

The Dialogic Classroom

by

Catherine Quanstrom
B.A., University of Victoria, 1987
B.Ed., Simon Fraser University, 2004

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Supervisory Committee

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Dr. Ruthanne Tobin, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Supervisor

Dr. James Nahachewsky, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Departmental Member

Abstract

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Departmental Member

The dialogic process used in the classroom is a response to research evidence that supports the use of classroom discourse as a tool for generating new ideas. Foundational and current research is discussed in order to show how acquiring this secondary, dominant discourse is important both for a student's academic future and for his or her social inclusion. Dialogic practices that enable students and teachers to co-construct meaning are reviewed. The paper also discusses requirements of the British Columbia English Language Arts curriculum where students in Grades 8-12 are expected to use oral language to improve and extend thinking, yet where the purposeful instruction required is often absent. The paper recommends strategies to support the development of student dialogue and listening skills. In this paper I show that there is widespread evidence that a dialogic pedagogical approach introduces, maintains and reinforces critical thinking and metacognition in the secondary classroom.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the people in my life who encouraged me to pursue further study in language and literacy: my remarkable students, past, present and future; my clever and inspiring colleagues at Houston Secondary School; and, my loving husband Gary and my beloved son Owen.

Chapter 1: Talking is for Learning

One of my earliest memories of school is of standing in the hallway. I had been sent out again for talking. In my Grade 1 classroom, where each student was confined within his or her own desk, there was a time to talk (when the teacher called on you) and a time to work. Silently. At that point in the mid-1960s social scientists were writing about social constructionism and Vygotsky's theory that speaking actively generates meaning (Smagorinsky, 2013). However, classrooms still functioned with strict, teacher-centric rules that viewed classroom dialogue as a means that needed to be firmly channelled to a prescriptive end. This was also the era of the strap.

Fast forward to my 21st Century classroom. What is different? Well for one thing, I am now the teacher. For another, students sit clustered at tables that offer easy conversational access to each other for the frequent discussion and sharing activities that take place in the course of a lesson. What is the same? The teacher (me) is *still* directing the dialogue. Yet within this classroom norm a shift is underway. Dissatisfied with the level of dialogue in my classroom and aware that more and better are possible, I am on a quest to improve and expand the quality of both our speaking and our listening in order to truly improve metacognition, comprehension and high-order thinking as students apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate in a dialogic space.

Research in recent decades has produced evidence to support the use of speech and classroom discourse as a tool for generating new ideas (Smagorinsky, 2013). Inherent in this advice, however, is Gee's caution that all students bring with them a primary "little 'd'" discourse that in some cases may be at odds with the secondary "big 'D'" Discourse of the classroom (1989). Acquiring this secondary, dominant Discourse

is important both for a student's academic future and for his or her social inclusion. Yet while Gee declares that students are locked in to the primary discourse of their home and socioeconomic context, often to their disadvantage, Delpit argues that teachers with high expectations can help students successfully negotiate the intricacies of an acquired secondary Discourse (Gee, 1989; Delpit, 2001). I would also argue that an engaging topic with engaged peers can be a powerful motivator as students seek to join the conversation.

Purposeful instruction in oral skills, both speaking and listening, is key to helping students attain this secondary Discourse. Although speaking and listening come before reading and writing, until the late 1990s they were not explicitly taught as thinking tasks (Latham, 2005). Now though, instruction in oral language forms a significant portion of the 8-12 language arts curriculum in British Columbia. Students are expected to use oral language to improve and extend thinking, to analyze and explore multiple viewpoints through speaking and listening and to use metacognition to self-assess and set goals for improvement. They are expected to interact, present, question, explain, persuade, and listen. (BC Ministry of Education, 2007). A range of strategies, from small group work to whole class discussion, has been developed to facilitate oracy instruction. However, recent writings have suggested that students also need to be taught metadiscoursal skills (Cordon, 2000 as cited in Latham, 2005). This discursive consciousness that allows students to employ the metalanguage of dialogue and conversation helps them build a linguistic repertoire (D'warte, 2012).

Over the past 10 years I have increasingly incorporated partner talk, small group discussion and whole class conversation into my lesson plans. Initially I was very "hands

on” in guiding the way students were expected to talk with each other. Partner talk always had a focus based on a recent task. Whole group discussions were often conducted by way of literature circles with specific roles for each student. Classroom conversations were teacher-initiated and teacher-sustained. Face-to-face discussing and learning with peers was, I felt, a definite improvement upon the “stand and deliver” instructional methods of my own high school experience. I designed instructional activities that met the BC education ministry’s proscribed learning objectives (PLOs) for Oral Language in English Language Arts 8-12. Lessons were scaffolded to ensure students had a solid grasp of their oral language task – both speaking and listening – before being gradually released to complete the assignment. I received administrative and collegial praise and encouragement for my willingness to “push the envelope” by trying new ways to get students talking and to keep them talking. In recent years, however, I have questioned my own practice, stirred by a sense that the classroom talk I encourage and help sustain lacks a sense of authenticity. Although my students were indeed talking, it often felt robotic or proscribed. It seemed to me that students were discussing whatever topic was at hand because they were required to converse rather than inspired to confer. I did not have a sense of sustained conversation or interest beyond the ‘task’ of talking as a teacher-initiated activity. Whole class discussions usually relied on continual prompting from the teacher and, like a flaccid balloon, often didn’t gain loft or momentum.

My sense that I still wasn’t seeing or hearing what I wanted from these exchanges may have receded had I not discovered the work of Robin Alexander and others on the dialogic classroom. According to Alexander, “(d)ialogic teaching is not just any talk. It

is as distinct from the question-answer and listen-tell routines of traditional teaching as it is from the casual conversation of informal discussion” (2008a). Simply setting up tasks for small group discussions doesn’t go far enough to develop students’ skills to the extent possible. If teachers understand the way that talk works and the way that general discourse can be legitimate learning ‘work’ then there is a greater possibility of making talk work for more children (Coultas, 2010). Barnes (2008) notes that teachers still have to encourage talk for thinking; additionally, students need time to practice, and to be cautious and tentative before moving on to higher-risk tasks such as presentational talk. This is especially true for students with non-dominant secondary Discourses, who may feel intimidated by the dominant Discourse in the classroom. Maloch and Bomer (2012) recommend that teachers listen to the discourses currently taking place in their classrooms, in order to envision how to apprentice students to discursive practices such as deep engagement with texts. Scaffolding then takes place within the context of students’ own voices, positioning student contributions as valued while also introducing strategies to expand the nature of the discussion. The potential benefit of this strategy is that accountable classroom discussions, while become deeper and richer, also become a comfortable register within which to construct meaning.

The obvious next step then, is for students to take their ‘group talk’ expertise into other domains. Gilles (2010) observes that students who know how to talk and think deeply in language arts can use similar structures to make meaning in other subject areas. Thus oracy practices become an internalized part of a student’s academic toolkit. However, no matter how effectively students talk to learn, talking is still only part of the answer. An area of lesser focus has been the need for students to develop critical listening

skills, yet I would argue that the need for scaffolded instruction in listening for learning is imperative.

If a student assumes the correct posture, it is easy to also assume he or she is listening. In fact, by the time a student reaches high school he or she is typically well practiced in various types of classroom comportment. With his or her head facing forward, eyes focused, chin in hand we are presented with the image of a student who is fully engaged. Or not. Without uptake it is difficult to assess whether that student is truly engaged or is just assuming the appropriate, expected stance. Listening is an essential language skill that is more than hearing; rather, it is an active process of making meaning from what is heard. Since the glazed-over pseudo-listeners may find some anonymity in a larger group, small group and partner work can narrow the focus and make active listening an indispensable component of the meaning-making progression. Yet while the importance of meaningful classroom talk has received considerable attention in the past decade, listening has become what Tompkins (2002, as cited in Tindall & Nisbet, 2008) calls the lost language art. Tindall and Nisbet (2008) hypothesize two possible reasons for the lack of listening instruction in schools: a) listening is a simple, passive process; and b) listening is a natural ability that does not have to be taught. Following this line of thinking one could say the same for speaking, yet research has shown that while most people learn to talk, classroom talk for learning requires targeted instruction, examples, scaffolding and continued support in order to be effective. Surely effective listening for learning would have similar requirements.

Within the dialogic classroom I see potential for shifting some of the obstacles that keep students from thinking deeply and, eventually, writing thoughtfully. I

believe there are many teachers who, like myself BA (before Alexander), do not have a clear understanding of the dialogic repertoire. In particular, classrooms appear to lack sufficient attention to learning talk (Alexander, 2008a) that encourages narrating, explaining, speculating, evaluating, arguing and justifying. As well, research findings reporting the continuing domination of the teacher's voice in many classrooms indicates a need for professional development on the concept of uptake (Elliott-Johns, Booth, Rowsell, Puig & Paterson, 2012). Uptake, therefore, is a significant focus of my current instructional practice.

Making meaning through talk is the first step toward finding meaning through reading and then creating meaningful texts. While I have been aware of the need to develop a safe and respectful classroom environment, until this year I had not considered the importance of intentionally and explicitly valuing and encouraging students' use of their primary Discourses as a means to scaffold the transition to academic discourse and engagement with texts. Currently the primary Discourse of adolescents is an encultured space that students contain and maintain as mostly separate from their academic Discourse. By this I mean the topics of Discourse, rather than the mode. Students have always used informal teen-speak in classroom discussions, but topics are typically narrow, and are often focused toward a specific academic outcome. By welcoming a greater range of teen-friendly topics into the classroom I now find I can facilitate more effective dialogue. The work of Alexander, Barnes, Gee and others who have built on Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural learning has offered me a way to conceptualize and, hopefully, establish a classroom where the authentic dialogue of engaged learners leads to original thinking, profound insight and deep comprehension.

My project therefore centers on the following question: How does a dialogic approach to teaching and learning in secondary English classes develop students' speaking, listening and thinking skills?

My instruction currently reflects my shift towards a classroom more truly reflective of dialogic practice due to the following principles and procedures:

- Valuing students' primary Discourse by promoting discussion of home, habits and hobbies.
- Encouraging students to engage in structured conversation, and both modeling and encouraging continued uptake to see how long they can keep the talk flowing continuously.
- Helping students to deconstruct their primary Discourse, in order to see where it converges and diverges from academic, or school-centered, Discourse.
- Developing, with students, a list of techniques and practices that will lead from superficial discussion to deeper understanding.
- Framing classroom discussions around topics that will engage students on an emotional level.
- Supporting students who need "thinking time" in order to formulate verbal contributions.
- Involving myself in students' informal Discourses, by engaging with them and their parents in out-of-school contexts.

My classroom, where students meet for 75 minutes per day, is only one space in which to focus on valuing and augmenting speaking, listening and, ultimately, thinking skills. However, by reframing the classroom space as a place where students' primary

Discourses are welcomed and valued I offer them a robust means by which to scaffold their own learning, as we work together to ultimately develop the essential academic skills of reading and writing.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

Foundational Thinkers

Rene Descartes' famous phrase *cogito ergo sum*, or, I think, therefore I am, considers only the individual. Yet foundational thinkers in dialogic inquiry would observe that the individual does not exist separate from notice by another. In other words, we are defined within the context of our social milieu, and our words only gain meaning when met with a response. Starting with Vygotsky's sociocultural theories and proceeding through Bakhtin's thoughts on the indispensable role of response, Frieze's argument for dialogue to sustain critical thinking and Halliday's theory that language *is* learning, this chapter reviews the essential concepts that support the dialogic classroom. Gee's research on the social nature of language learning, Barnes' investigation of exploratory and presentational talk and Wells' work on the need for a collaborative approach to learning are also examined.

Vygotsky – Socially-constructed Meaning

The Russian linguist Lev Vygotsky is recognized in educational circles for his social constructivist theory of development as well as for his contemplation of the relationship between speech and thought (Vygotsky, 1978). He stressed that language and meaning were inextricably linked: "(a) word without meaning is an empty sound; meaning, therefore, is a criterion of 'word,' its indispensable component" (Vygotsky, 2012, p.225). Yet he also noted that speech and thought were not mirror images of each other; rather he viewed the process as one of transmutation, where thought became realized in speech (Vygotsky, 2012). While external speech is used to communicate with

others, Vygotsky proposed that inner speech had the separate and distinct function of bringing words from the outside back into the mind to form thoughts. Inner speech is disconnected and incomplete – a first draft of speech that may later find expression in written or oral form (Vygotsky, 2012). Dialogue, with its series of utterances that include questions, replies and repartee is typically comprised of first draft speech (Vygotsky, 2012).

It is a child's need for dialogue -- to communicate with others in his or her environment -- that gives rise to speech; later, aspects of speech become internalized and are used to organize thought. Indeed, Vygotsky said it was not enough to understand the words of another; for true understanding the listener must also know both the thought and the motivation behind an utterance (2012). It is only in this way that speech and thought can interact to support learning. Vygotsky proposed that "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when a child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (1978, p. 90). These developmental processes he referred to as a "zone of proximal development" which later scholars abbreviated to ZPD.

Vygotsky's research and theories continue to influence scholars who investigate development and learning. The concept of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) in which an individual is beginning to struggle with a concept and is ripe for assistance provides a clear example of social constructivism. In his commentary on Vygotsky, Wells noted the Russian psychologist's view that language mediates the co-construction of meaning as one member of a culture assists another (Wells, 1999). Because individual development is concomitant with the social milieu in which development occurs (Wells,

1999), individuals and society are shaped concurrently while also allowing for constructed meanings that go beyond the historical experience and practices of the group. “From this perspective, particular occasions of situated joint activity are the crucible of change and development, as well as the means by which society is perpetuated,” (Wells, 1999, p. 56). In commenting on Vygotsky’s legacy for educators, Smagorinsky and O’Donnell-Allen stated that since students typically negotiate several cultures as they mature, education must necessarily use an approach that is collaborative and exploratory (2000).

However, socially constructed meanings through collaboration may not always meet an educator’s agenda. Vygotsky’s emphasis on the history and culture of a group has bearing on the educational effectiveness of the meaning derived. Simply setting students up in small groups disregards the social dynamics that may affect a group’s cohesion (Smagorinsky and O’Donnell-Allen, 2000). From a Vygotskian perspective there will always be some sort of meaning constructed by the group, but it may not be academic and may not achieve a teacher’s goals.

Bakhtin – Utterance and Response

Bakhtin makes a clear distinction between the dictionary definition of a word and its (often altered) meaning when used in live speech (Bakhtin, 1986). Context, therefore, shapes understanding and meaning emerges when a word makes contact through utterance. In underscoring the relational aspect of speech, Bakhtin (1986) notes that utterances must be regarded as responses, whether they refute, affirm, supplement and/or rely on a previous response. In other words, language relies on reciprocity for contextual meaning. Tone also comes into play as it expresses attitude towards a previous utterance.

These *dialogic overtones* give meaning and form to conversations, whether verbal or in print, that stand outside of syntax (Bakhtin, 1986).

In his discussion of primary speech genres, which he defines as having taken form in unmediated speech communion, Bakhtin asserts a need for deeper inquiry into the way that styles of speech – scientific, technical, popular, journalistic, everyday – are categorized. He argues that primary (simple, typically conversational) speech must be clearly delineated from more complex secondary (primarily written) speech (Bakhtin, 1986). Bakhtin's commentary offers a framework through which to view dialogue in the classroom. If, as Bakhtin states, speech is inherently responsive, then the listener has as active a role in making meaning as does the speaker. While the response may not be immediately articulated, the listener is nevertheless engaged in some form of agreement, disagreement, augmentation, or application, some or all of which may be formulated as an utterance (Bakhtin, 1986).

Yet co-generation of meaning will not transpire unless the speaker is receptive to the response. In other words, the listener is responsible for articulating a response, the speaker then becomes the listener and so on. In the dialogic classroom, non-participant listeners who adopt what Bakhtin refers to as a passive understanding of meaning will only have an abstract awareness. The listener then, must formulate a response. However, the nature of the response can vary. It may be what Bakhtin refers to as a silent responsive understanding or it can be enacted through speech and/or behaviour. Responses can be written and later articulated, or they can form part of a written dialogue that takes place over time, distance or cyberspace. What is certain, though, is that in order for a classroom to be a truly learning community, speakers and listeners must have

both awareness of and commitment to their roles in the dialogic relationship. In order for this to take place, the dialogue must be relevant to all parties.

Freire – Dialogue and critical thinking

Picture a nest of hatchlings, mouths agape, waiting for the nourishment their parents will bring. This is how literacy educator Paulo Freire (1970) views traditional modes of curriculum delivery. Students are ‘empty’ until they are ‘filled’ with knowledge by their teachers. Freire used the term “banking education” to describe instruction as “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat” (p. 72). There is no room in this scenario for Bakhtin’s active dialogue where the speaker and the listener co-create meaning. Freire takes issue with the condescending assumption that students come to school as empty vessels with nothing to offer but much to acquire. If learners are considered empty, Freire asks, how then can they do other than regurgitate information that may or may not have relevance to their lives. For the state the idea that a sanctioned appointee retains knowledge, to be parceled out to what Freire refers to as “patient, listening objects” (p. 71) provides a means to control information and maintain the repressive status quo.

Freire’s milieu was the Marxist intellectual climate of Latin America in the 1960s. He espoused a system of education that would empower peasants and indigenous people by giving them the tools to question and critique the status quo. A central component of his “liberating education” employs dialogue as a process by which problems can be named and solutions proposed within an encouraging, forward-thinking context. Yet to

be effective and transformative, dialogue must be coupled with critical thinking (Freire, 1970). In Freire's problem/solution construct students are encouraged to pose problems and then critically investigate answers. As critical thinkers, then, students begin a process of *praxis* which Freire defined as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). Critical to praxis, beyond reflection and evaluation, is the action necessary to bring about change. The traditional banking approach to education leaves no room for action since students are preoccupied with memorization and regurgitation. Teachers mediate and channel information rather than knowledge, resulting in a learning schema comprised of what Bloom's Taxonomy would refer to as lower-cognitive skills of remembering and understanding, rather than the higher cognitive processes of analyzing, evaluating and creating; or, in the revised Taxonomy, factual, conceptual and procedural knowledge without metacognition (Krathwohl, 2002).

Critical thinking is as relevant to the North American classroom as it was to Freire's peasants and slum-dwellers. Freire's political objectives – to create awareness leading to a desire for change and knowledge of the ability to effect change – resonate whether the desired change comes about on a national, regional or local scale. Acceptance of the status quo is acceptable if the status quo is beneficial to all groups. If it is not, then awareness of any deficit can only come about through critical evaluation. If schools do not equip student with the tools for critical thinking, a population remains nothing more than "patient, listening objects" and those who control the agenda can proceed unchecked.

Halliday – Social uses of language

In the opening of his article “Towards a language-based theory of learning” Halliday claims “the ontogenesis of language is at the same time the ontogenesis of learning” (1993). In other words, the two are mutually dependent: language supports learning, learning assists language and both are necessary in order to make meaning. Wells (1999) notes that Halliday’s interests diverge from Vygotsky in that Halliday looks at the social uses of language to create meaning, as opposed to Vygotsky’s study of individual cognition. While Vygotsky was most interested in inner speech, Halliday focused on the reciprocal relationship between language and culture (Wells, 1999).

Halliday categorizes language as having seven functions (1993). Instrumental language is used to satisfy material needs. Regulatory language, the language of rules and instructions, is used to control the actions of others. Interactional language is used to establish status and to get along with others. Personal language, using the “I” pronoun, expresses self-awareness. Heuristic language is means of exploring, learning and testing knowledge through questions and answers. Imaginative language is used to create pretend worlds and experiences. Representational language is used to communicate information.

Halliday was concerned about what he saw as a tendency by theorists to categorize language as a domain of knowledge, rather than the means by which experience is transmuted into knowledge (Halliday, 1993). Halliday’s argument derives directly from Vygotsky’s premise that thought, speech and meaning are inexorably linked (Vygotsky, 2012). In his 21 features of language development, Halliday discusses the relationship between written language, which is static and which follows a strict syntactical format, and spoken language, which takes a flexible approach to parts of

speech in order to convey knowledge (Halliday, 1985). In distinguishing between the two forms, he describes written language as a means of representing phenomena as products, while spoken language is concerned with processes (Halliday, 1985). Everyday speech is concerned with meaning in the moment, while written texts, especially within the institutionalized registers of science, government and commerce, are rife with grammatical metaphor – an objectification of processes and properties (Halliday, 1993). Students entering secondary school are required to make this leap of understanding between the registers of everyday conversation and the technical language of secondary education. Success varies, and Halliday notes that even many purveyors of this technospeak are dissatisfied. He recommends a return to the forms of spoken language in order to achieve greater clarity in written texts (Halliday, 1993). While this may give students greater access to texts, they still require some facility with new terminology in order to create meaning through language.

In the final feature of his theory, synoptic/dynamic complementarity, Halliday notes that all learning, whether about language or through language, involves learning in multiple ways. Synoptic/dynamic complementarity takes place in secondary classrooms where students are assumed to have acquired sufficient literacy to negotiate the forms of analysis and synthesis. Teachers, he remarks, are adept at combining the objective register of written texts with various registers of spoken language that relate the learning to action (1993). However, teachers know that many students struggle with academic discourses and yet do not have adequate everyday language to make meaning from their new learning. Perhaps classrooms need to offer students more verbal opportunities to practice disciplinary discourses, while at the same time mediating their new

understandings though the discourse of teen-speak. The vocabulary at the heart of any disciplinary discourse requires the same deliberate and focused attention that would accompany second-language instruction. As students become adept with the language they gain entry to the discourse.

Gee – Discourse and discourse

In a response to Halliday, Gee (1994) cautions that in many cases technical terminology is an essential aspect of accurate representation. In his theory of Discourse (a way of being) versus discourse (a way of using words) Gee notes that language is sociohistorical and embedded in Discourses. He uses the example of disciplinary Discourses where substitution of everyday language risks communicating an inaccurate message. He also cautions that even though we are all members of many Discourses, translation between Discourses can result in a mixed message which can be either good or bad, yet inherent in all Discourses are historical and cultural biases that can also prejudice findings (Gee, 1994). Because of this, Gee applauds Halliday's initiative in transcending current disciplinary Discourses to try and establish a new educational Discourse (Gee, 1994).

The function of language, Gee claims, is to both support social activities and identities, and to support relationships within cultures, group and institutions (Gee, 2005). In this way Gee builds upon the theories of both Vygotsky and Bakhtin in his assertion that speech requires an 'other' before it becomes meaningful. He proposes seven building tasks of language: to build significance, to engage in activity, to build identity, to negotiate relationships, to offer political perspectives, to make connections and to privilege systems of knowledge (Gee, 2005). These tasks are continually in play within

any Discourse or discourse. Gee uses *discourse analysis* to look within a conversation and uncover the various tasks at work. The analyst can then form a hypothesis about how meaning in that particular case is being organized and constructed (Gee, 2005). In particular, the way people experience the world and the manner in which they recognize and affirm patterns affects the nature of the ‘language meaning’ they will construct from that experience. These recognizable patterns help children acquire the primary Discourse of their community in that shared word patterns become shared meanings (Gee, 2005). Acquiring this social Discourse strengthens social bonds and helps form identity. Yet unless a child is able to transcend the familiar and adapt to the new secondary Discourses of school and, ultimately the workplace, the primary Discourse can also be limiting.

Barnes – Exploratory Talk

In his constructivist view of the nature of learning, Barnes (2008) maintains that internalizing new knowledge requires actively constructing models of the world. Students who forget information from one lesson to the next simply have no model or schema in which to place it. Teachers, then, must set up situations where students are challenged with new ideas that they can relate to their existing schema in order to re-mold their thinking and arrive at revised or advanced understandings (Barnes, 2008). The flexibility of speech offers a ready means of trying out new ideas and adjusting them if they seem inadequate or if new information is acquired through a response. We often refer to this process as ‘thinking out loud’ and Barnes (2008) argues that teachers must encourage students’ exploratory talk, which is often hesitant and incomplete, in order to enable them to work on understanding. Classroom environment is therefore crucial as students are unlikely to think out loud if they feel they will be mocked or belligerently

challenged. A supportive setting that encourages exploratory talk allows students to examine their own thinking and challenge one another in a non-threatening manner (Pierce & Gilles, 2008).

Exploratory talk can be viewed as first draft thinking. It is similar to a written draft where words are replaced, sentences revised and themes developed. However, what Barnes (2008) refers to as presentational talk, is a type of final draft thinking that is used to share new understandings with others (Pierce & Gilles, 2008). The speaker has formulated and consolidated his or her understanding and is speaking to an audience in a forum designed for display and possibly evaluation. In this case the speaker is usually delivering a message that is affected by audience expectations. While noting that presentational talk is also important in learning, Barnes (2008) cautions against pushing students towards it before they have had time to absorb a new idea. Yet when a student is ready to present his or her understanding, having to consider the audience can offer a new perspective (Pierce & Gilles, 2008).

While a supportive classroom atmosphere can encourage exploratory talk, the teacher has a crucial role in validating a student's attempt to join in the thinking simply in how the student's endeavour is responded to (Barnes, 2008). Often the whole class format is less productive. Teachers frequently fall into the IRF (initiation-response-feedback) routine, which does not encourage students to make meaning through talk. As well, talking in front of peers within the power structure of the classroom is risky, which is why Barnes (2008) recommends the use of small group discussions which involve less personal peril and which are also less formal. Yet he also underscores the importance of helping students relate their new understandings to their existing knowledge, which

means finding ways to make school knowledge personally relevant. In this way students will become critical learners, able to take responsibility for finding connections, asking questions, reinterpreting experience and locating new paths to understanding.

Wells – Collaborative Learning

In a close study of both Vygotsky and Halliday, Wells (1999) proposed that a comprehensive language-based theory of learning “should not only explain how language is learned and how cultural knowledge is learned through language, it should also show how this knowledge arises out of collaborative practical and intellectual activities, and, in turn mediates the actions and operations by means of which these activities are carried out” (p. 48). Wells champions the collaborative learning model as superior to the traditional model of knowledge transmission, because of its emphasis on individual discovery while engaged in collaborative exchange with others (Wells, 1999). The teacher’s role, then, is to enable the student to take charge of a learning task. The teacher facilitates the learning by responding to the student’s questions regarding the task resulting in scaffolding that helps the student with the immediate circumstance while also promoting the student’s confidence in taking charge of his or her learning in future situations (Wells, 1999).

In building on the premise of both Vygotsky and Halliday, that the opportunity to learn language also provides a means to learn *through* language, Wells (1999) notes that neither theorist gave much attention to the nature of the knowledge under discussion. Transmission and transformation of knowledge are loosely discussed terms with no clear definition, he claims. In expounding on the nature of knowledge, Wells determines that acts of knowing are social constructions that are then demonstrated by the relationship

between the knower and the concrete representations that mediate his or her knowing. These representations could take myriad forms – theatre, writing, painting, for example – yet none come into being without being preceded by some form of social interaction.

Wells (1999) advocates creating settings that follow a model relating four opportunities for meaning-making: experience, information, knowledge building and understanding. Experience may be diverse or limited, depending on an individual's social circumstances. Information is relayed through others and may or may not be incorporated into an individual's schema depending on what prior knowledge exists for attachment. Knowledge building differs from information in that it is active and typically involves construction and revision. Understanding is the ultimate goal and acts as “the interpretive framework in terms of which we make sense of new experience and which guides effective and responsible action” (Wells, 1999, p.85). Experience, then, is insufficient to build understanding on its own, but it does provide a starting point. Wells' model views the four meaning-making quadrant as existing in a spiral where continuous transformation takes place as the collaborative knowledge of the group or society are incorporated.

Wells (1999) invokes Vygotsky's concept of artifact-mediated joint activity, a central component of the Russian linguist's theory of learning and development, to support his view of the classroom as a Community of Inquiry. Within this active, vibrant space students construct knowledge by means of collaborative group work, dialogic knowledge building and an inquiry-oriented curriculum. In this way students benefit from learning that requires them to actively engage in continuous meaning making that

has relevance to their own world, and society benefits by gaining active citizens with the skills to discern and construct understanding.

Speaking, Listening, Thinking and Writing

When we use the expression ‘in one ear and out the other’ we are acknowledging that the ability to talk and the ability to hear don’t necessarily mean any thinking takes place. So why do we talk? When do we listen? And, critically, how do speaking and listening build meaning?

Dialogic instruction is not a new notion. Vygotsky (2012) posed the concept of socially constructed learning as an essential component in developing thought. When considering how we build meaning together, Halliday (1969) identified the seven functions of language and noted that for the child it is “a rich and adaptable instrument for the realisation (sic) of his intentions; there is hardly any limit to what he can do with it,” (p. 27). Gee (1989) continued the discussion with his theory of primary and secondary Discourse, which Delpit (1992) extended to assert that teachers must value students’ home language while teaching them the dominant Discourse of their society.

With this foundation, other theorists sought to examine dialogic education as a classroom practice (Alexander, 2008a; Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Fisher, 2009; Lyle, 2008; Reznitskaya, 2012; Sosa & Sullivan, 2013). Findings to date indicate that while teachers are open to the concept of dialogic pedagogy and in fact think they use it effectively, many are reluctant to relinquish control and balance the power relationship in a way that would truly free up student voices (Alexander, 2008a). Yet the reward of pedagogy that concentrates on authentic questioning and argument as a foundation for writing makes it worth a teacher’s while to examine and eliminate any embedded

personal resistance. The reading and writing of students, especially those with weaker abilities, is “benefiting from this greater emphasis on talk” (Alexander, 2008a, p. 108).

The Importance of Classroom Talk

In retrospect it seem obvious that talk and learning are inextricably linked. If not then what would explain the specialization of the speech areas of the human brain? How would we account for the prattle of the playground and why has the story of Babel transcended millennia? However, what may be obvious anecdotally does not enter the educational canon until it has been pondered, examined, studied, reflected upon, discussed and refined through rigorous research. Because of this criterion, the lively chatter of the classroom is now recognized as a vital aspect of student learning. Gone are the days when all would fall silent as a teacher entered the room holding a ruler that was rarely used for measurement. In fact, Hodgkinson and Mercer (2008) claim that classroom talk is now recognized as the most important educational tool available to both direct the development of understanding and assist with the joint construction of knowledge. Guided by Vygotsky’s social constructivism and Bakhtin’s emphasis on primary speech genres, as well as by the writings of Halliday, Friere, Gee, Barnes and Wells, scholars are now exploring the various ways talk manifests in classroom and how it can most effectively advance construction of knowledge.

Purposeful Dialogue

Ideal classroom talk is a “purposeful and productive dialogue where questions, answers, feedback (and feed forward) progressively build into coherent and expanding chains of enquiry and understanding” (Alexander, 2003, p.23). Alexander (2010)

cautions against regarding classroom talk as the “communication skills” aspect of a given language arts curriculum. Instead, dialogic teaching is an approach to pedagogy that values the role of talk in the construction of meaning and that draws on four repertoires to develop students’ ability to construct meaning: talk for everyday life; learning talk; teaching talk; and, classroom organization (Alexander, 2003).

By encouraging students to use talk for everyday life that is transactional, expository, interrogatory, exploratory, expressive and evaluative teachers not only give students the means to discuss ideas in class, they also enable their dialogue beyond the classroom walls. Learning talk corresponds to Bloom’s Taxonomy, which recommends students learn to narrate, explain, analyze, speculate, imagine, explore, evaluate, discuss, argue and justify (Taxonomies, 2009). Ideally, in a dialogic classroom, students become skilled at using learning talk within an environment that values questioning and exploration over single-answer factual certainty. In a quantitative study across 18 Grade 6 classrooms, researchers concluded that students must be taught to ask and answer questions if they will then be expected to engage in reasoned argumentation, problem-solving and learning during cooperative, inquiry-based science. The study found that extended teacher mediation in developing students’ questioning abilities resulted in students’ achieving higher reasoning and problem-solving skills (Gillies, Nichols, Burgh & Haynes, 2012). Yet in a study of 12 Grade 5 classrooms Reznitskaya et al. (2012) investigated transfer effects from dialogic discussions to new tasks and contexts. They found that students did not particularly transfer skills employed in dialogic discussions to individual argumentation. This raised the issue of how much assistance students might need in identifying and extracting useful skills and tools from their dialogic experience. A

metacognitive approach that helps students identify specific tools is likely required. As well, inquiry learning across diverse contexts and experiences may give students more opportunities to practice taking and defending a position with support and evidence (Reznitskaya et al., 2012). However, it is important to note that current research reflects a lack of similar studies at the secondary level. It is possible that the content-driven curricula of many North American high school courses, with an emphasis on high-stakes testing and numbered percentage grading, discourages teachers from investing the time required to teach effective classroom questioning and discussion. As well, because high school courses tend to be discipline-specific rather than cross-curricular, dialogic techniques learned in one classroom may not transfer effectively to other contexts. Students may need multiple and varied opportunities to practice dialogic techniques, which means that ideally all their teachers would practice, support and facilitate dialogue in the classroom. A dialogic teacher's repertoire of teaching talk, while including rote, recitation, instruction and exposition, will also include teacher and pupil-led discussion (Alexander, 2003). In addition, the teacher will arrange scaffolded dialogue involving stimulating interactions, complex questions, answers to build upon, feedback that informs, extended contributions, and linking exchanges all within a supporting, relational classroom environment. Indeed, teacher intervention to guide student interactions, particularly in cooperative, inquiry-based learning, appears to be critical (Gillies, Nichols, Burgh & Haynes, 2012). It is therefore important to recognize the role of legislators and administrators in supporting dialogic education. If teachers are held to account for an ever-expanding corpus of content they are unlikely to invest the time necessary to nurture a dialogic atmosphere and expectations.

Classroom organization provides essential support for dialogic learning. In order to maximize opportunities for dialogue, a teacher may incorporate a variety of strategies, including whole-class teaching, teacher-led group work, student-led group work, direct discussion with individual students and pair work between students. As students become accustomed to the varied forms of dialogue, their ability to initiate and sustain discussion increases (Alexander, 2003). Within this environment, students learn to take charge of their own learning and to encourage the learning of others. A respectful learning space encourages exploratory talk that triggers uptake and elaboration. As students gain confidence they are less bothered by perceived “wrong” answers and are more likely to venture further contributions. Their growing comfort, in turn, models participation for quieter students who still benefit from the ability to reflect and evaluate. Within small groups students use their developing skills to build on each others’ contributions and strive for common understanding (Alexander, 2003). Again it is important to note that broad collegial support would be an important component of dialogic instruction at the secondary level, in order to enable students to practice their developing skills in a variety of contexts. Yet as dialogic principles take hold in elementary classrooms, students will enter secondary school with both the expectation and the ability to learn in a dialogic environment.

Listening to Learn

Cupping the hands behind the ears, waiting in silence, flicking the overhead lights, clapping hands together – teachers employ a variety of signals to cue students that it is time to listen. In most cases students will then stop talking and await further instruction. Yet while a pause in chatter may be the first step toward effective listening,

are students receiving explicit coaching in listening skills in order to strengthen their overall oral language performance? A review of the literature seems to indicate that of the six basic language skills – speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing and representing -- listening is the poor cousin. Listening is not the same as merely hearing; rather it is a learned skill that enables the listener to construct meaning from both verbal and nonverbal messages (Floyd, 2009). Listening is also the first language mode children acquire, and provides a foundation for the development of subsequent language skills (Swain, Friehe, Harrington, 2004; Linebarger, 2001). Throughout their early school years students engage most commonly in informational listening as they learn to attend to instructions, take turns in conversation, follow directions, listen to stories and answer questions (BC Ministry of Education, 2007). In later grades students will also engage in critical listening as they interpret, evaluate and synthesize ideas and information (BC Ministry of Education, 2007). Yet the research on effective listening practices focuses more on ways to improve outcomes for students with auditory challenges, or on increasing the comprehension skills of second language learners. Very few studies centre on the listening abilities of students in a typical classroom, either elementary or secondary.

Effective listening has six stages: hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating and responding (Floyd, 2009). K-12 curriculum documents for English Language Arts in British Columbia embed these stages within the prescribed learning outcomes for oral language (BC Ministry of Education, 2007). Evidence of student proficiency tends to rely on written or oral responses. The new Draft K-9 Curriculum for English Language Arts contains more promising language in its

requirement that students by Grade 9 become able to engage actively as listeners to construct meaning, deepen thinking and comprehension, and promote inquiry (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). However at this point the document offer no further guidance regarding listening skill development. Indeed there are few studies that reflect or recommend explicit instruction in, for example, hearing. Janusik (2007) comments that the lack of testable theories adds to the challenge of listening research. In an effort to both investigate classroom listening and to provide some techniques for sensitizing students to the listening process, Tindall and Nisbet (2008) conducted a qualitative study of low performing Grade 6 students. An initial survey to determine student understanding of listening, and whether students employed any specific strategies, resulted in one idea: don't talk when you have been instructed to listen. In other words, listening was regarded as a passive process that required little in the way of deliberate and active engagement. Yet when the researchers led a discussion with students on the importance of listening in both their school and personal lives, the students were stimulated and willing to participate. Tindall and Nisbet's (2008) work with this group of students resulted in the development and implementation of the Classroom Listening Strategy (CLS) where students are taught to *Look like a listener*; *Choose to listen*; and *Be a listener*. Yet the researchers stress the need for further qualitative and quantitative study of classroom listening and in particular in the use of the CLS on larger groups.

A survey of rural teachers indicated that while the majority regarded listening skills to be equally important across the curriculum, many thought fewer than half their students were effective listeners (Campbell, 2011). Problems with listening are often revealed by poor eye contact, excessive hand body or foot movements; and/or talking

during a time designated for listening (Swain, Friehe & Harrington, 2004). Interventions that prepare students for listening-to-learn while minimizing classroom distractions and noise can help many student overcome barriers to effective listening (Campbell, 2011; Swain, Friehe & Harrington, 2004). The K-12 curriculum in British Columbia includes several strategies for listening, including: connecting to prior knowledge; making reasonable predictions; identifying main points; generating thoughtful questions; and, clarifying and confirming meaning (BC Ministry of Education, 2007). While presented as listening strategies, the aforementioned list may be more familiar to teachers as an inventory of reading strategies. Certainly there are similarities and overlap, yet the document contains little in the way of a specific focus on listening. The new Draft K-9 Curriculum has stronger language associated with listening, but is even less detailed ((BC Ministry of Education, 2013).

In order for students to successfully internalize and then use listening strategies they require a purpose for listening (Campbell, 2011). A graphic organizer such as a K-W-L (Know, Wonder, Learn) chart is one means of providing students with a focus (Ogle, 1986). The K-W-L approach also requires the teacher and students to engage in oral discussion to find common understandings and knowledge gaps (Ogle, 1986). By giving students a purpose for their listening and therefore for their construction of meaning as they use their existing schema to build understanding, teachers somewhat demonstrate the dialogic principle of shared learning in the egalitarian classroom. Yet this approach also raises questions. Who decides what should be learned? (The teacher.) What if a student is unable to engage with the purpose for learning? What are the consequences of being either unwilling or unable to connect with the purpose for

listening? It is clear that there is a extensive scope for further research into methods of encouraging classroom listening for learning.

Dialogic Instruction for Thinking

They are talking and they are listening, but how do we know they are learning? In their theoretical model of dialogic teaching and learning, Reznitskaya and Gregory (2013) use the metaphor of pebbles in the ocean that, by rubbing together, change their shape. Similarly, students in a dialogic classroom “polish their abilities to engage in rational argumentation, as they encounter new language and thought processes during their interactions with peers,” (p. 118). An argument schema is essential, they argue, to understand the need for support and to formulate potential counterarguments. Yet how does this develop in the classroom?

Student-led discussions, where the teacher relinquishes the floor and control of the dialogue, can provide essential reinforcement. However, the discussion must connect to students’ perspectives while also requiring accountability (Chiaravalloti, 2010). In discussing the work of researcher Lauren Resnick from the University of Pittsburgh, Cazden (2001, as cited in Chiaravalloti, 2010) referred to three accountability expectations for group participants: claims must be backed up with evidence; strategies must be employed to present and challenge arguments; and, attentive listening and responding must be used to clarify or expand ideas.

In a qualitative study that thematically analyzed interviews with leading researchers in the field of dialogic education, the multiple perspectives of all participants affirmed the central role of dialogue in secondary schools as the basis for the critical thinking that bolsters the more highly valued practice of writing (Higham, Brindley &

Van de Pol, 2013). Encouraging teachers to redistribute classroom power in order to sanction student voice is a key element of the dialogic classroom (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). Unfortunately, the pedagogy doesn't translate directly from elementary to secondary contexts (Higham, et al., 2013). Yet the case for the intrinsic value of talk as the basis for reflective and critical thought and "a vital underpinning for...writing skills" (p. 12) reinforces Reznitskaya's contention that dialogue builds essential schemata for performance tasks (2013).

A qualitative study that employed facilitators as "dialogue coaches" helped teachers shift their stance and "invite more student questions, talk and ownership about the evolving discussion," (Adler, Rougle, Kaiser & Caughlan, 2003, p. 313). Discourse analysis revealed firmly controlled question-and-answer practices in the middle school English classes investigated. Students rarely responded to each other; all questions were directed by and to the teachers. Fisher and Larkin (2008) found a similar situation when they set out to examine the language skills of children in a socially disadvantaged area of England. The multiple perspectives of eight teachers interviewed about student use of language revealed that only one used activities intended to develop children's talk (Fisher & Larkin, 2008). Although they acknowledged the importance of student voice in the classroom, none of the teachers were able to connect theory to practice, or indeed see that it might be necessary. Yet as teachers formed a collaborative learning community and supported each other through the cognitive dissonance of a changing pedagogy, they learned to value the joint construction of meaning reflected in dialogic education (Adler, et al., 2003).

Indeed, as a meta-analysis of classroom discourse showed, the most productive discussions are structured, focused and occur when students hold the floor for extended periods, when they pose and respond to authentic questions, and when discussion features a high degree of uptake (Soter et al., 2008). The analysis of student comments revealed greater student control over discussions that featured either an expressive or a critical-analytic stance, which in turn offered the greatest opportunities for higher-level thinking (Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Soter et al., 2008). This is not to say the teacher is merely a bystander. Instead, “modelling and scaffolding on the part of the teacher is necessary to prompt elaborated forms of individual reasoning from students,” (Soter et al., p.389). In other words, a sensitive teacher will support student dialogue from the sidelines.

Continued commitment by teachers to shift their stance bodes well for the use of dialogue in secondary classrooms to develop argument skills. A longitudinal, qualitative study of 48 sixth graders attending an academically challenging American middle school showed that over time students receiving direct instruction in dialogic argument were able to effectively transfer their competencies to essay writing (Kuhn & Crowell, 2011). While the focus was on thinking rather than writing skills, this intervention study revealed that students coached in argumentative dialogue wrote better essays than students who simply received extended essay-writing instruction. Once again, Reznitskaya’s (2013) argument for a developed schema is borne out.

If teachers want to help their students develop genuine thinking skills they must commit to five criteria for a dialogic classroom: address learning tasks together; listen to each other and share ideas; allow free articulation of ideas without judgement; build on the knowledge of self and others; and, keep educational goals in mind (Alexander, 2008).

By giving prominence to talk, teachers value the learning processes that build critical thinking (Gilles, 2010). As well, by using talk to reinforce argument skills, teachers help students develop robust schema and standards for evaluating evidence and formulating conclusions. At the same time, though, teachers with a genuine desire to step to the sidelines and give centre stage to student generated discussion should seek out administrative and collegial support for what will likely be an uneven, awkward yet ultimately rewarding journey for both them and their students.

Asking Good Questions

Essential questions, often used to form overarching themes, as well as to guide daily classroom instruction, are meant to provoke deep and imaginative thinking among both students and teachers in relation to their daily lives (Fecho, 2011). Yet the trivializing, or watering down, of essential questions to the point where they are used simply for fact recall, diminishes the power of the interrogative position in the classroom. Used effectively, skilful questioning can encourage students to become aware of their own learning and enable them to pose their own questions and research paths (Fisher, 2009). At the same time, teachers must step back from the temptation to follow a pre-set agenda and allow questions to open a dialogue rather than using questions to direct students down a set path thus stifling student initiative (Fisher, 2009). However, that does not mean teachers leave the floor open for an “anything goes” question free-for-all. The role of the teacher as question facilitator is integral to students’ becoming effective questioners themselves. It is important, therefore, that teachers have a plan for eliciting student questions while maintaining an open and inviting tone in the classroom (Fecho, 2011). Questions can be intimidating – they rebuke complacency and invite (and in some

cases demand) a response. Teachers can reduce tension and encourage responses by validating students' questions and answers, even if it requires delicate word play such as "Interesting point" or "I've never thought of it that way" (Fecho, 2011). Used strategically, a deliberate plan to bring out student questions can result in dynamic and interactive dialogue that in turn encourages students to analyze, process and formulate answers (Crowe & Stanford, 2010).

Is dialogic questioning possible in all disciplines? Dull and Morrow (2008) explored whether questioning in 38 high school social studies classrooms supported dialogue. Interestingly, the study found that more dialogue was enabled in school with a higher socioeconomic demographic. The researchers were left to wonder whether teachers felt students in the lower-income schools felt their students to be incapable of engaging in the interpretive and values-based discussions that are characteristic of dialogue. They also raised the possibility that teachers in "deficit" areas may feel pressured to bring their students into line with grade-level learning outcomes and therefore exert more control over the classroom question format (Dull & Morrow, 2008). What is certain is that more research is needed into questioning to sustain dialogue in the content-area classrooms. Further study may support a cross-curricular approach where students learn dialogic skills which teachers then help them sustain through all their academic courses.

Good questions lie at the heart of the dialogic classroom. Quality dialogue is characterized by the ways in which teachers challenge thinking and by the ways that student responses show extended thinking (Fisher, 2009). As students analyze summarize and share ideas, further questions are essential to extend their thinking (Fisher, 2009).

The higher-level thinking required for both asking and answering analytical, evaluative and synthesis questions, with a requirement for “proof” or evidence, then favourably positions students for writing tasks that demonstrate understanding.

Linking Dialogic Talk to Writing Practices

A well-developed argument schema includes an understanding of logical structures, standards of evidence and argument strategies (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013). Does this then transfer to proficiency in writing? A five-month, qualitative, microethnographic study of how 25 Grade 11 students were positioned to view themselves as readers and writers examined the teacher’s use of responsive dialogue and open-ended questions (Vetter, 2010). It is within the context of these of spontaneous, yet sophisticated navigations “that teachers facilitate the construction of literary identities in a high school English classroom,” (p.35). Vetter (2010) defines these navigations as a central feature of positioning theory, in that people strategically position themselves through dialogue to negotiate meanings about themselves and their social worlds. Yet for this positioning to be successful, the teacher must have already internalized what Boyd and Markarian (2011) refer to as a dialogic stance where the shifting of power to a more equitable relationship between teacher and students creates space for the exploratory dialogue that characterizes both metacognition and the construction of new knowledge (Alexander, 2008). In particular, the use of collective pronouns such as “we” and “our” situate both teacher and students as joint members of a cooperative venture (Johnston, 2001, as cited in Vetter, 2010). The findings of this study showed that by working together, the teacher and students can develop dialogue that values the students’ identities while offering them material for writing tasks.

While positioning students as writers appears to be an essential part of a high school language arts ethos, younger students may need considerable scaffolding before they even reach that point. In a qualitative case study of home and school cooperation to support the writing of lower-achieving boys, Scanlan (2012) describes an activity where parents and Year 2 students together selected an artifact from the home to discuss, thereby providing the students with material to write about at school. Three boys formed a selective sample. At home, students chose items to go in a shoebox. Parents then had intentional conversations with their children about the contents. In this way the parents and children worked together much as did Vetter's Grade 11 students and their teacher. In both cases knowledge was socially constructed prior to writing. At school each of Scanlan's participants shared their shoeboxes in circle time. They then wrote, word-processed and created illustrations for their compositions, which were spiral bound in a hard copy. In discussing her findings, Scanlan (2010) refers to the vital role the teacher played both in initiating the activity and later in helping students clarify and organize their ideas during the presentational talk in the classroom that preceded the writing activity. By encouraging parents to co-construct knowledge with their children, and by then giving the floor to the children during sharing time, the teacher relinquished power to promote dialogue (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). In each case the student participant made what the teacher referred to as a "literacy breakthrough". By linking home and school, the teacher and the parents were able to work together to position the students as writers, helping them to construct meaning and reflect their knowledge as a written outcome (Scanlan, 2010).

While Scanlan underscored the beneficial effect of dialogue in both the home and the school on the writing of low-achieving boys, another study examined how the teaching of exploratory talk skills to gifted and talented children influenced their ability to manipulate and control sentence structure (Robins, 2011). The author, a self-described constructivist practitioner chose a focus group of six Year 5 students, four boys and two girls, for this study. Focus group students were first engaged in metatalk that covered aspects of exploratory talk and listening skills, and established ground rules for discussion (Robins, 2011). Students then participated in guided writing sessions that centered on adverbial phrases, clauses and complex sentences. Although the students' writing skills initially lagged behind their developing proficiency with exploratory talk, their capacity for both were eventually parallel (Robins, 2011). Like the low-achievers Vetter (2010) observed, and Scanlan's Grade 11s (2010), scaffolding and teacher stance enabled student advancement.

If structured scaffolding and pedagogical stance can enable discussion, will these methods translate to on-line discussion? A grey area has emerged in the study of dialogic education, when discussion practices attempt to move into cyberspace. A collective case study using cross-case analysis, of how three pre-service teachers interacted online with 24 middle-school students, revealed a tendency to control the discussion in a manner that closed off potential avenues for dialogue and effectively turned the chat space into a monologic classroom (Groenke, 2010). Was this effect generated by the faceless nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC) or did it simply reflect the inexperience of pre-service teachers? These findings underscore the importance of an assured dialogic stance on the part of the teacher/mediator/facilitator. In her findings Groenke (2010)

speculated that strategies to enable scaffolding in a virtual environment might require teachers “to share personal information, including personal opinions and beliefs...[to be] considered by all participants as a group member,” (p. 412). Again the discussion returns to the concept of who holds power. Is it the teacher? Is it the students? Or, as Boyd and Markarian (2011) recommend, is power shared so that student voices can command the virtual floor and emerge as authentic dialogue.

The Literacy Identity

Classrooms are transactional spaces. Yet although a group engaged in a specific transaction might arrive at a common meaning, all participants have taken different paths to get there (Fecho, 2011). Those paths may occasionally intersect with others, but they remain uniquely individual as they incorporate culture, community, home, past and present. Thus the richness of the classroom environment that encourages dialogic transactions affords students exponential opportunities to hone and refine their understanding and world view. Construction of a literacy identity, then, can be seen as a non-linear identity process that features constant negotiation between teacher and student (Vetter, 2010).

In this select review of relevant research the most effective methodology for examining dialogic education appears to be discourse analysis that examines the language of teacher and students in minute detail (Adler et al., 2003; Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Soter et al., 2008). Findings from these studies offer consciousness-raising evidence teachers can use as they work to change their dialogic stance. Yet the more intimate case study portrayals of individual experiences with dialogic instruction and learning (Robins, 2011; Scanlan, 2012) are also encouraging, while indicating a need for considerable further

research, particularly within Canadian classrooms. In particular, more study is required into methods appropriate for adolescents (Groenke, 2010; Higham et al., 2013; Vetter, 2010) while acknowledging potential cultural impediments such as adolescent wariness of open discussion and power differentials between students and teachers as well as between students and peers (Higham, et al., 2013).

Teacher professional development is also required, especially as the research is showing willingness on the part of many teachers to embrace a dialogic method that will improve outcomes and create thoughtful, literate, cognitively-aware students (Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Groenke, 2010; Higham, et al., 2013; Vetter, 2010). Contemporary research to date has looked at the social benefits, the cognitive benefits and the representational benefits of classroom talk, and the best strategies for informing pedagogy. It is in the context of these select finding that a series of recommendations are made regarding classroom practices that encourage the use of talk and listening to strengthen student understanding, promote higher level thinking, and produce reflective, analytical, persuasive writing.

Chapter 3: Pedagogical Implications

The Language of the Classroom

If learning is a social construction (Barnes, 2008) then dialogic talk is the vital ingredient. Yet in order for dialogic talk to truly enable higher-order thinking, students must develop mastery in the language of the classroom. Inherent in the teacher's role is a responsibility to help students negotiate the language of subject disciplines (also known as big "D" Discourses). These secondary Discourses may be different from the everyday language (also known as primary, or little "d" discourse) they use at home and among their peers (Gee, 1989). Gee identified the language of the classroom as a secondary Discourse students acquire to varying degrees; he then defined literacy as fluent control over this Discourse. The teacher's task is to assist students in acquiring fluency, by enabling and empowering them with the flexibility to eventually negotiate the varied Discourses of adult life; however, the underlying contradiction is that mastery will not develop effectively in a top-down learning model. As demonstrated in Chapter 2 of this document, the role of talk in the classroom has undergone scrutiny. Recent scholarship has identified the importance of classroom talk that is dialogic rather than transmissive (Alexander, 2008a). In order for students to develop the skills they need, Alexander (2008b) prescribed five criteria for effective teaching: learning tasks are addressed by teachers and students together; listening is reciprocal between teachers and students; the learning environment is supportive of student articulations; teachers and students build knowledge together; and, teachers purposefully monitor and guide classroom dialogue. While education authorities recognize the role speaking and listening play in learning,

there is less clarity about modes of instruction and indeed whether teachers have the information and training required to establish true dialogic spaces.

What do curriculum documents ask of teachers?

Curriculum documents published by British Columbia's Ministry of Education place considerable importance on Oral Language. In particular, the documents detail several pedagogical understandings of Oral Language that support the K-7 English Language Arts curriculum. In particular, several key concepts are prominent:

- Oral language development and its relationship to later reading achievement is central to literacy. (English Language Arts K-7, 2007).
- The more students talk and listen to others talking, the better their ability to manipulate language, the better their ability to think and therefore read and write. *Ibid.*
- Talk is not only a medium for thinking, it also provides a way to learn how to think. *Ibid.*
- If students learn that they can use language to affect the world around them they will be more willing to set goals and participate in learning activities. *Ibid.*
- Most communication is done through speech. To avoid social disadvantage, therefore, students must learn to listen attentively and speak clearly, confidently and articulately. *Ibid.*

The concepts inherent in the K-7 curriculum document are expanded upon in the pedagogical understandings of Oral Language that support the 8-12 English Language Arts curriculum. Specifically, the document notes:

- Oral language is a tool for learning (English Language Arts 8-12, 2007).
- For students to become more competent communicators, they require deliberate instruction in oral skills. *Ibid.*
- Students must have varied opportunities to use talk for learning with partners, in groups and in whole-class discussions. *Ibid.*

Both curriculum documents acknowledge the role of speaking as thinking as well as speaking for (or for demonstrating) thinking. Interestingly, despite devoting a third of the prescribed learning outcomes to purposes, strategies and features of oral language, the goal of each document still seems to be fluent reading and writing. In other words, the purpose is to obtain a measurable outcome using tools currently available in the average classroom. In our data-driven society where results must be quantifiable and reportable, simply assuming that students are using language for thinking is not enough. How can we measure thinking? Can we necessarily assume that poor reading and writing skills equal poor thinking skills? Certainly a creative teacher might find a variety of ways to assess students' understanding without a tangible product, but that teacher would likely also require administrative support for assessment that lacked a measurable artefact.

What specific oral language skills are required for British Columbia students?

The K-7 document identifies criteria for powerful listening in kindergarten as observable behaviours (sitting still, not talking, waiting for a turn, looking at the speaker) and powerful speaking as actions (clear voice, adding detail, asking questions). In particular students are expected to:

- demonstrate use of social language to interact co-operatively with others and to solve problems; and,

- demonstrate being a good listener for a sustained period of time (English Language Arts K-7, 2007).

By Grade 7 students are expected to have integrated their speaking and listening skills as they:

- use speaking and listening to interact with others;
- listen critically to understand and analyze ideas and information; and,
- select and use strategies when interacting, expressing, presenting and listening (English Language Arts K-7, 2007).

In Grade 8 expectations are extended to include:

- interacting and collaborating to comprehend and respond to texts;
- expression of ideas and information in a variety of forms; and,
- listening to comprehend, interpret and evaluate.

(English Language Arts 8-12, 2007).

Finally, by Grade 12, students are expected to do all of the above, as well as being able to verbally argue, persuade and critique as well as listen to interpret and evaluate ideas with particular attention to context (*Ibid*).

Teachers with a desire to expand their practice and deepen the learning of their students therefore need not fear they are stepping out on a radical limb by enlarging the classroom time dedicated to purposeful talk. The aforementioned curriculum documents not only acknowledge the critical value of speaking and listening, they also provide a platform upon which to build a dialogic classroom. Yet to avoid falling back into the transmissive trap, teachers need to both commit to assuming a dialogic stance, and

commit to professional development that will help them facilitate dialogue in the classroom.

Linking Theory to Practice

The old-fashioned librarian with a sign on her desk demanding ‘SILENCE’ has retreated into memory for some, and been relegated to the realm of ads and movies for the rest of us. Now most secondary school libraries have a low hum as students, often sitting in pairs at monitors or in groups at round tables, conduct research, explore questions, share answers and collaboratively build understanding. As students work together their dialogue features exploratory talk as they analyze, explain, speculate, evaluate, question discuss, argue and justify to make meaning. Obviously talk is critical to understanding as students co-construct meaning together across the curriculum, in science, mathematics, social studies and language arts through inquiry, projects, lab reports, chapter questions and the range of tasks characteristic of secondary classrooms. So why is the dialogic classroom such a challenging construct for K-12 Language Arts teachers?

Wegerif (2013) remarks that the advent of the printing press thrust primarily dialogic cultures from oracy-centred learning to a monologic focus that plays out in education through the imposed authority of reading and writing. Yet it is difficult for teachers to withdraw from the comfort of tangible artefacts and evidence. Teachers are accountable to administrators, parents and, most importantly, students. Changes in classroom culture can raise questions. When administrators ask for data, and parents request indications of skill development, teachers need be able to provide evidence. Certainly proof of improved thinking and understanding are evident in student writing

and representations. Yet the discussion time required for arriving at improved and sophisticated final products may not satisfy those who need many and frequent updates. One solution might be maintaining video and audio recordings of student discussions. Another solution is whole-staff professional development that offers teachers and administrators evidence from the numerous studies over the past 40 years supporting the shift to dialogic instruction. Information sessions for parents and guardians would also be helpful.

However, the most important shift that needs to take place is within the hearts and minds of individual teachers. Fecho (2011) describes his own journey to dialogic instruction when he stopped lecturing students about their lack of engagement and instead created opportunities for him and the students to engage in critical dialogue. He invokes the words of Friere (1970) who said teachers can transform their practice through a combination of love, humility and faith, meaning love of human potential accompanied by openness and acceptance, humility in recognizing that all people are similar in their attempt to learn more than they currently know, and faith in the power of all people to be transformed.

Alexander (2008b) outlines five principles of dialogic instruction for teachers who plan to make the shift to a dialogic stance:

1. It is collective. Teachers and students address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class, rather than in isolation.
2. It is reciprocal. Teachers and students:
 - listen to each other,
 - share ideas and

- consider alternative viewpoints.
3. It is supportive. Students articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over ‘wrong’ answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings.
 4. It is cumulative. Teachers and students build on their own and each others’ ideas and link them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry.
 5. It is purposeful. Teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view.

No teacher is likely to implement all five principles at once. Alexander (2008b) observes that assuming a dialogic stance is a process that will develop and evolve over time. Fecho (2011) notes that if a teacher feels powerless to change student outcomes in his or her class, it may be time for a shift in attitude towards locus of control. Teachers who commit to relinquishing control in favour of empowering student voice will find they are able to develop closer and more productive relationships with their students, which in turn leads to improved learning (Fecho, 2011).

Teachers who talk among themselves about encouraging classroom discussion often mention their discomfort with ‘dead air’. No new practice launches without the occasional interruption or step back. With this in mind, Alexander (2008b) offers a structure to smooth the way into purposeful classroom discussion:

- Explain and Describe.
 - The teacher starts the discussion and asks one pupil to respond;
 - Then pupils talk and respond to each other through questions or building on what someone has said;

- The teacher intervenes now and again to join the discussion or to bring in another pupil or to stop the discussion.
- Demonstrate and organize.
 - The teacher demonstrates and discusses the process at the front of the class with 3 or 4 pupils or shows and discusses a piece of video where another class is involved in dialogic talk.
 - The teacher organises students in a single or double horseshoe or a circle.
- Discuss, agree, set ground rules such as:
 - respect each other's opinions;
 - only one person speaks at a time;
 - speak loudly and clearly;
 - give reasons for your views and ideas;
 - listen carefully;
 - try to build on what others say;
 - support and include each other;
 - ask when you don't understand; and,
 - try to reach an agreement.
- Assess and adjust
 - Try it for only 5 to 10 minutes at first.
 - Review and evaluate the process with the class to identify strengths and ways to improve.

Cooperative sharing of responsibility between teacher and students is an important aspect of Alexander's structure. This characteristic of the dialogic stance may

take time for some teachers to get used to. Yet as the teacher gradually releases responsibility for all purposeful talk, and instead takes more of a participant role, space is created for student voices.

Mercer and Dawes (2008) note that school may be the only place for some children to participate in discussions that develop language and thinking skills. They recommend three main ways teachers can provide such opportunities:

1. Take an active role in guiding students' use of language and modelling how it can be used for collective thinking. For example, show respect for tentative ideas, draw out different points of view, ensure multiple voices contribute, encourage elaboration and ask students to support their opinions.
2. Establish ground rules for talk that become part of the common understanding of the class.
3. Design group activities that will bring forth debate and encourage joint reasoning. Such activities should utilize students' existing knowledge while also providing scaffolding that will enable them to search collaboratively for new ideas and information as they co-construct new meanings (Mercer & Dawes, 2008).

Introducing opportunities for dialogic interaction at the start of a semester will set a tone for the teacher and students to adjust to over time. As with any new skill, it will take practice for all participants to develop trust and build proficiency. Over time the difference between the traditional I-R-F position and the dialogic stance will become apparent.

Changing the stance

Ask any teacher if there is dialogue in his or her classroom and the answer would be: “Of course!” likely accompanied by a puzzled expression. Classroom talk is a given in schools, but the quality of that talk has come under scrutiny time and again, with findings that may or may not find expression in general K-12 pedagogy. While many researchers emphatically endorse the use of dialogic instruction and exploratory talk in the classroom, policy-makers and administrators also need to address the barriers to implementation by teachers (Adler, Rougle, Kaiser, & Caughlan, 2003; Elliott-Johns, Booth, Rowsell, Puig, & Paterson, 2012; Gilles, 2010). The greatest barrier, however, appears to be the stance of teachers themselves, some of whom are apprehensive about losing control over the classroom dialogue (Adler, et al., 2003; Gilles, 2010). What is the origin of this concern? A study of teacher training in dialogic education, and of pre-service teacher expectations regarding classroom talk might be instructive.

Modern classrooms are much noisier than in the past, which indicates that teachers are attempting to give more space to student voice. Primary classroom in particular, are showing progress in dialogic education. Yet primary-grade pedagogies do not automatically translate into effective practices with adolescents (Elliot-Johns, et al., 2012). Even with this progress, many teachers still fail to consistently encourage and promote the genuine language practices, including strategies for argument and authentic questioning, that help students socially construct meaning and extend understanding (Adler, et al., 2003; Fisher & Larkin, 2008; Higham, et al., 2013; Soter et al., 2008). One reason could be a perception of curricular demands that impose a challenging quantity of facts and processes to be taught at each grade level. Are these teachers getting

the support they need to adjust their stance? The studies in this document focus primarily on British or American schools. While Canadian teachers face some constraints similar to those experienced by their colleagues in Britain and the United States, the absence of a national curriculum gives provinces and school districts more flexibility to promote practices supported by current research. Yet the British Columbia Curriculum Guide for English Language Arts still lists 39 learning outcomes just for English 8. Twelve of these processes fall under the heading of Oral Language (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007). Covering all aspects poses a challenge for any teacher; many likely incline (or fall back upon) what is most familiar and comfortable.

Fortunately, new curriculum documents for English Language Arts, although still in draft form, liberate teachers from responsibility for specific learning outcomes, and instead identify a broad spectrum of “Learning Standards”. Beginning with Grade Band K-2 and proceeding through to Grade Band 8-9, the document anticipates students developing curricular competencies using “**oral**, written, visual, and digital texts” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p.1). In the primary grades students will learn to “(e)ngage actively as **listeners**...to make meaning and develop thinking and comprehension” and ““(e)xpress thoughts, feelings, opinions and ideas through oral...presentations and contribute as a member of a classroom community (*Ibid*). In the upper primary and intermediate grades students will “(e)ngage actively as readers and listeners to construct meaning and develop thinking and comprehension” while also “(applying) oral language to explore and express ideas, communicate with others, and contribute as a member of a classroom community” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p.2). In Grades 6 through 9 students will “engage actively as readers and listeners to construct meaning, deepen

thinking and comprehension, and promote inquiry ((BC Ministry of Education, 2013, pp.3 and 5). In Grades 6 and 7 they will also “(e)xplore and express ideas, opinions, and perspectives to communicate clearly through oral language (*Ibid*). By Grades 8 and 9 they will be able to also use oral language to “evoke emotion” ((BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p.6).

The revised Learning Standards for English Language Arts K-9 offer considerable scope for teachers to initiate dialogic teaching practices. Without being overtly prescriptive the curriculum documents clearly highlight the link between oral language skill development and higher-level thinking processes. At the same time, speaking and listening still seem somewhat overshadowed by an emphasis on reading and writing. The curriculum overview notes that “(k)ey ELA concepts and competencies include the following:

- using reading strategies to construct meaning, explore texts, appreciate story, explore language, and understand literary elements
- using the writing process to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings; create a variety of communication forms; apply language in creative and playful ways; and use conventions and features of language
- using thinking strategies” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, n.p.).

In our artifact and evidence-oriented education system a reading score and a piece of writing offer tangible confirmation that a student has acquired and applied requisite skills. Evidence of verbal reasoning and listening skills may be more nebulous and difficult to quantify. This may explain why many secondary teachers are reluctant to commit to a dialogic stance. In order to assist teachers, then, the research community

needs to develop classroom assessment tools that will quantify oral language skill development. Measurement of student progress continues to be an important aspect of instruction. Teachers use assessment to guide their instructional planning. Administrators require assessment findings to determine school-wide and district-wide trends. As well, assessment information offers parents a window into their child's learning, understanding and overall progress. Hopefully, as the dialogic stance finds its way into more and more Canadian classrooms, research into authentic, informative assessment of speaking and listening skills will follow.

The research discussed in Chapter 2 covers a range of valid practices demonstrating the validity of dialogic talk. Fisher & Larkin (2008) talk about the need for a "free talk" space that honours students' out-of-school literacies and gradual enculturation to academic language, acknowledging that the behavioural values of school are likely different from those practiced in students' home (Smagorinsky, 2007). Recognizing students' home discourses corresponds to the broader theory of Discourse and considers students' primary and secondary Discourses, as well as their dominant and non-dominant Discourses (Delpit, 1992; Gee, 1989).

Making the shift from monologic to dialogic instruction is challenging for many teachers, yet a change in stance is necessary in order to create a learning space where students have a continuing opportunity to socially construct meaning (Alexander, 2008a; Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Fisher, 2009; Gilles, 2011; Lyle, 2008; Reznitskaya, 2012; Sosa & Sullivan, 2013). Once the optimal learning environment is available, students need explicit instruction and modelling in order to develop and strengthen their dialogic discussion strategies, including exploratory talk (Fisher, 2008; Gilles, 2011; Sosa &

Sullivan, 2013). Students also require support to apply their dialogue skills in other courses and contexts (Barnes, 2008). Finally, The specifics of dialogic instruction, for adolescents in particular, must include instruction in argument, authentic questioning and extended discussion (Fisher, 2009; Gillies, 2011; Reznitskaya, 2012; Sosa & Sullivan, 2013).

Barnes (2008) notes that learning only happens when people can make sense of their experiences. That “sense-making” is dependent upon what we already know, and how far we can extend and reshape our understanding to allow the addition of new understandings. Barnes refers to this process to as building “models of the world” (2008, p.3). Individual models or schemes provide an attachment point for new information. If there is no place for new information to attach it is discarded or forgotten from one day to the next. Students working together, then, have the benefit of multiple schemes to build upon leading to a greater opportunity for new knowledge to be consolidated and retained. Researchers and dialogic practitioners have developed a range of specific activities to encourage purposeful, engaged, classroom talk. Several useful activities for high school students are included in Appendix B.

Bringing It Home: Readings for Teachers

Teachers chronically feel pressed for time. Secondary instruction in particular often requires considerable outside reading to augment course content. Yet as evidence-oriented practitioners, teachers also often take a “show-me” attitude towards recommendations that would encourage them to change their classroom practice or stance. Is it necessary for every teacher to read Vygotsky, Bakhtin or Halliday in order to be convinced to move toward dialogic classroom practice? Likely not. However,

several recent books and articles offer a convincing summary of current research while also providing a range of techniques to help teachers make the shift to a dialogic stance.

Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk (4th ed.)

Alexander's 2008 publication gives the reader a range of evidence to support dialogic teaching based on research into the relationship between language, learning and thinking. The repertoire and principles described in Chapter 2 of this document are discussed in detail and highlight the teacher's role in promoting effective discussion and scaffolded dialogue. Also offered are classroom indicators to help teachers evaluate whether learning and understanding are taking place, and suggestions for professional development.

“Using student voices to guide instruction.”

In this 2012 article from *Voices from the Middle*, Elliott-Johns, Booth, Rowsell, Puig and Paterson summarize findings that the authors presented to a National Council of Teacher of English Annual Convention. Four excerpts are shared regarding inquiry into student voices in classrooms: instructional design; intensive reading instruction with adolescents; artifactual literacies; and, drama talk and role-play. The authors clarify that their research is conducted from a hebegogic stance, which approaches learning and instruction with adolescents differently from the methods and stance used with younger children. Instructional design research reveals a need to know students, to develop trust, to listen closely as they articulate their understandings of themselves as learners in the context of classroom instruction, and to use the information conveyed to design responsive programs. In particular, a program of intensive reading instruction showed

that primary-grade pedagogies designed to promote self-regulation and early referencing skills are inappropriate since most adolescents arrive at middle school with the ability to self-direct, self-monitor and self-regulate. A responsive teacher will listen to student voices and use their remarks to guide the implementation of age-appropriate instructional practices. The use of artefacts to prompt verbal stories and reflections, with corresponding listening practices, was found to give more students voice, especially those who felt marginalized in the classroom. Finally, a drama context was found to set up varying language demands, allowing students to practice unfamiliar language codes and providing stimulus for language exploration. Responses were a key factor in students' assessments of whether their communications were successful.

Teaching for the Students: Habits of Heart, Mind, and Practice in the Engaged Classroom.

Fecho's 2011 book describes his experiences teaching both students and teachers-in-training. He reflects upon his early struggles to teach writing, and in particular the difficulties he encountered when he tried to make students care about how they expressed their ideas. He realized that the engagement he wanted to see required him to position himself differently within the power structure of the classroom. As he shifted his stance to a dialogic approach, Fecho found himself allowing more space for writing, conferring more with his students, noting and praising their strengths and conferencing with them more about the content of their writing,

In describing practices that will help teachers bring more dialogue into their classrooms, Fecho notes that students must be able to both "pose and explore complex questions" (p. 88). His personal goal is to arrive at dialogic "seamlessness" where topics and units of

instruction from earlier in the semester are revisited later; where predictions are assessed and revised, and where the ongoing dialogue of the classroom has a continuous flow s meaning is created and extended in community.

“Pedagogy or ideological struggle? An examination of pupils’ and teachers’ expectations for talk in the classroom.”

Fisher and Larkin’s 2008 article in *Language and Education* focused on a cluster of schools in a socially disadvantaged area and investigated administrative concerns about the poor oral language skills of some students, as well as querying whether teachers and children in the schools had a good understanding of the role of talk in school. Initially 189 students were tested both for vocabulary and for their views of talk. Children who could not write their own responses were given scribes, although the researchers acknowledged this intervention posed a risk to the validity of the data. Six months later eight teachers were interviewed and 64 students were selected for small group interviews. Researchers found no difference between the vocabulary skills of the sample group and national norms. The student questionnaires showed that most students considered themselves “good talkers,” who converse readily and ably with their peers. Most named a family member as a role models. However, students indicated that “school talk” was constrained and controlled by the teacher. Teacher interviews revealed a general opinion that poor language skills were related to parenting and low socioeconomic status. Student interviews confirmed the questionnaire findings. Fisher and Larkin’s research significantly underscores the perceptions both teachers and students often hold about the role of talk in a classroom. If a classroom is not designated as a “free-talk” space, then students will not have the opportunity to engage in language practices that socially construct meaning and extend understanding.

Creative dialogue: Talk for thinking in the classroom.

As well as discussing various types of classroom talk, Fisher's 2009 book contains a chapter on effective listening. Fisher notes that most people can hear, but listening is a skill that must be taught and that is essential for higher-level thinking. Questioning is at the heart of Fisher's passion for classroom dialogue. He invokes Bloom's Taxonomy (2009) as a guideline for the developing complexity of questions to goad and encourage student thinking. Fisher also underscores the importance of discussing with students, as partners in the learning process, the role questioning plays in learning and thinking. In his discussion of creative talk, verbal reasoning, group discussion and cross-curricular dialogue, Fisher offers teachers a variety of practical ideas and simple techniques to implement in their classrooms.

"Making the most of talk"

Writing in *Voices From the Middle*, Gilles (2010) calls on all teachers to understand the importance of classroom talk and to undertake the challenge of integrating talk throughout the curriculum. The author focuses on small group discussion and offers practices to help students talk and learn. A group of 29 seventh-grade students were discussed in the context of explicit instruction in the Language Arts class and the subsequent benefits for several subject areas. These students were given explicit lessons in how to talk. Students practiced small group discussion, taking turns being either a participant or an observer. All group practice sessions were videotaped. Debriefing sessions followed, focusing on conversational skills and expectations. The process was repeated several times, with discussion material becoming more sophisticated, prompting

students to deepen their dialogue. Taping and debriefing continued and students became more skilful at working together, at co-constructing meaning, and at completing associated tasks independently. While acknowledging the value of these skills to Language Arts learning, by freeing the teacher to spend more time on analysis and synthesis skills, the author also discussed the value of this experience in preparing students for meaning-making in other subject areas. However, she discovered that students also need assistance in recognizing how to take their discussion skills into a different context. She recommended administrative and collegial support for teachers endeavouring to bring more talk into the classroom, and that teachers work together to integrate a “talking to learn” approach across all disciplines. The author’s recommendations significantly highlight a requisite “next step” in the concept of talking for understanding where students must also be taught to transfer their new understanding to other subject areas.

“Shifting the primary focus: Assessing the case for dialogic education in secondary classrooms.”

For this article in *Language and Education*, Higham, Brindley, and Van de Pol (2013) interviewed leading academic researchers in the field of dialogic education about their perceptions of both the difficulties and the potential benefits of extending the practice of dialogic education from primary schools to secondary schools. Participants were selected using reputational case sampling. Six agreed to be interviewed: Robin Alexander, Adam Lefstein, Eugene Matusov, Neil Mercer, Sylvia Rojas-Drummond and Rupert Wegerif. All participants had wide experience of dialogic teaching and research in several countries. All participants affirmed the importance of dialogic education in

secondary schools as the basis for the critical thinking that bolsters the more highly valued practice of writing, yet several themes emerged, including practical concerns around subject-specific achievement and the difficulty of implementing cross-curricular strategies. Potential cultural impediments included adolescent wariness of open discussion, power differentials between students, teachers and peers, and teacher perceptions regarding the value of classroom dialogue. The researchers recommended encouraging students to engage in cross-curricular dialogue relating their learning to their primary Discourses to cultivate flexible, critical thinking. By drawing together the recommendations of leading experts this study points to the need for concerted efforts both to research and implement dialogic teaching in secondary schools.

“Dialogic argumentation as a vehicle for developing young adolescents’ thinking.”

Kuhm and Crowell (2011), writing in *Psychological Science*, reported on their research using electronically conducted dialogues on social issues as a medium to develop argumentative reasoning skills in two cohorts of young adolescents. Outcomes were evaluated through student essays, although in this case researchers scrutinized this data for evidence of thinking skills rather than writing skills. The essay-writing tasks were assigned four times over three years. Data from the second and third years showed that most students who were taught argument skills were able to compose dual perspective arguments, compared to only half of the comparison group. As well, some students were able to develop more sophisticated, integrative perspective arguments. The findings indicate the value of teaching dialogic argument and point to a link between dialogic reasoning and expository writing. The researchers report also that participants came slowly (by Year 3) to the realization that evidence was a critical aspect of

supporting argument. This study connects dialogic argument with writing, supporting the idea that an emphasis on specific dialogic skills has far-reaching academic benefits.

“What the discourse tells us: Talk and indicators of high-level comprehension”

In a 2008 article in the *International Journal of Educational Research*, Soter, Wilkinson, Murphy, Rudge, Reninger, and Edwards (2008) conducted a three-year longitudinal project to identify and study nine small group discussion approaches used in classrooms. The researchers sought findings that would help them better characterize quality discussion and students’ learning and comprehension, with the goal of developing a model of discussion that teachers can use to promote high-level comprehension of texts. The study was part of a larger project funded by the U.S. Department of Education on the use of small-group discussion to promote higher-level thinking. Study findings indicated that the most productive discussions occurred when open-ended or authentic questions were used, when students were able to speak for extended periods of time, and when there was significant uptake. The findings hold implications for dialogic instruction and lesson pacing, particularly in regard to authentic questioning and the need to create extensive space and time for student voice in the classroom.

Inspiring dialogue: Talking to learn in the English classroom

Hot off the press in 2013, Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan and Heintz’s book for teachers make the case for the dialogic stance in the classroom, and then goes on to show how teachers can transform their practice by following several manageable, practical steps. The authors offer a range of both teacher-led and student-led tools to encourage thoughtful classroom dialogue. As well, they provide a framework for

sequencing dialogic talk into the classroom throughout the year, and a selection of vignettes taken from classrooms where teachers are actively incorporating dialogic tools. Juzwik et al. advocate the use of discourse analysis in order for teachers to closely examine and analyze the conversations taking place in their classrooms. They also encourage teachers to form Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with a focus on dialogic teaching in order to have collegial reflection and support. Examples of PLCs are included, as are guidelines for developing an effective PLC. A useful *coda* addresses potential challenges that arise during implementation of dialogic tools. The authors discuss managing side conversations and dealing with offensive or inaccurate comments.

Looking to the future

Pedagogical Recommendations

- Effective instruction requires a shift in stance that invites greater student participation.
- Monologic instruction needs to be subordinate to dialogic instruction.
- Teachers require specific on-going instruction to changing their instructional stance.
- Do not automatically adopt primary-grade pedagogies to use with adolescents.
- Allow space for “free talk” and relinquish control of the discourse.
- Provide explicit instruction and modeling for discussion strategies that build meaning.
- Be intentional about using argument and authentic questioning in the classroom.
- Make explicit the link between dialogic talk and the critical thinking that bolsters writing.

- Invest time in developing teacher-student and student-peer relationships.
- Encourage students take their dialogic skills and flexible thinking to their other courses.

Implications for Future Research

The scope for research into dialogic classroom practices remains wide-open in Canada. Most of the research and writing on the subject to date has come from the United States and the United Kingdom. Within those studies are both universal discoveries and recommendations, as well as context-specific suggestions that arise from individual cultural or socioeconomic environments. Fruitful information might come from more studies of Canadian classrooms. Turning the lens on our unique context might help Canadian teachers situate their practice within a global perspective.

The following topics in particular require further investigation:

- Explore the use of dialogic instruction in Canadian classrooms.
- Examine the utility of dialogic teaching practices in enhancing understanding among Canadian aboriginal learners.
- Develop recommendations for secondary school dialogic pedagogy.
- Study the role of professional development in teacher implementation of dialogic teaching.
- Assess administrative knowledge and understanding of dialogic instruction.
- Evaluate the utility of Professional Learning Communities in helping teachers shift securely into a dialogic stance.
- Examine the critical thinking skills of students who have had continual exposure to dialogic instruction.

- Research cross-curricular applications of dialogic instruction in Canadian secondary classrooms.
- Compare the effectiveness of dialogic and traditional instruction in meeting diverse student needs at the secondary level.
- Evaluate the utility of dialogic instruction in scaffolding comprehension for students with learning challenges.
- Continue researching the connections between dialogue, thought, reading and writing.

A Workshop for Teachers

In the interests of both introducing teachers to the concept of the dialogic stance, as well as providing them with some techniques to apply in their own classrooms, I developed a workshop entitled: The Dialogic Classroom (Appendix A). A PowerPoint presentation of 60 slides with accompanying speaker's notes covers the background theory that supports a focus on oral language skill development and reviews current recommended approaches to bring a dialogic stance into the secondary school context. Dialogic instructional techniques are discussed and teachers are given the opportunity in the workshop to participate in a sampling of activities to use in the classroom. Handouts used in the workshop can be found in Appendix B.

Conclusion

The delight and the challenge of an English Language Arts curriculum is the focus on developing students' skills and devising techniques to support, scaffold and elicit ever more sophisticated critical thinking. As secondary instruction becomes more

cross-curricular and inter-curricular, teachers are stimulated to use the classroom as a place for exploration, inquiry, argument, comparison, debate, revision, reassessment – practices that can all be informed and enhanced by a dialogic stance. As Vygotsky first articulated, and as numerous subsequent scholars have since affirmed, meaning is a social construct. To modify a common expression we can say: “two voices are better than one.” The challenge in the Canadian high school classroom is not so much to find space for the dialogic stance as it is to build teachers’ confidence that dialogic instruction is an effective way to foster critical thinking skills in their adolescent students. Yet as the research accumulates, and particularly if researchers turn the spotlight on Canadian classrooms, administrative support, professional development and classroom practice will follow.

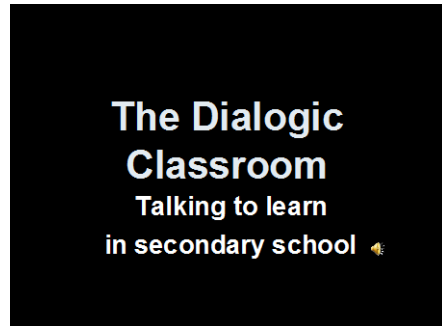
As far as my own practice is concerned, I was already well along the path to the dialogic classroom before I started exploring its multiple benefits. As a teacher who has always valued student voice, I feel validated by a wealth of peer-reviewed research that supports the role of student-led dialogue. Yet recognizing the critical role of dialogic instruction in developing higher-level thinking skills is not enough. Teachers need a repertoire of straightforward techniques that will enable them to successfully shift into a dialogic stance. I feel fortunate to have benefited from the generous contributions of the many teacher “converts” who publish effective tips and lessons on the web, in journals, and in books. A sampling of these techniques, including some activities I have developed, is available in Appendix C. I also feel I have now answered my own question of how to create a truly dialogic space for learning. As the teacher, I am responsible for the learning outcomes in my classes. However, from a dialogic perspective that obliges me

to facilitate and guide instruction rather than direct and dictate. As Alexander (2008a) notes, the dialogic classroom is a perspective and a process rather than a particular place. It is my hope that in the service of developing thoughtful, critical, articulate citizens, every secondary classroom becomes a dialogic space.

Appendix A: A Workshop for Teachers

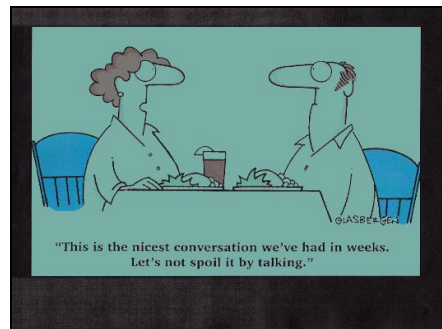
(Speaker's notes are to the right of each slide.)

Slide 1



- This topic will have much that is familiar to teachers.
- It may also have new information.
- We all encourage students to discuss ideas.
- What may be different is the stance taken in the true DIALOGIC CLASSROOM.
- My plan here is to simply familiarize or re-acquaint colleagues with findings from the research on talk in the classroom.
- I'd also like to offer some approaches to encourages true dialogic talk.

Slide 2



- There's a kernel of truth here.
- Because we spend our days in a noisy environment, we have those times where we crave quiet.

Slide 3

In the '60s teachers were...

- Standing at the front
- Demanding silence
- Using fact recall
- Asking "closed" questions
- Rewarding "known" answers

- One of my earliest memories of school is of standing in the hallway. I had been sent out again for talking. In my Grade 1 classroom, where each student was confined within his or her own desk, there was a time to talk (when the teacher called on you) and a time to work. Silently.
- At that point in the mid-1960s social scientists were writing about social constructionism and Vygotsky's theory that speaking actively generates meaning (Smagorinsky, 2013). However, classrooms still functioned with strict, teacher-centric rules that viewed classroom dialogue as a means that needed to be firmly channelled to a prescriptive end.
- This was also the era of the strap.

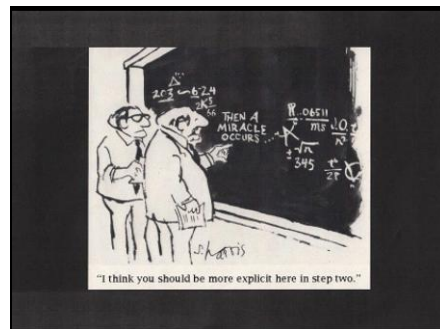
Slide 4



- That isn't to say there aren't times when silence is appropriate. During individual written exams, for example. (Although the use of those to assess understanding is a whole other topic).

immediately articulated, the listener is nevertheless engaged in some form of agreement, disagreement, augmentation, or application, some or all of which may be formulated as an utterance (Bakhtin, 2008).

Slide 8



- In other words, it takes AT LEAST TWO to make meaning.

Slide 9

Neuroscientists discovered that within the brain...

We have specialized areas

- for talking
- for listening
- for processing

These areas are all very close to one another because

- they all work together to make meaning

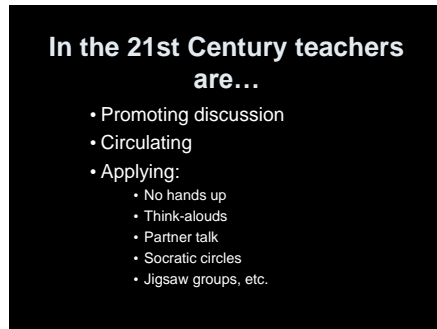
- As the semioticians and linguists were developing their theories, neuroscience was taking advantage of new techniques to look deeply into the human brain.

Slide 10



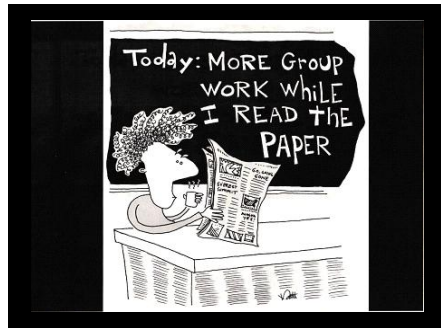
- This is just a short neuroanatomy review.

Slide 11



- Teaching in the 21st Century classroom reflects decades of research into effective practices. There is clear understanding of the need to make space and time for all student voices.

Slide 12



- Students now leave school having worked in groups from K through 12.

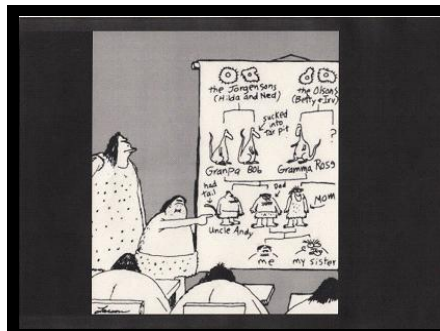
Slide 13

In the classroom

- Teachers who ask questions are more likely to:
 - Receive questions from students
 - Promote elaborated answers
 - Encourage spontaneous contributions to dialogue

- So we're there, right? We listened to Vygotsky and realized that meaning is socially constructed. In other words, to borrow from Jon Donne, "No kid is an island of comprehension".
- We build many of our classroom activities around the social understanding of learning. We have responded to Bakhtin by encouraging students to listen to each other and to work together.
- So there it is -- students are speaking, responding, building meaning, increasing understanding and further reflecting their teachers' brilliance in creating such a stimulating classroom environment.
- But is this a truly dialogic environment? Not necessarily. At least, not yet.

Slide 14



- In William Goldman's grim novel of human dynamics, *Lord of the Flies*, whoever holds the conch gets to speak.
- In our classrooms, whoever holds the floor is usually the one who gets to speak, and in most cases that is either the teacher or someone appointed by the teacher.

Slide 15

The importance of speaking...

- Discourse versus discourse
- Primary Discourse (home)
- Secondary Discourses (school, work and elsewhere)
- Negotiating home and school

- Research in recent decades has produced evidence to support the use of speech and classroom discourse as a tool for generating new ideas (Smagorinsky, 2013). Inherent in this advice, however, is Gee's caution that all students bring with them a primary Discourse that in some cases may be at odds with the secondary Discourse of the classroom (1989).
- In other words, they may need help in acquiring the "language" of the classroom. Acquiring this secondary, dominant Discourse is important both for a student's academic future and for his or her social inclusion and research has shown that teachers with high expectations can help students successfully negotiate the intricacies of an acquired secondary Discourse (Gee, 1989; Delpit, 2001).
- I would also argue that an engaging topic with engaged peers can be a powerful motivator as students seek to join the conversation.

Slide 16

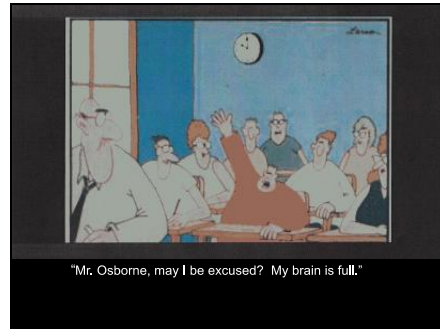
The importance of questions

Questions:

- Focus attention
- Sustain dialogue
- Find out what students know
- Stimulate thinking

- Questions are at the heart of classroom teaching. How else would we know what our students know?
- We have a variety of ways that we ask questions (at the start of a unit; at the end; through quizzes and tests; etc.)

Slide 17



- Yet what type of questions do we ask? Are they for information or to provoke more questions? When does the questioning end (or does it)?

Slide 18

In the classroom

- Teachers who ask questions are more likely to:
 - Receive questions from students
 - Promote elaborated answers
 - Encourage spontaneous contributions to dialogue

- The assumption here is that if you are asking questions, you are inviting discussion. As students receive more opportunities to talk in the classroom, they tend to anticipate and expect more and more opportunities.

Slide 19

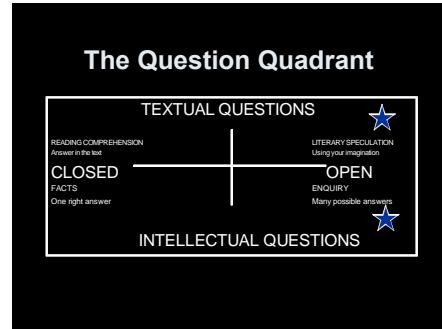
“Open” versus “Closed” questions

Bloom's question stems:

- How many...?
- Can you provide an example of...?
- What would you change if...?
- Why did...occur?
- Can you see a possible solution to...?
- How would you have handled...?

- As the questions become more sophisticated students are nudged toward higher-level thinking. At the same time, this type of questioning requires time and space. For this to work in the classroom, teachers might have to let go of some of their content agenda.

Slide 20



○ The Question Quadrant was developed by Philip Cam (2006) to help teachers discuss different question types with students.

○ It is a useful tool for sorting questions, and for helping students understand the difference between open and closed questions.

○ The blue stars indicate question types that lead to higher-level thinking.

Slide 21

Question of the Day

Students jot down answers in response to cues:

- How many kinds of...can you think of?
- List all...that could be used for...
- What might be the arguments for...?

○ This is one example of a classroom questioning technique that could be easily incorporated into daily classroom routines, but which prime students for open questioning throughout the class.

Slide 22

Journalists' Questions

Critical thinking from different angles.

Who? Who are the people involved in the problem?

What? What was done and not done?

When? When did this start? When will it end?

Where? Where will the issue go from here?

Why? Why did this situation arise?

How? How can it be resolved?

○ Here is an activity to encourage critical thinking about a topic from different angles. These questions can be divided up among students in a jigsaw manner. Groups can then come together to answer all 6.

Slide 23

Interview

Choose someone from literature, history or current affairs to interview.

Create a list of open questions:

- Why did you...
- When you ... what was the consequence?
- If you could do ... again, what would you do differently?

• See if you can find information to answer your questions.

- This activity provides a way to discuss the motivations of a character or of a historical figure. For example:
 - Q. “M. Bonaparte, if you were planning to march on Russia again, what would you do differently?”
 - “I’d dress my men in better uniforms, and I’d do it in the summer.”

Slide 24

Question an answer

- Give students a quotation from a poem, play or other reading.
- Tell them to create 10 questions to which the quotation is the answer.

- Give students a quotation from a poem, play or other reading.
- Tell them to create 10 questions to which the quotation is the answer.
- For example: “Parting is such sweet sorrow.” (From Romeo & Juliet)
 - Why did the lovers linger so long when it was dangerous for Romeo to be in the garden?
 - What was the reason for Juliet’s tears after her wedding night?
 - In an example of Dramatic Irony, when Juliet wept in her room, what did we know that her parents did not know?

Slide 25

Problem Box

- Collect interesting questions that arise in the class.
- Once a week, have students work in small groups or pairs to discuss potential answers.

- Collect interesting questions that arise in the class. (Teacher can also submit.)
- Once a week, have students work in small groups or pairs to discuss potential answers.
- For example:
 - What causes confrontation and fights between people? What can help prevent fights?
 - How could life in school be improved?
 - What is your recipe for keeping healthy?

Slide 26

Analyze Questions

- Ask students to generate questions about a particular text.
- List the questions, then use the Question Quadrant for analysis.
- Try identifying “closed” questions and then turning them into more interesting, “open” questions.

- Ask students to generate questions about a particular text.
- List the questions, then use the Question Quadrant for analysis.
- Try identifying “closed” questions and then turning them into more interesting, “open” inquiry-type questions.
- For example:
 - The question: How many astronauts have walked on the moon?
 - Becomes: What characteristics must an astronaut have possessed in order to have been selected for a moon walk?

Slide 27

IRF

- Initiate-Response-Feedback
- Comprises the majority of “Teacher Talk”
- Tends to follow a pre -set agenda
- Has a role in the classroom, but should not dominate
- Tends to focus on “what” and “where”

- The Initiate-Response-Feedback style of classroom questioning can come from both teachers and students, but tends to result in “closed” or single-word answers.
- Example: What was the main character’s name? (Scout.)
- Where did she live? (Maycomb, Alabama.)
- Why questions, on the other hand, tend to open up dialogue and allow for several answers.
- Example: Why was the main character’s name Scout? (Maybe her dad thought she would have a better chance in the world if she was raised as a boy. Maybe she chose that name for herself. Why would a girl do that?...and so on.)
- Why questions often lead effectively into more questions.

Slide 28

Bloom’s Taxonomy

- Evaluation
- Synthesis
- Analysis
- Application
- Comprehension
- Knowledge

↑

- Research shows that teachers ask about 300 questions though the course of the day, but most of these are ‘closed’ questions, meaning there is a single response. Open questions, on the other hand, are those that allow for more than one response.
- This topic refers back to teacher “stance” in the classroom. Who gets to ask the questions? Who determines the correctness of the answer?

Bloom’s taxonomy increases in complexity as it moves from KNOWLEDGE to EVALUATION. When I attended a credentialing workshop for marking English 12 exams it was suggested that we teach SYNTHESIS starting in Gr. 8.

Slide 29

Exploratory Talk

- Is "in process" thinking talk
- Builds on to each other's comments
- Is hesitant, not perfectly articulated
- Involves verbal challenges, revision, critique, concurrence
- Agreement is sought
- Works best in small groups; can be whole class if students are comfortable

- *Exploratory talk* is considered the most educationally relevant type of talk. The conversationalists both build critically and constructively on what the other party has said, thus offering suggestions and statements for joint consideration. Arguments and counterarguments are justified, and alternative solutions and perspectives are offered.
- *Exploratory talk* is that in which **partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas**. Relevant information is offered for joint consideration. Proposals may be challenged and counter-challenged, but if so reasons are given and alternatives are offered. Agreement is sought as a basis for joint progress. Knowledge is made publicly accountable and reasoning is visible in the talk (Mercer, 2000).

Exploratory talk is a kind of interaction which combines explicit reasoning through talk with a co-operative framework of ground-rules emphasizing the shared nature of the activity and the importance of the active participation of all involved (Wegerif, 1996).

Slide 30


The importance of listening

- A7** Use **listening strategies** to understand, recall, and analyze a variety of texts...
- A8** **Speak and listen** to make personal responses to texts...
- A9** **Speak and listen** to interpret and analyze ideas and information from texts...
- A10** **Speak and listen** to synthesize and extend thinking...
- A11** Use metacognitive strategies to reflect on and assess their speaking and **listening**...

- Most of us have functioning ears, so what more is there to listening?
- A lot, as it turns out.
- These Prescribed Learning Outcomes are from the English 8 IRP

Slide 31

But do we teach listening?



Or do we simply assume that in the appropriate environment, listening will occur?

- How many secondary teachers give instruction in listening?

Slide 32

Julian Treasure


5 Ways to Listen Better

- You Tube clip

Slide 33

Five Principles of Dialogic Teaching

(From Alexander, R. 2006)



- So keeping IRF and exploratory talk in mind, let's look at the principles of dialogic teaching.

Slide 34

1. Collective

Teachers and students address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class, rather than in isolation.

○ Learning is collective.

Slide 35

2. Reciprocal

Teachers and students:

- ✧ listen to each other,
- ✧ share ideas and
- ✧ consider alternative viewpoints.

○ Talk is reciprocal.

Slide 36

3. Supportive

Students articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they **help each other** to reach common understandings.

○ The classroom is supportive.

Slide 37

4. Cumulative

Teachers and students **build on their own and each others' ideas** and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry.

○ Understandings are cumulative.

Slide 38

5. Purposeful

Teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view.

○ Learning is purposeful.

Slide 39

Introducing Dialogic Teaching

○ This is an overview that describes how to initiate the process in your classroom.

Slide 40

Assess and adjust

- Try it for only **5 to 10 minutes** at first.
- **Review and evaluate** the process with the class to identify strengths and ways to improve.

Slide 41

Demonstrate and organize

- ⌘ **Demonstrate and discuss** the process at the front of the class with 3 or 4 pupils or show and discuss a piece of video where another class is involved in dialogic talk.
- ⌘ **Organise** students in a single or double horseshoe or a circle.

Slide 42

Discuss, agree, set ground rules such as:

- Respect each other's opinions;
- Only one person speaks at a time;
- Speak loudly and clearly;
- Give reasons for your views and ideas;

Slide 43

In addition...

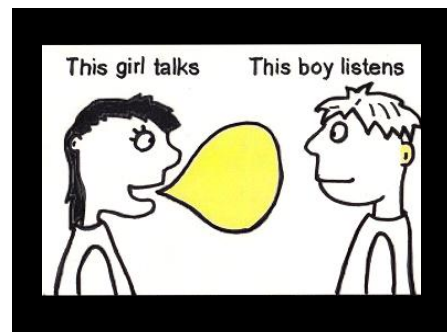
- **Listen** carefully;
- Try to **build on** what others say;
- **Support** and **include** each other;
- **Ask** when you don't understand;
- Try to reach an **agreement**.

Slide 44

And remember...

- You can ask another person to support your view;
- You can ask another person for their view even if it's different to yours.

Slide 45



Slide 46

	Not Yet Meeting Expectations	Minimally Meeting Expectations	Fully Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
Speaking	Lacks to say. No thought or discussion expected.	Some expression of opinion or reflection on the content viewed and discussed.	Expression of opinion and reflection on the content viewed and discussed.	Thoughtful, concise expression of opinion and reflection on the content viewed and discussed.
Listening	Lacks evidence that viewed material has understood or that group discussion occurred.	Sometimes reflects the viewed material has understood and that group discussion contributed to understanding.	Evidence that the viewed material was understood and that group discussion contributed to understanding.	Articulate evidence that the viewed material was understood and that group discussion deepened understanding.
Synthesizing	No evidence that ideas changed or evolved following viewing and discussion.	Sometimes reflects that ideas changed or evolved following viewing and discussion.	Evidence that ideas changed and/or evolved following viewing and discussion.	Articulate evidence that ideas changed and/or evolved following viewing and discussion.

- This is a generic rubric.
- (Hand out more detailed Discussion Skills/Listening Skills rubric).

Slide 47



Slide 48

Balloon Conversation

- Divide class into groups of 6 -8
- Give each group a balloon
- Write a topic on the board
- Allow a minute for digestion
- Groups then see how long they can keep the balloon aloft and keep their conversation going at the same time.

- Sample activity for teachers in order to experience the process:
- Divide audience into groups.
- Topic: Is it okay for Russia to annex Crimea?

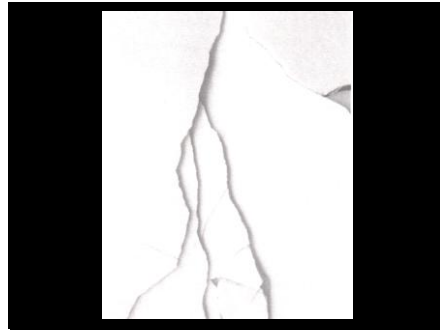
Slide 49

Visual Prompts

- Good for partners; groups of 4; whole class
- Avoid text
- Start with the unfamiliar
- Allow wait time
- Promote exploratory talk
- Encourage "discussion of the discussion"

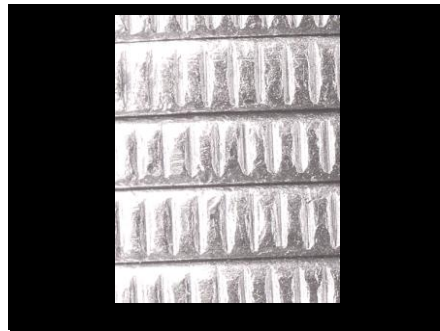
- In groups of four, view each picture.
- Then:
 - Hear what each person thinks it is.
 - Discuss as a group.
 - Try to determine an answer all agree on.
- Report out.

Slide 50



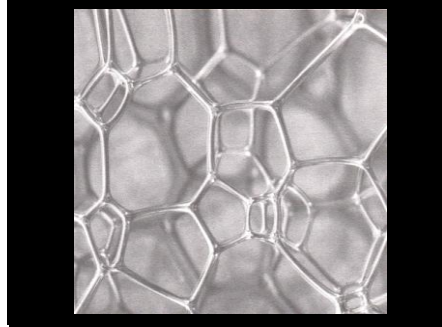
- Allow 2-3 minutes before reporting out.
- Did you notice EXPLORATORY TALK? When? (Hopefully as each person was offering his or her view).
- Did it help others?
- Were you able to agree?

Slide 51



- Allow 2-3 minutes before reporting out.
- Was the EXPLORATORY TALK more evident this time? Did it help others?
- Were you able to agree more quickly?

Slide 52



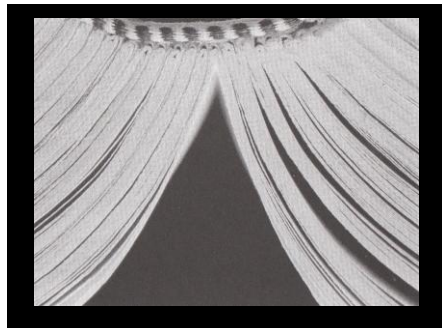
- Allow 2-3 minutes before reporting out.
- What about this time?

Slide 53



- Allow 2-3 minutes before reporting out.
- What about this time?

Slide 54



- Allow 2-3 minutes before reporting out.
- What about this time?
- What was your discussion like?

Slide 55

Match the Text Jigsaw

- Good for groups of 4 -6 leading to whole class discussion
- Uses text
- Start with the unfamiliar leading to KWL
- Allow wait time
- Promote exploratory talk

- Text is taken from a novel, long poem or short story. (Hand out excerpts from *The Book Thief*.)
- Participants each receive 1 of 4 different paragraphs.
- Find those who have the same paragraph as you. Discuss together: What is happening in this excerpt?
- Then go to a group where all have different pieces. Piece them together as you think the story might appear in the novel. Discuss what the novel may be about
- Whole class: What do you know? What would you like to know?

Slide 56

Jigsaw cont'd...

- Allows students to check/affirm group answers with other groups
- Effectively introduces a novel as students ask the questions
- Promotes examination of plot and characterization

Slide 57

Body Biography

- Effective for pairs or small groups of 3 -4
- Uses text and allows students to create representations
- Promotes dialogic exploration within group
- Promotes "Presentational Talk"

- This is just a short overview of a longer assignment that encourages groups to work independently and continue dialogue over a series of classes. (Offer teachers the handout).

Slide 58

Body biography for *Hamlet*

Your body biography must contain:

- A review of significant happenings in the play.
- Visual symbols.
- An original text.
- Your character's three most important lines from the play.

- This assignment allows students to engage in dialogic talk while they determine how they will meet the following requirements that address other PLOs.

Slide 59

Body biography presentation

When you present to the class :

- Review the significant **events, choices and changes** involving your character.
- Emphasize the **traits** that make him/her who he/she is.
- Promote **discussion** with your audience (especially regarding gender issues in the play).

Slide 60

Other resources

- Developing Students' Critical Thinking Skills Through Whole-Class Dialogue
https://www.ted.com/talks/eric_grosshowing_students_critical_thinking_02.html
- Press Conference for Bud, Not Buddy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z0m1m1m1m1>
- Communicating on Local Issues: Exploring Audience in Persuasive Letter Writing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z0m1m1m1m1>

Appendix B: Workshop Handouts

Five Principles of Dialogic Teaching

Five principles, which bring together the essential features of dialogic teaching in the classroom:

1. **Collective**: teachers and students **address learning tasks together**, whether as a group or as a class, rather than in isolation;
2. **Reciprocal**: teachers and students **listen to each other**, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;
3. **Supportive**: students articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they **help each other** to reach common understandings;
4. **Cumulative**: teachers and students **build on their own and each others' ideas** and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;
5. **Purposeful**: teachers plan and **facilitate dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view.**

From: Alexander, R. (2008b). *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk*. UK: Dialogos UK Ltd.

Introducing dialogic teaching

Explain to the class what is going to happen and what your expectations are, for example:

- The teacher will start the discussion and ask one student to respond;
- Then students will talk and respond to each other through question or building on what someone has said;
- The teacher will intervene now and again to join the discussion or to bring in another student or to stop the discussion.



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Demonstrate and discuss the process at the front of the class with 3 or 4 students or show and discuss a piece of video where another class is involved in dialogic talk.

Organise students in a single or double horseshoe or a circle.

Discuss, agree and set ground rules such as:

- Respect each other's opinions;
- Only one person speaks at a time;
- Speak loudly and clearly;
- Give reasons for your views and ideas;
- Listen carefully;
- Try to build on what others say;
- Support and include each other;
- You can ask another person to support your view or you can ask for their view even if it's different from yours;
- Ask when you don't understand;
- Try to reach an agreement.

Try it for only 5 to 10 minutes at first.

Review and evaluate the process with the class to identify strengths and ways to improve.

Listening Skills Rubric

CATEGORY	NOT YET MEETING EXPECTATIONS	MINIMALLY MEETING EXPECTATIONS	FULLY MEETING EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS
MANNER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appears uninvolved in the discussion ○ Appears uninterested in the contributions of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attempts to be attentive but is easily distracted ○ May demonstrate inappropriate nonverbal behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attentive and courteous ○ Shows interest in the ideas of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attentive, courteous and sensitive to others ○ Demonstrates nonverbal behaviour that sets an encouraging environment for the discussion
POSTURE AND EYE CONTACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Slouches and/or does not look at other participants during the discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sometimes leans forward ○ Sometimes establishes eye contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leans forward during the discussion ○ Establishes eye contact with several other participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leans forward into the discussion ○ Establishes eye contact with every other participant during the discussion
CONTENT AND COMPREHENSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does not seem to understand the topic very well ○ Is unable to accurately relate the topic of the discussion or the contributions of any other participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shows a good understanding of some aspects of the topic ○ Is able to accurately relate the contributions of some participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shows a good understanding of the topic ○ Is able to accurately relate the contributions of the other participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shows a full understanding of the topic ○ Is able to accurately relate and synthesize the contributions of the other participants

Discussion Skills Rubric

CATEGORY	NOT YET MEETING EXPECTATIONS	MINIMALLY MEETING EXPECTATIONS	FULLY MEETING EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS
MANNER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does not appear to understand the topic ○ Appears uninvolved in the discussion ○ Either offers no comments/ opinions or offers inappropriate comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attempts to be attentive but is easily distracted ○ May demonstrate inappropriate nonverbal behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attentive and courteous ○ Shows interest in the ideas of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attentive, courteous and sensitive to others ○ Demonstrates nonverbal behaviour that sets an encouraging environment for the discussion
POSTURE AND EYE CONTACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does not make eye contact with any other participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rarely makes eye contact with other participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Makes eye contact with several other participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leans forward into the discussion ○ Establishes eye contact with every other participant during the discussion
SPEECH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Either inaccurately rephrases statements of others, or does not participate ○ Speech is unclear or statements are very brief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Minimally or superficially rephrases statements of others, or does not participate ○ Speaks rapidly or in a monotone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accurately rephrases statements of others ○ Uses clear, well-paced intonation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accurately rephrases statements of others and seeks confirmation ○ Uses clear, well-paced intonation ○ Encourages others to respond
CONTENT AND COMPREHENSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appears confused by the task ○ Appears not to comprehend ○ Fails to offer a response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Makes few connections ○ Offers broad judgments with limited support ○ Is able to accurately relate the contributions of some participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Actively questions, makes connections and reacts; adds support ○ Makes logical, supported judgments and evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offers thoughtful questions and connections ○ Uses convincing examples for support ○ Makes thoughtful, well-supported judgments and evaluations

Bloom's Taxonomy Question Stems*

Knowledge

- What happened after . . . ?
- How many . . . ?
- Who was it that . . . ?
- Can you name the . . . ?
- Described what happened at . . . ?
- Who spoke to . . . ?
- Can you tell why . . . ?
- Find the meaning of . . . ?
- What is . . . ?
- Which is true or false . . . ?

Comprehension

- Can you write in your own words . . . ?
- Can you write a brief outline . . . ?
- What do you think might happen next . . . ?
- Who do you think . . . ?
- What was the main idea . . . ?
- Who was the key character . . . ?
- Can you distinguish between . . . ?
- What differences exist between . . . ?
- Can you provide an example of what you mean . . . ?
- Can you provide a definition for . . . ?

Application

- Do you know another instance where . . . ?
- Could this have happened in . . . ?
- Can you group by characteristics such as . . . ?
- What factors would you change if . . . ?
- Can you apply the method used to some experience of your own . . . ?
- What questions would you ask of . . . ?
- From the information given, can you develop a set of instructions about . . . ?
- Would this information be useful if you had a . . . ?

Analysis

- Which events could have happened . . . ?
- If . . . happened, what might the ending have been?
- How was this similar to . . . ?
- What was the underlying theme of . . . ?
- What do you see as other possible outcomes?

Analysis (cont'd)

- Why did . . . changes occur?
- Can you compare your . . . with that presented in . . .?
- Can you explain what must have happened when . . .?
- How is . . . similar to . . .?
- What are some of the problems of . . .?
- Can you distinguish between . . .?
- What were some of the motives behind . . .?
- What was the turning point in the game . . .?
- What was the problem with . . .?

Synthesis

- Can you design a . . . to . . .?
- Why not compose a song about . . .?
- Can you see a possible solution to . . .?
- If you had access to all resources how would you deal with . . .?
- Why don't you devise your own way to deal with . . .?
- What would happen if . . .?
- How many ways can you . . .?
- Can you create new and unusual uses for . . .?
- Can you write a new recipe for a tasty dish?
- Can you develop a proposal which would . . .?

Evaluation

- Is there a better solution to . . .?
- Judge the value of . . .?
- Can you defend your position about . . .?
- Do you think . . . is a good or a bad thing?
- How would you have handled . . .?
- What changes to . . . would you recommend?
- Are you a . . . person?
- How would you feel if . . .?
- How effective are . . .?
- What do you think about . . .?

Body Biography



For your chosen character, your group will create a body biography – a visual and written portrait illustrating several aspects of the character's life within the play.

You have many possibilities for filling up your giant sheet of paper. I have listed some ideas, but feel free to come up with your own creations. The choices you make must be based on your understanding of the text. You will verbally explain (and in a sense, defend) your creation at a showing of your work.

Above all, your choices should be creative, analytical and accurate. (See reverse for assessment criteria)

Preparing the Product

Your body biography must contain:

- A review of significant happenings in the play.
- Visual symbols.
- An original text.
- Your character's three most important lines from the play.

Planning the Showcase

When you present to the class, your masterpiece should accomplish several objectives:

- Review the significant **events, choices and changes** involving your character.
- Communicate the full essence of your character by emphasizing the **traits** that make him/her who he/she is.
- Promote **discussion** of your character with your audience (especially regarding gender issues in the play).

Suggestions

1. **Placement.** Carefully choose the placement of your text and artwork. For example, the area where your character's heart would be might be an appropriate location for illustrating important relationships within his or her life.

2. **Spine.** Actors often talk about a character's spine. This is his/her objective within the play. What is the most important goal for your character? What drives his/her thoughts and actions? This is his/her spine. How can you illustrate it?
3. **Virtues and Vices.** What are your character's most admirable qualities? His/her worst? How can you make them visual?
4. **Colour.** Colours are often symbolic. What colour(s) do you most associate with your character? Why? How can you effectively work these colours into your presentation?
5. **Symbols.** What objects can you associate with your character that illustrate his/her essence? Are there objects mentioned within the play itself that you could use? If not, choose objects that especially seem to correspond with the character.
6. **Formula Poems.** These are fast but effective recipes for producing a text because they are designed to reveal a lot about a character (See additional handouts).
7. **Mirror, Mirror.** Consider both how your character appears to others on the surface and what you know about the character's inner self. Do these images clash or correspond? What does this tell you about the character?
8. **Changes.** How has your character changed within the play? Or has he/she changed? Recall the terms: static and dynamic, round and flat. Trace any changes within your text and artwork.

Assessment

	Beginning	Approaching	Successful	Outstanding
Creativity	Project demonstrates a hesitant interpretation of the task.	Project demonstrates a cautious interpretation of the task.	Project demonstrates a colourful, original interpretation of the task.	Project demonstrates a confident, colourful, original and imaginative interpretation of the task.
Analysis	Project does not demonstrate an analysis of character.	Project demonstrates a partial analysis of character.	Project demonstrates a thorough analysis of character.	Project demonstrates a thorough and perceptive analysis of character.
Accuracy	Text and quotations are accurate. Errors in grammar and mechanics obscure meaning.	Text and quotations are accurate. Some errors in grammar and mechanics mar the product.	Text and quotations are mostly accurate. Grammar and mechanics are applied accurately.	Text and quotations are accurate. Grammar and mechanics are applied accurately.
Completion	Project is incomplete with few aspects covered.	Project is partially complete with several aspects covered.	Project is complete with all aspects covered.	Project is complete with all aspects covered. Creative additions enhance.

* From: Smagorinsky, P. & O'Donnell-Allen (2000). Idiocultural diversity in small groups in P. Wells, (ed.), *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix C: Activities to Promote Dialogue

1. Active Listening in the Dialogic Classroom

Form groups of 4-6. Have a pen and paper ready.

Post a writing prompt. (This can be a statement, a quotation, a photograph or other image, a song or a You Tube clip.)

Task 1

Students individually write or draw a response to the prompt. Be sure to give each group member time to finish writing.

Task 2

Students take turns discussing their responses. They are encouraged to listen carefully to what each member is saying and try to connect to their response in some way. Students are reminded to give both verbal (“uh-huh”, “go on”) and non-verbal (forward posture, eye contact, nod, smile) cues to the speaker.

Task 3

Students take turns reporting out to the class on another group member’s response and any connections he or she made.

2. Pre-reading/Pre-debate Jigsaw

Form groups of 4-6.

As an activity to start a new unit, hand out copies of a chapter, article poem or other text that will spark discussion and questioning. The texts will have been separated into 4-6 sections. (I used a chapter from *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak.)

Have students with the **same** text section cluster into **Expert Groups**.

Expert Groups

Each member has the same piece of text. Students will discuss the text and speculate about the topic. They will then return to their Jigsaw Groups.

Jigsaw Groups

Each member has a different text that they have now read and discussed. In discussion with their Jigsaw Group, students will assemble the text consecutively and discuss their new understanding and remaining questions, which they will report out to the class.

3. Mystery Image

Step 1

Have students initially work in pairs.

Using a document camera, screen an image with an unusual perspective that students are unlikely to readily identify. (I use images from *Small Worlds: A Book of Photo Puzzles* by Matthew Wheeler.)

Students discuss the image and speculate about what it might be.

Step 2

Each pair finds another pair.

Again, students discuss the image and speculate about what it might be, working to find general agreement among the group.

Step 3

Student groups then report out to the class offering their ideas and reasons.

Step 4

The identity of the image is revealed and the class as a whole discusses how the perspective was modified to create the altered effect.

4. Balloon conversation

(This is a challenging but worthwhile activity to warm students up to working in groups. It encourages a lot of laughter which then serves to break down some potential barriers.)

Divide class into groups of 6-8.

Give each group a balloon.

Write a topic on the board and allow a minute or two for students to form some thoughts.

Groups then see how long they can keep the balloon aloft and keep their conversation going at the same time.

Once the balloon drops the group can stop. When all the balloons have dropped groups can report out to the class on their conversation and their level of success.

5. ReadWriteThink Links to Dialogic Lessons

ReadWriteThink.org is a non-profit website maintained by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, with support from the Verizon Foundation.

“Developing Students' Critical Thinking Skills Through Whole-Class Dialogue”

(Grades 3-5) by Kate Chiliberti, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/developing-students-critical-thinking-326.html>

“Press Conference for Bud, Not Buddy” (Grades 6-8) by Lori Papajcik, Bedford, Ohio.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/press-conference-buddy-303.html>

“Communicating on Local Issues: Exploring Audience in Persuasive Letter Writing”

(Grades 9-12) by Missy Nieveen Phegley, Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/communicating-local-issues-exploring-945.html>

“The Pros and Cons of Discussion” (Grades 9-12) by Karen Luchner, Palm Beach

Gardens, Florida.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/pros-cons-discussion-819.html>

“Encouraging New Content with Seed Discussions” (Grades 5-12) by Cathy Allen

Simon, Urbana, Illinois.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/introducing-content-with-seed-30631.html>

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