic instruction relates to students' literacy achievement and their substantive engagement in learning.

Classroom recitations documented in the research literature test students' ability to remember; dialogic exchanges test students' ability to think and depend on how a teacher establishes his or her role, which, in turn, affects how students position themselves as thinkers, interpreters, and generators of new understandings. Nystrand (1997) refers to the development of these roles by students as a result of the ways in which language is used and valued in the schools as the "most fundamental way in which classroom discourse shapes student learning" (p. 29). To deemphasize the authoritative voice of the teacher and to promote students' interpretive authority over text, Nystrand (1997) conceptualizes the dialogic teacher's role to include the following facilitative moves: moderating, directing discussion, probing, foreseeing, and analyzing student responses (p. 17).

However, researchers have argued for the need to move beyond the particular form of any one discourse move (e.g., "authentic question") when seeking to understand the affordances and limitations of dialogically-organized classrooms (Boyd & Markarian, 2015). For example, research by Boyd and Rubin (2006) problematized the notion that all inauthentic questions (i.e., known answer questions posed by the teacher) resulted in stifling student responses or functioning only for students to "recite information already known by the teacher" (p. 143). Indeed, the researchers found that students provided elaborated responses to teacher questions—even known answer questions—when the teacher's question was contingent on student ideas that were presented previously during the discussion. This suggests that both the forms and functions of classroom discourse moves must be attended to when analyzing what makes for "educationally effective talk" (Mercer & Littleton, 2007, p. 60).

2.1 Interpretive Authority and Dialogic Stance

We theorize interpretive authority as a dynamic feature of classrooms that shapes the dialogic instructional stance of teachers and learners (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, 2015). From this perspective, interpretive authority provides an especially useful heuristic for characterizing instructional stances because it can be leveraged in analyses of (a) discourse patterns, (b) power dynamics inherent in classroom discourse, and (c) the recognition and uptake of previous contributions that build conversational and curricular coherence. We review each of these analytical uses to studying dialogically-accomplished interpretive authority below.

Discourse patterns. In a study of the effects of a teacher's interpretive authority of poetry on the nature of discussions with 14- and 15-year-old students in two advanced secondary English classes, Smith and Connolly (2005) conducted an experiment in which they analyzed discussions subsequent to the reading of a poem that both the teacher and the students were reading for the first time. They found that the balance of interpretive talk shifted from the teacher to the students when the discussion focused on explicating a poem that the teacher had never read before. In this case, shifting interpretive authority over the text from the teacher to the classroom community resulted in a significant increase in the amount of talk students produced in relation to the teacher. Further, students evidenced their own interpretive authority by engaging in evaluations and text-based generalizations—authoritative and interpretive practices that characterized the adult book clubs studied by Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995). Thus, noting the ratio of student-to-teacher turns-at-talk, as well as the amount of talk in which students and teachers engage can unveil underlying instructional stances at play in the classroom environment (Nystrand et al., 2003). However, such descriptive figures do not fully capture instructional stances that support dialogic interactions in classrooms—stances that are often driven more so by talk functions rather than talk features or forms (Boyd & Markarian, 2015).

Power dynamics inherent in classroom discourse. Christoph and Nystrand (2001) reasoned that the transformation involved in facilitating dialogic discussions required a teacher to risk *doing* or *allowing* something to happen (p. 277). Miller's (2003) research on mediating text-based discussions and Aukerman's work on dialogically-organized instruction offer two portraits of ways in which teachers can risk *doing* or *allowing*, respectively, discursive shifts in their classrooms.

In investigating how teachers mediate student learning during text-based discussions, Miller (2003) described how one teacher promoted shared interpretive authority by pursuing student-generated questions that connected students' experiences with the text. The exploration of ideas that were elicited in the movement (i.e., "shuttling" p. 309) between the "public" space of the text and the "private" space of individual experiences encouraged students to engage in "collaborative thinking," which included features such as, student-to-student talk and the use of evidence to interpret texts (p. 297). The teacher in Miller's (2003) study helped

students to clarify ideas in texts for themselves rather than clarify ideas for students. She accomplished this by listening closely to students' talk, calling into question the authority of the text, and facilitating the public availability of ideas as they circulated throughout the classroom.

Aukerman's (2007) research demonstrates the power of *allowing something* different to happen during text-based discussions. Instead of positioning the teacher as the expert and the students as novices, Aukerman demonstrated the interpretive affordances of a classroom in which students' "shifting social and intellectual intentions" (p. 57) drove the interpretive and evaluative questioning that occurred during discussions. Findings from this study suggest that social interactions among students for social purposes—not necessarily teacher models that move students toward standard or sanctioned interpretations of the text—ought to lead instruction about texts. The teacher in Aukerman's (2007) study chose not to "correct" two students' apparent "mistakes" (a miscue and a misinterpretation of a word), which created the space for students and the teacher to become jointly responsible for evaluations of texts and students' ideas about their meanings. Reimagining discussions as spaces in which everyone holds interpretive authority at the outset, repositioned both the teacher and the students as "possible knowers" (p. 91) rather than intellectual authorities.

In both the Miller (2003) case and the Aukerman (2007) study, classroom discussions were conceptualized in terms of what students bring to the instructional environment. Students' experiences in the world, their misinterpretations, their interpretive questions—all of these resources were used by teachers in each study to scaffold students' literary learning. By beginning with students' intentions and their questions about the text, teachers established an instructional stance in which interpretive authority was shared with their students and classroom talk functioned to build meanings collaboratively in ways that honored students' interests and emergent thinking—aspects of the classroom community that explained why the seeming recitation practices documented in Boyd and Markarian (2015) created "supportive epistemic and communal functions of classroom talk [that were] more important to successful dialogic teaching and learning than surface dialogic features" (p. 281).

Recognizing and taking up others' ideas. Boyd (2012) argues that teacher listening and contingent questions are key factors involved in establishing a dialogic pedagogy "in the service of student streams of thinking" (p. 31). Indeed, the ability to craft questions that build on a community's collaborative thinking and collective past demands careful listening on the part of the teacher. How students take up such critical listening and uptake practices has been taken up by researchers interested in the concept of interpretive authority. Flint (2000) argued that the interpretive authority of eight 10-year-old readers during volunteer literature discussion groups was constructed in relation to the roles students took up during this socially-mediated literacy practice. During student-led discussions, some students positioned themselves as the source of interpretive authority (e.g., "know-it-alls" and

"identifiers"), while others challenged authoritative perspectives and promoted alternative ways of thinking about the text (e.g., "defenders"). Finally, other students stood in solidarity with the defenders. Flint demonstrates how these various roles positioned some students to take up interpretive authority in particular and diverse ways while one student's (a "defender's") approach to interpretive authority was unsuccessful because the student's contributions were not recognized as viable by those in the group whose words carried more interpretive authority within this community.

Thus, it is important to recognize not only the ways in which discourse patterns and teachers' instructional stances function to create dialogic classroom spaces in which interpretive authority can be collaboratively constructed and shared among teachers and students, but it is imperative also to recognize the consequential roles of complementary and competing teacher and student intentions that respond contingently and with myriad outcomes within these environments, as noted in the epigraph that framed the introduction to this paper.

2.2 Theoretical Frame: Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

We ground our study in the theory of language developed by Russian literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, who theorized the utterance as a "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language" (1981, p. 272). The tendencies to which Bakhtin refers are the centripetal and centrifugal forces that are inherent in discourse. As Landay (2004) noted: "Language moves in multiple directions simultaneously: in perpetual tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces—the tendency to unify, centralize, fix, formalize, privilege, and create norms—and the tendency to invent, innovate, vary, expand, and specialize" (p. 108). Dialogic discussions of literature constitute, then, a compelling classroom space in which to analyze how language moves between these two tendencies, how students and teachers work with speech that moves discussion in centripetal and centrifugal directions, and what the instructional affordances of such movement might be.

Thus, authoritative discourses that exert centripetal forces may be privileged during discussions of texts when teachers lead students toward particular sanctioned interpretations (Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995) or when outside pressures inform the teacher's perceived need to control the content of the discussion (Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1990) or standardize the kinds of evidence and reasoning that should attend textual interpretations. Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, seek disruption and messiness. For Bakhtin, the centrifugal in language "decentraliz[es]" and "disunif[ies]" through creativity, innovation, and individuality (1981, p. 272). In discussions of texts, centrifugal forces are those that introduce unanticipated perspectives, dialects, evidence, and reasoning. Centrifugal forces are not the *ex nihilo* creation of new language but novel heteroglossia—that is, the introduction of language often reserved for one social world into another.

As the work of Bakhtin could be used to critique the stratification of linguistic prestige and power, the centripetal may seem to oppress while the centrifugal liberates. We have attempted value-neutral applications of the terms, describing *what is* in classroom discussion and tracing how either tensioning force can both further and hinder the interpretive work occurring in discussions of texts. Certainly, pulls toward the extreme pole in either direction limit the capacity for multiple voices and perspectives to collaborate on developing communal understandings of texts or communal language functions, either by eliminating or severely bounding other voices or by introducing voices that seem purely idiosyncratic to the majority of the discussion's participants.

The concept of interpretive authority is situated at the nexus of the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces; the tendency to transact with and devise innovative insights into the text is tensioned by the tendency to identify the sanctioned meaning in the text. To understand how this tension shaped classroom talk, we illustrate how one teacher and his students worked between centripetal and centrifugal forces in language to establish interpretive authority during discussions of literature.

3. METHODS

3.1 Participants and Instructional Context

The focal classroom serviced students in Riverview (all names of places and people are pseudonyms), a socioeconomically diverse district in the eastern United States. Adam, the second author, was a second-year teacher at the district's high school. The socioeconomic background of students in Adam's class ranged from working class to middle class, and 95% of the students in the two focal periods were white. Although Adam's school was on warning for not meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) the previous year, most of the students in his classes scored in the proficient range on the state's standardized assessment, with less than 20% of the students scoring in the basic to below basic categories. The two focal classes met consecutively for 80-minutes each, the 2nd and 3rd periods of the day, and were considered academic, or general, English classes. 17- and 18-year old students in these sections followed a variety of post-secondary paths, including four-year colleges, two-year colleges or technical school, military enlistment, and employment.

The curriculum for Adam's course was a study of the hero. Students considered throughout the unit the influence of perspective on the construction of the hero. Texts included excerpts from the epic *Beowulf* and the twentieth century parallel novel *Grendel*, by John Gardner (1971), which provides the monster's eye view of the events recorded in *Beowulf*. Forty-five minute discussions took place in each class period after students had finished reading both texts and were asked to compare the representations of the central figures each text conveyed. Adam had provided students with a comparison chart to use during reading and also distributed a

discussion sheet, which contained three pre-planned questions and room for student notes (see Appendix A).

James, the first author, was an observer researcher in Adam's classroom throughout one semester. The data for this paper were collected as part of James's doctoral dissertation. For the dissertation study, James introduced a research design that sought to examine the use of multimodal tools in mediating literary discussions. James and Adam planned and debriefed three intervention cycles jointly: a set of multimodal instructional activities with prompts designed to elicit interpretations of texts and related discussion questions for the subsequent class period. That semester's work led to Adam's adaptation of the research design in an action research project he carried out with new students the following semester (Loretto & Chisholm, 2012).

3.2 Data sources

Two 45-minute digital video files and their corresponding transcripts functioned as the baseline discussion data for James's dissertation study, meaning these two discussions occurred before Adam implemented any of the lessons co-planned with James. We found this time point to be meaningful because it represents the practices Adam was using that were motivated by the instructional context and Adam's own classroom experiences and teacher education courses but before Adam's specific reflection with James on the discourse patterns and functions of talk in both of the classes.

3.3 Data analysis

We took a micro-level approach in the discourse analysis of our data in order to understand how centripetal and centrifugal forces tensioned talk and how interpretations were accomplished. Data analysis proceeded in three phases. In the first phase, James and Adam engaged in open coding (Charmaz, 2006) of the two transcripts. Both authors drew on established categories from the research literature on inquiry-based discussions of literature to characterize typically monologic and dialogic talk forms, such as codes for closed questions and uptake, respectively. Our goal in this phase was to identify which discourse moves participants took during the discussion and to determine the consequences of such moves. We noted, for example, the ways in which students took up other students' ideas, provided evidence in support of a claim, or introduced an alternative perspective in the discussion. These analyses answered the question, "*How* are students co-constructing interpretive and authoritative perspectives during discussion?" After engaging in this analytical process individually, we reviewed collaboratively our coding decisions and dialogued through our discrepancies.

In the second phase of analysis we identified episodes (a collection of thematically related turns by multiple speakers) based on the codes developed in the first

phase, which represented students' interpretive and authoritative meaning making about the text as well as whether and how students or the teacher recognized ("Was it viable?") an idea as having merit or not ("Was it valid?"). Reducing the data set to episodes instead of turns-at-talk allowed us to identify the ways in which both the teacher and students co-produced and reacted to dialogue around a particular topic and how discussing the text extended thinking about the topic or shut down dialogue altogether.

In the third phase of analysis, we bounded all episodes by ascribing an interpretive question to a series of turns that students and the teacher were exploring during the discussion. Then, we selected for additional micro-analysis interpretive episodes in which concepts from Bakhtinian theory seemed to be salient. Specifically, within each interpretive episode we considered how centripetal and centrifugal forces shaped the meanings that were sanctioned and endorsed and explored and contested. For example, we noted Nate's contribution (see Table 1) in which he drew on textual evidence to endorse a perspective put forward by his classmate, Leonard, which functioned as a counter perspective to the ongoing discussion about Beowulf's sanity. As with most episodes in the discussion, we noted both centrifugal and centripetal tensions at work in the dialogue between the students and Adam. The teacher explicitly invited multiple perspectives on the text, which students then argued using standard strategies like citing language in the text to support a claim that was made about a character's disposition. This interesting combination of forces in the dialogue allowed us to realize the ways in which "[i]nterpretive authority manifests itself within literacy events through the discourse roles and positions participants make visible" (Flint, 2000, pp. 130-131) and how students and the teacher occupied various interpretive roles flexibly.

Table 1. Example Analysis of Interpretive Episode from Period 3: Episode #5: "Is Beowulf Crazy?"

(Turn) Speaker	*Utterance*	*Analytic Description*
(65) Adam	Right. That's on 162 where Jake was looking: "Stranger said it all so calmly, so softly, that it was impossible to laugh. He believed every word he said. I understood at last, the look in his eyes: he was insane." Now is that just Grendel saying, "This guy is just crazy" [to] talk about it this way, or does he literally mean he thinks Beowulf is out of his head?	Directing Attention Posing Bounded Interpretive Question
66) Eric	I think he thinks that he's crazy.	Choosing Endorsed Interpretation
(67) Adam	Alright. Why?	Probing Question
(68) Louise	Well, if you look at this from Beowulf's, I mean Grendel's perspective, it's a really interesting thing because he's not human. I mean, he doesn't have the same feelings or ideas that we do because he's not affected by it. So he's like an outside source for what's going on. So when we would think that certain things would justify that he swam across the sea with Breca, he's looking at it like, "This guy's insane." No one would do that just to show that they could. So, if you look at it that way, I think that it makes sense. I think that he's actually insane.	Perspective Taking Exploring Reasoning Choosing Endorsed Interpretation (through unconventional reasoning)
(69) Adam	Do you think that that's the same reaction that the Danes?	Connecting Talk to Original Question

(70) Louise	Yeah.	Choosing Endorsed Interpretation
(71) Adam	That they think he's crazy too? So Grendel's interpretation of the story, turning Beowulf into this insane person, versus the original of those two fits more with how you see it? Jeff, would you see it more as "makes him crazy" or "makes him a hero"?	Sets Up Bounded Debate (to include broader story participation)
(72) Jeff	Uh, I don't know.	Choosing a Non-Option
(73) Adam	Your feelings? Your first thoughts?	Providing Approaches to Response
(74) Jeff	On what?	Positioning as Disinterested Participant
(75) Adam	What we just talked about. Is it the fact that he's talking about so calmly the swimming match, would it make him insane like Grendel thinks, or would it make him a hero like the original story said?	Reiterating Response Choices
(76) Jeff	Insane.	Choosing Endorsed Interpretation
(77) Adam	Okay. Anyone else think he's insane as well.	Collecting Perspectives and Evaluations
(78) George	He's crazy.	Choosing Endorsed Interpretation
(79) Kris	Yeah, he's crazy.	Choosing Endorsed Interpretation
(80) Adam	*Anybody want to stick up for him?*	*Promoting Multiple Perspectives*
(81) Nate	*He's a hero, but he's a pretty crazy hero. Like he goes out on limbs to do whatever he can.*	*Qualifying Endorsed Interpretation*

(82) Adam	*So you can be both?*	*Probing for Reasoning*
(83) Kris	*He want to be (inaudible)*	
(84) Adam	*So you could be both and that's okay? You can still be a hero if?=*	
(85) Eric	*=If you're a little crazy.*	*Endorsing Qualification*
(86) Louise	*I think you'd have to be a little crazy to do some of those things. I mean, he's fighting a monster by himself that apparently can kill 30 people without even trying, so you'd have to be a little insane to want to do that, to feel the need to.*	*Rationalizing Response*
(87) Leonard	*<u>Who says all the things he's doing is insane to him?</u> He's much stronger and much better than all of them. They all know this. It may not mean that everything he's doing is insane; maybe it's just casual things that they do. I mean, he saw the threat and was told to come over. But he came over and said "I will kill Grendel for you." You know, he did it. He fought him fair, and that was it. It wasn't like some big insane thing where he was fighting like a million monsters at one time. It was just, he fought one-on-one against someone and beat 'em. It wasn't IN-sane. It was just a fight. And he made it fair.*	*Pushing Back against Endorsed and Qualified Responses*
(88) Adam	*And he has capabilities beyond the rest of us.*	*Endorsing Response*
(89) Leonard	*Mmmm hmmm. Like how he's treated. He's treated like a god and they think he's like a god.*	*Elaborating on New Perspective*
(90) Nate	*Yeah, Grendel even said when they first arrived, when they got off the ship and like, Beowulf was standing there like a*	*Taking Up New Perspective and Provid-*

	mountain and his men were like trees or somethin' and then like so "Beowulf's Forest" was like walking behind on the road to (xxx).	*ing Additional Evidence*
(91) Adam	Yeah, I like that description, too. It stands out. Beowulf's the mountain, the rest are trees.	Sharing Interpretive Authority
(92) Ian	Also like the, (xx) he was kind of feared even though he didn't say, Grendel said he didn't know how to think how to be afraid of Beowulf or not to be afraid, so like, he never second guessed himself.	Providing Additional Evidence/Taking an Authoritative Stance
(93) Leonard	That was the first time Grendel came across powers, not powers, but strength of Beowulf or any man that strong. Every time before was like an easy fight and everything, and he could take 'em and kill 'em, but finally when Beowulf came, it caught him by surprise and he didn't win.	Synthesizing Perspectives/Clarifying Plot Elements/Taking Interpretive and Authoritative Stance

Note. Underlined text indicates centrifugal forces. *Italicized* text included in the analysis in the Findings section.

We analyzed these sections by writing narrative notes in which we interpreted the events of the interaction based on the language provided in the transcript and our screening of the videos of the discussions. To illustrate our analytic process, we provide the following example from the discussion transcript for *Grendel* in Period 2:

> Adam: …Do we trust Grendel saying Beowulf is insane?
>
> Kurt: No. (4 second pause).
>
> Adam: Why?

During the first phase of the analysis of this transcript, James and Adam each coded Adam's "Why?" as a "probe for elaboration" on Kurt's one-word response, "No." This section was then identified in the second phase of analysis for the function of participants' talk. We noted that Adam's initial question in this sequence functioned centripetally as a way to elicit multiple perspectives on the text—his instructional goal from the outset. Yet, our analysis of the tone of Kurt's response on the video indicated how his response functioned centrifugally by employing sarcasm—not typical "academic" discourse—and responding with one word to the teacher's question, which, technically required a "yes" or "no" response. Nevertheless, Kurt went on to respond to Adam's probe with an elaborated articulation of his reasoning, which functioned centripetally and precipitated another student's response to the same probe for elaboration. Since the same discourse forms yielded different discourse functions, we identified centripetal and centrifugal forces at the episode—not turn—level of analysis.

During the third phase of our analysis of this exchange, we identified the interpretive question, "Do we trust Grendel" as the enduring query to which students responded during this episode and reflected in narrative notes the insights we generated during the first two phases of analysis. For example, Adam wrote:

> I'm noticing, at least from Kurt, a tendency to give one-word answers and needing to be prompted further—or expecting to be prompted further after the one-word answer based on classroom routine. What are the effects of this consistent structure to question single-word responses to probe for elaboration (from him or another student)?

After selecting the common sections of the transcripts that elicited the most compelling individual analytical notes, we interrogated each other's interpretations during monthly video conferences over a ten-month period (see Table 2). Based on Adam's analysis above, for example, we discussed the possibility of promoting what we called dialogic I-R-E sequences produced by consistent probing for elaboration with predictable follow-up questions like "Why?"

Table 2. Overview of Content and Analysis of Interpretive Episodes in Periods 3 and

Episode Title	*Analytic summary*	*Period*	*Turns*
What were the reasons for the war?	Participants contextualize story and establish corporate background understandings.	2	2-15
How do the Danes respond to Beowulf?	Participants draw on intertextual references and cultural knowledge to identify character motives.	2	16-27
What is Grendel's Point of View?	Participants explore the reasons for Grendel's perspective on humans. Students provide text-based evidence for Grendel's negative view of humans.	2	28-53
How do the Danes respond to Beowulf?	Teacher revisits earlier question to flesh out details and draws on cultural references and textual evidence. Teacher invites students to reread a passage from the text.	2	54-64
How do you visualize the setting?	*Participants consider Beowulf's motives and sanity based on an intertextual comparison. Students debate ancillary details about Grendel's body.*	2	*65-88*
Do we trust Grendel?	*Multiple students provide reasoned responses to the teacher's question in this episode. Students use colloquial and academic language, the text, and inferences to reason through their ideas. Students question each other.*	2	*89-109*
What happens during the fight?	Teacher invites dialogue, but student comprehension is challenged by distanced linguistic, cultural, and philosoph-	2	110-135

	ical allusions. Teacher focuses attention on a specific moment in the difficult passage that prompts a student interpretation. Teacher endorses the interpretation.		
What is the author trying to do?	Participants consider both Beowulf's and Grendel's positions in each respective tale. Teacher invites students to have an affective response to the perspectives that other students have identified.	2	136-142
Why does Grendel think he loses?	Participants discuss Grendel's mental and physical state in the climactic battle. They offer interpretations beyond the text to connect to Grendel's emotional response.	2	143-160
Which perspective is more believable?	Teacher invites students' evaluations based on their reading of two texts. Students consider the privileging of perspectives in each text.	2	161-177
What were the reasons for the war?	Participants establish corporate background understandings. Teacher revoices a student interpretation.	3	2-12
Who is the Shaper?	Teacher and students consider how the Shaper relates to Grendel being so upset	3	13-31
How do the Danes feel toward Beowulf?	Teacher synthesizes how Grendel's perspective has been shaped in the tale in order to transition into the discussion. Students draw on textual evidence to support reasoning. Teacher notes pages numbers that correspond to student interpretations.	3	32-46
Is Grendel right?	Students draw on colloquial language to support their inferencing. Teacher endorses and validates students' colloquial synopses of text passages.	3	47-57

How do the Danes respond to Beowulf?	Teacher marks the page numbers in the text that correspond to student interpretations.	3	58-64
Is Beowulf crazy?	*Teacher introduces a new perspective using colloquial language. Students debate interpretations about Beowulf's sanity. Students draw on multiple textually- and culturally-based reasons to support their responses.*	3	*65-93*
Unferth killed his own brothers?	Teacher recites as illustrative a text passage that a student in the previous class had marked.	3	94-100
Is Beowulf crazy?	Teacher encourages students to draw on the text to support their responses to the reading. Teacher provides information about text features that support student reading. Student shifts perspective during discussion to consider Grendel's experience.	3	101-110
What is Beowulf saying philosophically?	Participants co-construct a philosophical stance. Students generate central understandings about the relationship between the texts. Teacher models close reading of text and synthesizes student perspectives in discussion.	3	111-135
Why does Grendel think he's losing?	*Participants compare character motives across texts. Participants complicate previous readings and use colloquial language to animate the text.*	3	*136-148*
Is Beowulf a hero?	*Participants consider the influence of perspective on the definition of hero in these tales.*	3	*149-174*
Which perspective is more believable?	Participants debate cultural norms for the construct of hero.	3	175-192

Note. *Italicized* text included in the analysis in the Findings section. Turns=range of talking turns during each interpretive episode.

The data presented in the Findings section were marked in our third phase of analysis as examples of tensioning interpretive authority; that is, these excerpts represented the consequential ways in which centripetal and centrifugal forces shaped *how* students and the teacher were interacting and *what* interpretations emerged from the discussion.

4. FINDINGS

Our micro-level discourse analyses illustrated how interpretive authority developed through the action, and interaction, of centrifugal and centripetal forces during literary discussions. Integrating dialogic norms for interaction, negotiating centripetal and centrifugal tensions inherent in dialogue, and validating students' colloquial language featured prominently in developing co-constructions of interpretive authority and a dialogic instructional stance during discussions of literature. These findings add to the complexity of theorizing classroom discussions as spaces where either teachers or students hold interpretive authority over texts or spaces in which only innovative or standard interpretations can be explored. Instead, these findings demonstrate the interpretive possibilities that can be created during dialogic discussions when teachers and students tension the forces that are always already present and point toward ways in which teachers and students might promote interpretive authority through dialogic interactions around complex literary texts.

4.1 Features of Literary Discussion in Periods 2 and 3

In some ways, the discussions of *Grendel* in Periods 2 and 3 resembled typical recitations that might occur in many secondary English classrooms in the United States (Nystrand, 2006). During the 45-minute discussion, students often responded with brief answers to Adam's closed or open-ended questions, directed their responses almost exclusively to the teacher, who, in an effort to probe more deeply into the text proceeded to ask more and more questions. In fact, although Adam had crafted only 3 discussion questions to explore in depth (see Appendix A), 52 questions were posed in Period 2 and 51 questions were posed during Period 3. Despite the high rate of questions posed during these two literary discussions, classroom discourse did not follow a standard I-R-E pattern. Both students and the teacher posed and answered questions in order to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate multiple texts. To understand more completely how centripetal and centrifugal forces shaped the nature of interpretive authority during discussions and how Adam and his students facilitated inquiry in both periods, we examined excerpts from the transcript that illustrate how participants constructed meaning in interaction and what kinds of meanings were constructed.

4.2 Balancing Tensions in Dialogue

Throughout both literary discussions the teacher and students participated in ways that reflected both recitation and dialogic practice. For example, Adam posed closed questions that resulted in "correct" or "incorrect" student responses, particularly when trying to establish a "baseline" of comprehension or interpretation, which he then validated or invalidated, however "politely" (e.g., "hmmm" or "I'm not sure"). Such exchanges situated the locus of interpretive authority in Adam's particular reading of the text, typically a reading that drew on traditionally accepted interpretations grounded in close readings of texts. During such exchanges tensioned by centripetal forces, literary discussion provided an opportunity to access a source of interpretation, which could have illuminated or restricted insights into the text.

Conversely, we identified a number of instances in which Adam posed open-ended interpretive questions that he had about the text under study. In so doing, he modeled a participation structure for his students that deemphasized the centripetal force that can shape the authority that is often assumed by the teacher during literary discussions. Reimagining the teacher's position as one of many who have the authority to make interpretations about literature opened up the possibility for shared authority over the meanings in the text. During such exchanges tensioned by centrifugal forces, literary discussion provided an opportunity for students to construct meanings by exploring non-standard interpretations, which could have promoted or obfuscated insights into the text.

In the excerpts that follow, we analyze the ways in which centripetal *and* centrifugal forces worked during literary discussions to create and obstruct opportunities for the teacher and students to have interpretive authority. We argue that the way in which interpretive authority was tensioned within these literary discussions shaped the perspectives that students and the teacher generated.

Centripetal interpretive authority: Adam's monologue. As students in Adam's 2nd period considered the intertextual (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993) relationships between *Grendel* and the epic *Beowulf*, Adam's initial dialogic move to invite students to imagine a scene in the story turned into a monologic pursuit of his own interpretation of the text during the "How do you visualize the setting?" episode below (see Appendix B for transcript conventions):

> 65. Adam: You'll notice a lot of similarity between the original story and this one. And the words that they say to each other. But the tone as Grendel sees it is maybe a little bit different—so look for those things. (*54 second pause as Adam writes on a pink notecard. Adam gives a hall pass to a student*) Look at [page] 162 with me. When Beowulf finishes this story (*4 second pause*), what's the room like? Picture the room. Beowulf finishes his story about the swimming match and the beasts.
>
> 66. Kurt: Silent.
>
> 67. Adam: It <u>is</u>. It's completely silent. Why? How are they feeling? Reacting?
>
> 68. Brian: Surprised.

69. John: He said so serious. It says uh "Now the Danes were laughing as soon as he said it" so [it] also calms (xxx) the (xxx) (*5 second pause*)

70. Adam: Keep going with that. Right? It keeps talking about how calm he's doing these things. Keep going with that—with that paragraph. "He believed every word he said. I understood at last the look in his eyes. He was insane." He doesn't just mean (*gesturing, as if to dismiss someone*) "Alright that's crazy." He means he literally thinks Beowulf is insane and out of his head. Is that anything that you're led to believe in the original story?

71. Students: Uh uh. No.

Adam's invitation to "picture the room" was met with Kurt's response "silent." Adam affirmed this response as "correct" by saying "It is" in Turn 67, but recognized that there was much more to say about the setting. Adam followed up Kurt's response with questions that could promote elaborations of students' descriptions of the room. Another student, Brian, provided another one-word response: "Surprised." John disrupted a potential I-R-E sequence; he described the seriousness of the tone in the text before he drew on evidence to support his idea—perhaps recognizing the insufficiency of brief responses—to set up the Danes' surprising response to such a serious tone.

Adam's response to John, however, although initially facilitative (e.g., "Keep going with that")—which potentially positioned John as another interpretive authority on the text—ultimately functioned as an evaluation of his response and an opportunity for Adam to demonstrate his interpretive authority. Having never actually relinquished the floor so that John could respond, Adam led the class, instead, to a rhetorical question posed to the collective group, which functioned to dilute the cognitive work involved in inquiry to the teacher's standard interpretation of the text. By introducing this section of discussion as the interpretive authority ("You'll notice..."), Adam may have set the stage for what became a mostly monologic exchange with his students. Adam continued in the role of primary knower, then, ending the excerpt with a clear question that functioned as a claim that supported the narrative voice of *Grendel*.

Although Adam made clear moves toward inquiry (e.g., visualizing a scene) and sharing interpretive authority (e.g., positioning a student as a "possible knower") with his students in this section of the transcript, these moves were tensioned by centripetal forces (one-word responses and the dissolving of a student's potential response that demonstrated promise of interpretive authority), which led, ultimately, to Adam's centralizing monologue.

Centrifugal interpretive authority: Students consider multiple perspectives in Period 3. Student and teacher talk in Period 3 demonstrated the tensioning of interpretive authority in centripetal and centrifugal ways. In contrast to Period 2, however, students in Period 3 co-constructed interpretive authority. In the episode below ("Is Beowulf crazy?"), Adam listened and solicited persons to play the devil's

advocate and probed for deeper reasoning about Beowulf's mental state and status as a hero before he interjected as a participant in the discussion.

> 80. Adam: Anybody want to stick up for him?
>
> 81. Nate: He's a hero, but he's a pretty crazy hero. Like he goes out on limbs to do whatever he can.
>
> 82. Adam: So you can be both?
>
> 83. Kris: He want to be *(inaudible)*
>
> 84. Adam: So you could be both and that's okay? You can still be a hero if?=
>
> 85. Eric: =If you're a little crazy.
>
> 86. Louise: I think you'd have to be a little crazy to do some of those things. I mean, he's fighting a monster by himself that apparently can kill 30 people without even trying, so you'd have to be a little insane to want to do that, to feel the need to.
>
> 87. Leonard: Who says all the things he's doing is insane to him? He's much stronger and much better than all of them. They all know this. It may not mean that everything he's doing is insane; maybe it's just casual things that they do. I mean, he saw the threat and was told to come over. But he came over and said "I will kill Grendel for you." You know, he did it. He fought him fair, and that was it. It wasn't like some big insane thing where he was fighting like a million monsters at one time. It was just, he fought one-on-one against someone and beat 'em. It wasn't IN-sane. It was just a fight. And he made it fair.
>
> 88. Adam: And he has capabilities beyond the rest of us.
>
> 89. Leonard: Mmmm hmmm. Like how he's treated. He's treated like a god and they think he's like a god.
>
> 90. Nate: Yeah, Grendel even said when they first arrived, when they got off the ship and like, Beowulf was standing there like a mountain and his men were like trees or somethin' and then like so "Beowulf's Forest" was like walking behind on the road to (xxx).

Adam invited multiple perspectives to this discussion in which students drew on evidence from the text in order to support their particular claims (Turns 80 & 84). Adam also problematized student responses during the discussion to pose follow-up questions (Turn 82). Finally, in Turn 87, Leonard tightened the tension between the centripetal and centrifugal forces that shaped dialogue by providing a divergent response that calls into question the collective authoritative interpretation on the floor: "Who says all the things he's doing is insane to him?" Leonard extended his point by invoking his interpretive authority; he placed Grendel's perspective in context and noted the reverence that others paid Beowulf in society, which earned the support of Nate who recalled an image from the text (Turn 90) that supported Leonard's assertion in Turn 89.

We also noted that Adam's reformulation of previously considered ideas in Turn 88 positioned the teacher as a careful listener and contributor to the shared interpretive authority that students were co-constructing during the discussion and not as the sole source of interpretive authority. Adam's orchestration of discussion in

this excerpt promoted students' engagement with the text and with each other in ways that facilitated their use of the text in support of their ideas and their participation in dialogue around a contested claim.

Tensioning interpretive authority: The arms controversy in Period 2. In this section we illustrate the tensioning of centrifugal and centripetal forces within an episode ("How do you visualize the setting?") on the heels of Adam's monologue in Period 2. In the excerpt below, centrifugal forces created by student interjections functioned to derail the line of thinking that was being developed on the floor. These interjections established the students' interpretive authority, to which Adam responded by tensioning the interpretive authority centripetally:

73. Adam: So again, thinking about this new perspective, does Grendel have a point here?

74. Nancy: Yeah.

75. Adam: (*pointing to Nancy*) Why?

76. Nancy: [Be]cause he also talked about fighting this ten foot beast that has multiple arms? (*Brian raises his hand*) It would have to be [kind of nutty to want to do that].

77. Kurt: I thought it had two arms.

78. Brian: Multiple.

79. Kurt: I mean I thought it wasn't like with forty arms. I figured that.

80. Nick: (*to Kurt*) Well it said that he ran away on all fours, so (xxx).

81. Susan: (*laughs; other students chuckle*)

82. Nick: They said he's a hairy beast.

83. Adam: He's got two arms and two legs but—*(putting both hands out, then patting lap)*

84. Nancy: Like [be]cause it was saying something in the very first chapter when he got stuck in the tree how his like multiple—

85. Adam: (*softly*) Not sure. (*at standard volume)* But the point—the main point being—Nancy's saying the fact that he's coming to fight in the [mead hall], that he's killed so many people—he'd have to be a little bit crazy. Okay? Brian? You were going with that?

86. Brian: Yeah, exactly.

87. Kurt: (xxx) going?

88. Brian: I wasn't <u>going</u> anywhere, I was just agreeing.

This excerpt illustrated how Kurt and Brian acted discursively in ways that led them to (a) emphasize minor details related to the meaning of the first extended response by a fellow student (Turns 77-79), (b) gain a type of interpretive authority over the text that is reminiscent of some of the detail-oriented multiple-choice questions asked on class tests and standardized assessments, and (c) engage in a

kind of linguistic (play on the word "going" in Turn 88) and extra-linguistic (raising one's hand during a student's Turn 76) power play. Kurt and Brian's interjections, grounded only in a minor textual detail, interrupted Nancy's thinking, challenged her interpretive authority and called into question the veracity of the collective interpretation. By focalizing on such a small point in the text, Kurt and Brian prevented Nancy's utterance from acting as an invitation to dialogue.

This exchange demonstrated the ways in which centripetal and centrifugal forces shaped talk about literature. As the teacher and students pursued authoritative interpretations of this text, (the teacher's consideration of "insanity" and the introduction of the central theme of the unit: the role of perspective in understanding heroes in literature), centrifugal forces emerged as two students' talk detoured the collective thinking from a peer's line of reasoning. Although Kurt and Brian engaged in discourse that approximated the literary analysis they may have believed Adam expected of them, their dialogue also reflected their preference to interact with each other and a select few others in the class—among whom Nancy was not included.

Adam's response to these centrifugal forces was to centralize linguistically and extra-linguistically the interpretations being proposed by providing the last words, as it were, about the "arms controversy" ("He's got two arms and two legs") and gesturing the end of the centrifugal movement (Turn 83). Before rearticulating Nancy's relatively straightforward point, thereby validating Nancy's centripetal response, Adam invited Brian to agree with the interpretation that had been constructed by Nancy and validated by Adam ("Okay? Brian? You were going with that?"). Kurt and Brian then acted collaboratively to tension interpretive authority centrifugally in Turns 87 and 88. Brian's response in Turn 88 functioned as a concession of sorts, since Adam's description of Nancy's response—that Beowulf would have to "be a little bit crazy"—provided the point from which the next text-based question would be posed.

In an attempt to refocus students to consider the line of reasoning that Nancy put forward in Turn 76, Adam tensioned interpretive authority centripetally and recast an invitation to thinking in Turn 73 ("does Grendel have a point here?") in order to reset the floor for productive interpretive work. Adam's question below marks a new interpretive episode "Do we trust Grendel?" in response to Brian's comment "I wasn't <u>going</u> anywhere, I was just agreeing.":

> 89. Adam: Ok, so thinking about it do we trust Grendel saying Beowulf is insane?
>
> 90. Kurt: No. (*4 second pause*)
>
> 91. Adam: Why?
>
> 92. Kurt: I don't think he's insane, I think it was just like culture to them (xxx) like do what you're destined to do. Like you're like born in the world and you're destined to become a king so you act with royalty. If you're like a knight—like a son of a knight you're supposed to like protect the people— all that. He was just like pretty much said he was born to kill the monsters and like no one else can do it better.

> 93. Brian: I just think Beowulf had definite priorities so that everybody else like—he was more worried about like pride and glory and stuff like that whereas everybody else was worried about like maybe the people around him kind of like that. (*2 second pause*) But Beowulf didn't care—he'd go cut your arm off if he could feel like some hero or popular or something.
>
> 94. Adam: (*softly*) Right.
>
> 95. Yasmine: I don't think he's like—he's necessarily insane. I don't think that Grendel's ever seen anyone like stand up for themselves. Just like I mean yeah he told this whole story about how he was wrestling giant fish and cutting them to pieces but like the fact that this guy just totally called him out in front of the whole crowd and everyone was laughing at him and he was so calm when he just was like "No that's not true." I don't think he was prepared for Beowulf to say anything and be able to stand up for himself like especially when um he says um about the guy's brother.

Adam found the reliance on brief answers to be a sign of Kurt and others feeling that displays of understanding were sufficient for participation during discussions, though Adam also considered that Kurt was expecting a probing question as a kind of evaluation of correctness and invitation to continue. Adam's listening and simple probe ("Why?") in Turn 91 led to the first instance in which multiple students exchanged ideas with limited interjection from the teacher.

Kurt and Brian provided extended responses (Turns 92 & 93) that drew on their intertextual references ("knights" and "royalty") and text-to-world connections ("priorities," "pride and glory," and "popular"), respectively, which Adam tentatively endorsed (Turn 94), thus potentially establishing the standard reading of the passage. Yasmine's entrance into the discussion altered the terms of the conversation by considering multiple perspectives simultaneously with respect to Beowulf's mental state. Yasmine's response (Turn 95) changed the conversation from only students considering Beowulf's sanity to include the Danes' perspectives on Beowulf's sanity, as well. This centrifugal force complicated the dialogue by introducing a new line of reasoning ("I don't think he was prepared for Beowulf to say anything and be able to stand up for himself"), which also had the effect of shifting the ways in which interpretive authority was actualized in the classroom; instead of interpretive authority being held as inherent in the persuasiveness of a speaker's experience, Yasmine's simultaneous incorporation of multiple text-based perspectives established a dynamically negotiated interpretive authority. Although Yasmine was not often the first to offer an interpretation in this discussion (a role Kurt, Brian, and one or two others were more likely to fill), her responses were complex, elaborated, and drew on close readings of the text. Students' Turns 92, 93, and 95 took the structural form of a claim, followed by evidence from the text or a qualifier to the claim, and a warrant or the introduction of another interpretation of the passage—all features of interpretive authority.

Additionally, the three responses in Turns 92, 93, and 95 demonstrated rhetorical sophistication in which three voices harmonized thematically, and reached similar conclusions for different reasons (a particular station in life, personal pride, and unique abilities). Each turn stood on its own as a developed authoritative interpre-

tation of the text, and perhaps was formulated as such, but in placing them in sequence, each student extended a previous student's idea in order to deepen the inquiry base of the discussion.

Dialogically constructing interpretive authority: "Yeah, he snuck 'em." En route to addressing the final question on their discussion list in Period 3 (Which story is more believable, the original *Beowulf* or *Grendel*?), Adam followed up a student response by prompting for student reasoning. The subsequent interaction that took place constituted what we identified as dialogically constructed interpretive authority; that is, students tensioned centripetal and centrifugal forces while engaging each other dialogically with texts. The following excerpt spans two interpretive episodes ("Why does Grendel think he's losing?" and "Is Beowulf a hero?"):

149. Adam: True. So do you believe Grendel, that it was an accident? Because we talked before about, well, maybe Beowulf was just lucky in the original story.

150. Kris: I mean, I think he was. Grendel didn't know he was […] awake. If Grendel knew he was awake, I don't think it would've been as one-sided as it was.

151. Adam: Does that make Beowulf lucky or does that make him smart?

152. Kris: Smart, but, part lucky.

153. Nate: Skillful.

154. Adam: So literally as Grendel is=

155. Leonard: =(*raises hand*) Mr. Loretto? I think that everyone says that they think it's lucky for Beowulf to do that. He fought him fair as in a fistfight, but he didn't fight him fair like as an approach to the fight. Like, he didn't make it a fair beginning.

156. Nate: Oh, yeah. He snuck 'em!=

157. Leonard: =<u>Yeah</u>, he snuck 'em. He caught 'em off-guard so.=

158. Ivan: =But Grendel does that to everyone.=

159. Leonard: =Yeah, I know, but if you wanted a fair fight and he said let (*raises pencil in the air and then brings pencil back down toward the desk*) fate decide my death or not, he kind of really didn't let fate decide because he tricked Grendel. So it's kind of like "I'm going to let fate decide, but I'm going to bend it so that I <u>will</u> win." (*Adam nods head in agreement*).

160. Ivan: Did Beowulf talk about fate and losing to Grendel?

161. Adam: Well, we know that from the original story.=

162. Ivan: =Yeah, but.

163. Adam: Um, as far as whether he meant it right here, he doesn't necessarily, but we know from the original. So, the question of "Is Beowulf really a fair-minded, equal-ground seeking hero that we thought he was?" Right? This pushes us in the direction to maybe think he's not. He wasn't letting fate purely decide things. You could think that.

164. Louise: That makes sense.

165. Adam: (*raises left hand and opens* palm) Or you could stick with the original

> story and say, "Fate still intervened on his behalf." It was still a good thing that he did. (*raises both hands and opens both palms*) And this is the thing. Shouldn't we be saying that we're glad that Grendel's dying? Isn't that what we're supposed to be saying?
>
> 166. Nate: Yeah.
>
> 167. Adam: So why is this changing our point of view?
>
> 168. Kris: I feel bad for Grendel from this side of the story (*laughs*).
>
> 169. Students: Yeah.
>
> 170. Kris: He just got straight evil on 'em. I mean I don't feel like [(xxx) but his life is just straight up horrible.
>
> 171. Nate: I see him as lonely]. He just wants some friends.
>
> 172. Louise: Even so, too, like in the beginning, he would try and friend like the outcast of whatever, but in the end he would end up eating, I mean obviously it's like "Oh, I have to eat the person." But he had said in the beginning, in the first packet, that the outcast people who after they would burn the village or whatever, they would come and they would give them like a house and like their bad food or whatever. Or if they were shunned, he would try to friend them and it just didn't work out. […].
>
> 173. Adam: Okay.
>
> 174. Jordan: Yeah, 'cause in *Beowulf*, you want the human to win over the creature. It's more biased toward Beowulf.
>
> 175. Adam: Excellent. Good, good stuff. […]

In this extended exchange, students demonstrated interpretive authority dialogically. Although Adam's utterance in Turn 149 resembled a typical question that Adam had proposed throughout both discussions—posing an open-ended question and following up with questions that could promote students' perspective taking—this particular exchange worked between two texts, the juxtaposition of which was the central focus of the unit of instruction. Adam's curriculum had intentionally paired the *Grendel* text with the *Beowulf* text in order to explore perspectives. Thus, much of this discussion was dependent on a previously co-constructed understanding of a completely different text. Not only did such intertextual reliance support the coherence of the curriculum but, in this case, it also problematized a perspective that had developed during the discussion: that Beowulf had gotten "lucky" in the original epic, a claim that, if conceded, would transform how students interpreted the *Grendel* text.

Nate, in Turn 153, rejected Adam's distillation of Beowulf's disposition in the original story to "smart" or "lucky" by stating that he was "skillful." In this assertion of authority over the interpretation of meaning in these two different texts, Nate opened the floor for additional opportunities to author one's own ideas. As Adam attempted to revoice Nate's stance, Leonard raised his hand in Turn 155 to reframe how students were responding to the original question. Leonard took issue with the presupposition that it was a fair fight between Beowulf and Grendel. Before he drew on textual evidence to support his claim, Nate noted emphatically, "Oh, yeah.

He snuck 'em!" Leonard responded to Nate's contribution enthusiastically, stating, "Yeah, he snuck 'em. He caught 'em off-guard so." Nate's characterization of Beowulf's action as "snuck 'em" was received with laughter and added energy to the discussion whereby students contributed their subsequent responses in colloquial language (e.g., "straight evil," "straight up," "friend" as a verb) and closely connected, sometimes overlapping speech (Turns 158-161; Turns 170-171). Furthermore, Nate's response in that moment challenged the whole-class literary discussion as a site in which only academic language and teacher meanings could be articulated; instead, students owned the discussion at that point both linguistically and in terms of whose meanings counted.

Adam's incisive listening and the function of discourse moves such as Nate's declarations in Turns 153 and 156, Leonard's ideas in Turns 155, 157, and 159, and Ivan's questions and pushback in Turns 158, 160, and 162 provided windows—however small—into the complex interactions that function to support dialogic discussions that are always tensioned between centripetal and centrifugal forces.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Centrifugal forces including unexpected student responses that emphasized seemingly unimportant aspects of the text (e.g., "I thought it wasn't like with forty arms" in Period 2) and set up power plays in the classroom (the play on the word "going" in Period 2) were tensioned by centripetal forces shaped by students' deliberation of evidence from the text and from experiences in the world (Turn 92 in Period 2), the use of student contributions to pose new ideas and questions (Turns 87 & 90 in Period 3), and students' interpretations about the central issues across the texts from different perspectives (Turn 95 in Period 2 & Turn 87 in Period 3). Adam's participation throughout these discussions varied as he sought to orchestrate the most sonorous collaboration of voices from one moment in the discussion to the next, at times *doing* something to spur dialogue, and at other times, *allowing* for something to happen by refraining from interjecting into student-led dialogue (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001, p. 277)—but always listening to student voices in order to know when to prompt for further exploration of ideas and when to synthesize ideas that have already been presented.

Students constructed interpretive authority dialogically in Period 3 (Turns 155, 156, & 160, in particular) by reimagining the perspectives that were being explored, balancing the tension inherent in dialogue by immediately disrupting the standard interpretation that they themselves had developed, and drawing on their own linguistic understandings of the world ("He snuck 'em"). As students used their own linguistic resources to develop new insights into this text, they collectively explored their interpretive authority by reframing literary discussions as sites where centripetal and centrifugal tensions were negotiated dialogically.

These findings suggest that (a) centripetal and centrifugal forces were inherent in the literary discussions analyzed in this classroom, (b) interpretive authority was

established in ways that both obstructed and promoted dialogic discussion, and (c) students who balanced interpretive authority dialogically were most engaged in the discussion and demonstrated their individualized understandings of the text during discussion. As Landay (2004) noted in her drama-based inquiry, as students tried on multiple, sometimes competing discourses, they developed new ways of interacting with each other and with texts. We add to this insight the importance of Adam's "borrowing" of students' discourses as he selectively assimilated new ways of participating during literary discussions, which functioned to support students' exploration of non-traditional (Aukerman, 2007) perspectives on the text and mediation (Miller, 2003) of text-based understandings ("[I]n *Beowulf*, you want the human to win over the creature. It's more biased toward Beowulf").

Although scholars have highlighted the teacher's familiarity with the text (Smith & Connolly, 2005), and her or his use of inquiry-based discourse norms (e.g., visualizing a scene [Wilhelm, 2013]) in characterizing the relationship between interpretive authority and dialogic discussion, our analyses mark interpretive authority as a dynamic concept that is negotiated constantly during dialogic discussions about literature; this tensioned negotiation of centralizing and decentralizing forces can result in either monologic or dialogic exchanges, which potentially mediate productive textual interpretations at opportune moments, what Nystrand et al. (2003) identify as "dialogic spells" (p. 136).

Recognizing how interpretive authority is being tensioned and considering follow up moves that balance the tension could support teachers in facilitating dialogic discussions of literature in their classrooms. Our analysis of the "insanity" argument in Periods 2 and 3, demonstrates how consequentially various teacher and student discourse moves shape how interpretive authority is established during discussions of complex texts. As the "authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272), tensioned talk characterizes dialogically driven literary discussion—a literacy practice in which students and teachers encounter, interrogate, and foster the development of new ideas.

We see at least two ways for teachers to work through the tensions of centripetal and centrifugal forces at work in classroom discussions of literature. First, teachers may cut out complication and allow only the "party line" perspective. Practical approaches that echo this kind of move in classrooms are negative evaluations of student interpretations that venture outside of teacher sanction, study guides that ask only closed-ended comprehension questions, or discussion sheets with fill-in-the-blank outlines of discussion objectives. Alternatively, teachers can incorporate the complication and complexity and attempt to make those "disruptions" publicly available and sensible to all students within a bounded set of ideas. Here, teachers can have students summarize others' perspectives, chart competing and complementary interpretations, and provide reflective space for students to write about interpretations that made the most sense for them.

Future discourse studies might ask about the ways in which teacher and student talk functions to tension interpretive authority during discussions and how students and teachers balance those tensions (and to what ends). Additionally, we wonder how the concept of interpretive authority as realized at the macro- and meso-levels influences its tensioning at the micro-level (Rex et al., 2010). How, for example, do national and local curricular policies, assessment practices, and the genre of "literary discussion" frame interpretive authority as a literacy outcome and how do those macro- and meso-level discourses shape moment-to-moment discussions about texts in classrooms?

Conclusion. The democratizing push to make the novel comprehensible to all is in fact the pull of the centripetal, but the centripetal now incorporates further nuance and context than before—elevating the discourse available to all participants in the discussion. The work of teachers or other discussion participants in constructing interpretive authority collaboratively thus depends not only on creating possibility for discourse that favors students' available resources and multiple perspectives but also managing discourse such that all students are able to manipulate the facets of available interpretations—not in the pursuit of consensus but communal dialogue where any individual can wield interpretive authority crafted through the efforts of all.

As students in this study recast their interpretations of the texts in their own words in order to make claims about the text based on evidence found in the reading, they demonstrated the power of dialogically accomplished interpretive authority. We encourage teachers to become incisive listeners and fellow readers alongside students, to perceive discussions as opportunities for students to realize their thinking through speaking, and to explore ideas that may or may not represent standard interpretations of language in texts. Such moves fostered students' ownership of ideas during the discussion of a complex text. Interpretive authority as realized through the nuanced balancing between centralizing and decentralizing discourses shaped how meanings were constructed during literary discussions, which interpretations were developed, and whose voices were heard.

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APPENDIX A

5.1 Topics for discussion of perspective

1) *How do the Danes feel about Beowulf's arrival? How do they respond to how Beowulf answers and insults Unferth?*

2) *Why does Grendel think he is losing?*

3) *Which story is more believable, the original Beowulf or Grendel? Whose version do you trust?*

APPENDIX B

5.2 Transcript key

(xxx)	inaudible speech
(words)	guess at speech
[words]	overlapping speech
=words=	immediately connected speech
WORDS	speech increases in volume
<u>words</u>	emphasized speech
words	researcher's comments for clarification