

# Theory and Research on Teaching as Dialogue

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## Introduction

### The prescriptive tradition

The concept of dialogue has held a central place in Western views of education ever since the teachings of Socrates. The back-and-forth form of question and answer, challenge and response, has been viewed as the external communicative representation of a dialectical process of thinking based on conjecture, criticism, and reconstruction of ideas. Some of these views of dialogue have stressed the role of the teacher as a facilitator of a student's discovery of certain insights on his or her own; in some cases it is in pursuit of an answer the teacher has in mind already, in others, of an answer neither participant could have anticipated. Other views have stressed the role of vigorous debate and argument as a basis for hewing defensible conclusions out of the raw material of opinion and speculation. Still other views have stressed the role of the teacher as a partner in inquiry, learning *with* the student as both explore a problem together through reciprocal questions and answers. Other, quite different, traditions of thought, such as Zen Buddhism, also have a view of dialogue, but denigrate the value of express communication as a way of sharing knowledge or insight, relying instead upon the indirect effect of riddles, paradoxical statements, and questions (*koans*) that precisely *cannot* be answered.

Such brief genealogical reflections should make clear that the contemporary vision of dialogue as a pedagogy that is egalitarian, open-ended, politically empowering, and based on the co-construction of knowledge, reflects only certain strands of its history. Contrasting accounts see dialogue as a way of leading others to pre-formed conclusions; or as a way for a master teacher to guide the explorations of a novice; or as a set of ground rules and procedures for debating the merits of alternative views; or as a way to frustrate, problematize, and deconstruct conventional understandings. Dialogue is not only a multiform approach to pedagogy; its different forms express deeper assumptions about the nature of knowledge, the nature of inquiry, the nature of communication, the roles of teacher and learner, and the mutual ethical obligations thereof.

A special challenge for this chapter, therefore, is to carve out a useful terrain between two unproductive extremes. One is to consider any verbal interaction between teacher and student, or among students, a "dialogue," which would simply equate dialogue with communication. Building on Dewey's (1916, p. 5) famous formulation that "Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative," it would elide any distinctions among dialogue, pedagogy, and communication. The other unproductive extreme is to narrow prescriptively the multiple forms of dialogue to a single form as "true" dialogue, which neglects its historical genealogy (but is, even more important, pedagogically counterproductive). One of our central claims

will be that there are forms of dialogue, and that their usefulness in educational settings will depend on the relation between forms of communicative interaction and (1) the contexts of such interaction, (2) other activities and relations among participants, (3) the subject matter under discussion, and (4) the varied differences among those participants themselves. Conceptions of dialogue need to be rethought within the changing institutional and demographic circumstances of teaching and learning, and within the changing educational needs and aims of society.

### **The discursive tradition**

This rethinking of dialogue is informed by another tradition of theorizing that regards all communicative and representational acts as forms of social practice (Bruce, 1994; Cazden, et al., 1996; Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1972, 1980; Gee, 1990; Luke, 1995). This tradition explores discourses as forms of sociohistorically constituted relations among people, activities, texts, and situations. Participating in a discourse then means assuming a role within a community of practice (Wenger, 1993), rather than simply producing a pattern of decontextualized utterances. The discursive perspective implies that the various types of dialogue do not carve out distinct natural kinds; nor are dialogical forms discontinuous with discursive patterns generally. For particular analytical purposes, it may be helpful to set criteria for what will be counted as a kind of "dialogue" and what is not – but this decision in itself becomes a discursive move, not a search for the true essence of dialogue. This is the classic move of nominalism.

Yet it is fruitful to ask why traditions do count certain types of communicative interaction as dialogue, and others not; why dialogue has had particular appeal for some as a model of teaching and inquiry; and what is at stake in appropriating the term "dialogue" for one approach to teaching rather than another.

Because the major prescriptions in favor of dialogue as an approach to pedagogy have generally come from philosophical sources, these accounts have tended to emphasize either the epistemological advantages of dialogue as a way to pursue knowledge and understanding (see, for example, Socrates or Plato: Hamilton 1961) or the moral and political reasons for favoring dialogue, because it is egalitarian, mutually respectful, and so forth (see, for example, Buber, 1970; Freire, 1968, 1985; Levinas, 1981). Both kinds of arguments have tended to arise from a priori assumptions that may or may not have been tested against studies of pedagogical practice. As a result, the prescriptive tradition has often neglected the ways in which idealized forms of interaction either may not be feasible in certain circumstances, or may have effects contrary to their intent.

It may seem ironic that a quintessentially communicative activity, such as dialogue, has often been discussed in ways that ignore research on discourse generally. But the philosophical origins of this concept, its prescriptive intent, its idealized characterizations, have all tended to promote an anti-empirical approach toward elaborating what dialogues look like and how they work – or fail to work – educationally. While some accounts of dialogue have drawn from personal experiences in communicative engagement, in general there has been a desire to insulate the prescriptive model of dialogue from the conflicted rough-and-tumble of discourse generally (however, see Carlson, 1983).

In this essay we employ a model of discourse that stresses a tripartite set of relations among discursive practices, other practices and activities, and mediating objects and texts (see Figure 1):

mediating objects and texts

## other practices – linguistic interactions

(Figure 1)

Discursive practices are related, on the one hand, to other practices and activities within a setting. What people say and how they are heard is wrapped up with other kinds of relations and interactions among them, which might range from very specific practices (how close together people stand or sit while talking, for example) to very general institutional norms or structures (such as requirements in school to raise one's hand before speaking, or the physical arrangements of classrooms). At the same time, despite the oral connotations of "discourse," "speaking," and so forth, spoken language is obviously not the only form that discourse takes: it is manifested through a range of kinds of texts and other mediating objects (for example, notes passed between students, bulletin boards, or dress codes). Finally, those texts and objects are also artifacts within a setting of practices (for example, the differences in content, but also the differences in forms of production, sales, and patterns of use, between daily newspapers and weekly newsmagazines). A variety of research studies have emphasized these connections among linguistic interactions, mediating objects or texts, and other practices (for example, Anderson, Holland, & Palincsar, 1997; Cazden, et al., 1996; Engeström, 1990, 1991; Hicks, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Law, 1991; Moll, 1990; Raphael, et al., 1992; Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989).

Yet the issue goes even deeper, because these relations among discursive practices, other practices and activities, and mediating objects and texts are not simply interactions among discrete social factors; they are dialectical relations among elements that mutually constitute one another. A letter to a relative is a discursive practice, yet also a text, yet also a practice with nondiscursive significance (such as buying or perhaps collecting stamps). A Web page on a computer screen is a mediating object or text, but also a practice (it was made, by someone, in a particular situation), and a practice with nondiscursive significance, such as using electricity (which is available to only a fraction of the world's population). A variety of new representational forms are blurring traditional distinctions between "written" and "oral" text, or between what we have ordinarily thought of as "texts" (such as books) and what have not been (such as modes of dress). In the recent film "The Pillow Book," for example, lovers actually write on one another's bodies. Does this "make" the body into a text, or merely highlight the ways in which the body (through gestures, and so on), has always already been a text of sorts?

Within this model, then, any particular pattern of speech acts – such as dialogue – must be seen as situated in a complex net of interactions that govern how those speech acts are expressed, heard, interpreted, and responded to. In such a net of interactions the full meaning and effects of discourse will be impossible to read off the surface meanings of the words themselves. The nature of the relations fostered by particular forms of verbal interaction may be utterly unpredictable from the actual intentions and purposes of the agents concerned.

Conversely, as scholars have investigated broader social activities and processes, they continually return to discourse as the glue that holds these interactions together. For example, current work on inquiry models for learning have shown how teachers and students shape learning contexts through dialogues (Bruce & Davidson, 1994; Easley, 1987; Hansen, Newkirk, & Graves, 1985; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; Raphael, et al., 1992; Wells, 1986) in which participants highlight, identify, and negotiate which aspects of the institutional – even physical – arrangements of the classroom are most salient for their

interests and needs. Dialogue frames modes of interaction and directions of inquiry; furthermore, as learners pursue a line of inquiry, their questions are developed not only by the evidence or experiences themselves, but in part through the social structure of teacher-student and student-student verbal interactions. Similarly, activity theory (Engeström, 1990, 1991; Leont'ev, 1981; Moll, 1990; Rogoff & Toma, 1997; Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1980, 1991), which has grown out of the work of Vygotsky, Luria, Leont'ev and other Soviet psychologists, has expanded into a substantial discipline of study. A distinctive feature of activity theory is the sociocultural formation of mind. In contrast to other traditions in psychology, such as behaviorism, this approach conceives learning and mental development as a process mediated by social relations; in this, dialogue comes to be seen not only as a means of transmitting information or an overlay on cognition, but a constitutive dimension of the activity systems that construct and display thinking. Work on inquiry and activity systems, and related work, has pointed to the idea of shared thinking, or distributed intelligence, as a basic metaphor for how knowledge is formed, which suggests a fundamental shift in how we conceive education. Learning aims are seen in terms of group dynamics and meaning-making, and not only as individual achievements among the participants. Once again, dialogue plays a central role because it is a medium through which participants are able to share their conceptions, verify or test their understandings, and identify areas of common knowledge or of difference. This is particularly true when "dialogue" is understood to include a range of communicative acts, gestures, or facial expressions, and not only or always spoken words.

The difficulty of such an inclusive, relational model is that it threatens to count everything as discourse (even things); every social relation or practice becomes a discursive practice. It is clear that any particular study or account of discourse in the classroom will have to set some boundaries, however provisional, for the factors that will be included as most significant. There may be a discursive component to nearly all human activities and artifacts, but it is analytically useless to conclude then that "everything is discourse." This choice to set boundaries is necessary, we maintain, but it is a choice – and a choice that can be argued or reframed differently. What one will not know in advance is where the most fruitful boundaries are, or what will be gained (or lost) by approaching the situation with pre-existing distinctions or categories (such as discrete "teacher" and "student" roles) that one tries to overlay on the continuities of actual roles and performances. This gain or loss is something to be interrogated, we believe, within the framework of the study itself – and this is something we will be trying to do ourselves here. Considering dialogue through the discursive as well as the prescriptive lenses means a process of both proposing and contesting such boundaries and distinctions.

### **Pedagogy and discourse theory**

#### **Pedagogical communicative relations**

We want to begin by demarcating a range of interactions that could be termed "pedagogical communicative relations." Dialogue, in its various forms, represents one family of such communicative relations, but there are many others (lecturing, for example). When we refer to "dialogue," as it is typically used, we mean a definition grounded in the number of participants and in patterns of verbal interaction that are ostensibly distinguishable from "monological" models – although such simple distinctions are difficult to maintain as absolute categories.

According to some theories, such as Bakhtin's for instance, *all* language has an underlying "dialogic" nature, by which he means that every word participates in a history of rich intertextual relations in which it is related to all other utterances (Bakhtin, 1981). People do not simply "use" language; it comes already "used" and has a history that surpasses

particular uses, so that each use becomes an intersection point of multiple historically constituted discourses. On this conception, there is a dialogical element in every utterance, and even in internal thoughts (this view informs and underlies the work of much activity theory, discussed above).

At the same time, there are communicative relations that are not explicitly pedagogical (ordering dinner in a restaurant, for example), and there are classroom utterances that may have "pedagogical" effects, even though they are not intended to. One cannot limit "pedagogical" solely to the things teachers say when they think they are teaching; nor is the involvement of a teacher necessary for communicative relations to be pedagogically significant; nor is overt and intentional speech always the form that such communicative relations might take. Here, too, a particular analytical category that helps to delimit a scope of discussion still must be situated within the continuities of discourse generally. But every theory of teaching and learning incorporates at least implicitly a set of prescriptions about pedagogical communicative relations, and depending on how these are framed teachers see certain activities as within their purview and responsibility, and others not. An emphasis on particular pedagogical communicative relations constitutes a basis for teacher reflection, for defining a set of research questions, and for establishing a basis for the evaluation or assessment of teaching performance. It is not only a descriptive endeavor.

In considering dialogue as a form of pedagogical communicative relation, then, certain simple distinctions and categories interfere with deeper understandings of the issues at stake. Certain accounts of dialogue, notably that of Paulo Freire (1968, 1985), and to an extent that of Socrates as we encounter him in some of Plato's dialogues, have suggested that there are basically only two alternative choices for pedagogy. The first is variously termed lecturing, recitation, monologue, "banking education," or even "mug and jug" – all views holding that knowledge, possessed by the teacher, is "poured," "fed," or otherwise transmitted more or less directly to a passive, receptive student. In this dichotomous characterization, the alternative to this approach is "dialogue," a relation in which the student is more of an active partner in the teaching-learning process.

This dichotomy oversimplifies important issues on each side of the relation, obscures multiple forms that both "lecture" and "dialogue" might take, and places a range of important issues along a single either/or dividing line. On the one side, lecturing or more "monological" approaches can actually take a range of forms. Some lectures do indeed ask only to be heard and remembered (although even doing this with some success at gaining understanding requires a much more active response by the student than simply hearing and recording the data). Other lectures invite a high degree of thoughtfulness, skepticism, and imaginative response by the audience; some could even be considered "dialogical" in the sense that the speaker frames issues and questions in a way that invites an active reinterpretation of meaning from multiple standpoints among the listeners. Still other lectures contain a dialectical moment within them (the teaching style of Wittgenstein, reputedly, had this quality): that by visibly working through various sides of an issue in a public way, a teacher expresses not a body of information or conclusions, but models a method of investigation or diagnosis that students can observe and adapt for their own purposes. It may even be that in certain areas of "tacit knowledge," as Polanyi (1962) calls it, the *only* way that novices can learn is by observing or listening to experts who are engaged in a complex practice and reflect openly about their processes of thought and deliberation. In all of these ways, the simple image of monological or directive modes of teaching needs to be understood in the context of relations among the characteristics of a field of inquiry, the nature of complex human practices, and the multiple needs of learners at different stages of experience and sophistication.

On the other side of this putative divide, dialogue can also take many forms. As noted in

our opening, not all of these necessarily imply egalitarian, open-ended modes of inquiry. Dialogue can have a highly didactic, directed quality, as it often does in the Platonic dialogues (such as the exchange with the slave in the *Meno*); Socrates sometimes says that all the teacher is doing is drawing out a set of conclusions that a learner already "knows" unconsciously. In other kinds of dialogue, the students are led to a set of conclusions that the teacher intends them to reach; the interaction might be one of question and answer, but the conclusion is foregone. It is certainly debatable, in some of these cases, whether a straightforward lecture might not be in fact a more efficient (not to say less manipulative) way of getting the same ideas across – students often rightfully resent the "can you guess what I'm thinking" type of teacher question. This transcript comes from a classroom discussion about *Antigone*:

Teacher: "So is it a feminist or antifeminist play?"

Students: "Anti!"

Teacher: "Anti?"

Student, 1: "Anti."

Teacher: "Huh?"

Student 2: "Do you want us to say feminist?"

Teacher: "Huh?"

Student 2: "Because every time we say anti, you say –"

Teacher: [Interrupting] "Okay. No, I want – I want examples. I want something to support your opinion" (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989, 321).

Socrates himself distinguishes what he calls "disputatious" and "friendly" forms of dialogue: one kind characterized more by aggressive questioning and critique, the other more by tolerant acceptance (at least provisionally) of alternative points of view, and attempting to build upon the understandings of others rather than to defeat them. Elbow (1986) calls these the "doubting" and "believing" games; some feminist theorists call these ways of "separate" and "connected" knowing (Belenky, et al., 1986). Forms of dialogue could also be distinguished on the basis of how active the learner is in the pedagogical relation; of the extent to which the process is truly one of co-investigation, as opposed to a method (even if a more humane method) of drawing others to one's own conclusions or point of view. Such concerns have led some to ask of ostensibly emancipatory dialogical pedagogies, "why doesn't this feel empowering?" (Ellsworth, 1989).

Similarly, even when a single dialogue is taking place among different participants, they may not all regard the experience of participation in the same way; to some participants, an "open" dialogue may feel like a kind of imposition. Pratt (1987) has argued that conventional characterizations of dialogue have ignored some of the most significant aspects of linguistic interactions, namely the way in which dialogue patterns are localized within particular social groups. Pratt goes beyond pointing out that dialogues are cultural constructions, showing that it is at the point of contact among different forms of talking that the effects upon dialogue participants is strongest. Classrooms, even those that appear to manifest dialogical interactions, often manifest hidden tensions and conflicts that this analysis of "contact zones" would reveal. Pratt calls for a "linguistics of contact" that explicitly examines these dialogical boundaries. By implication, educators might consider that the surface

features of dialogue obscure the meanings of these zones for the diverse participants in classroom discussion. Gutierrez, et al. (1995) have termed this sort of focal point the "third space" where teacher discourses and student discourses engage, conflict with, or speak past one another:

Thus, for example, when the teacher begins asking students about *Brown v. Board of Education*, one student quickly re-keys the line of questioning by making the association with a "Brown" [James Brown] with which he is more familiar (Gutierrez, et al., 1995, p. 461).

According to this model, it is here that meaningful dialogical engagements might occur, but now within a discursive space that is itself open to question and negotiation: "the potential for intersubjectivity exists when the teacher and student depart from their rigidly scripted and exclusive social spaces. The disruptive nature of the third space allows for the commingling of various social and cultural perspectives, the existence of multiple scripts, and the potential to contest the transcendent script" (Gutierrez, et al., 1995, p. 467-8).

As a result of such considerations, any useful theoretical frame will need to move beyond the simple, dichotomous monologue/dialogue distinction to, at the very least, a spectrum along which various pedagogical communicative relations can be classified from the relatively univocal and directive to the relatively reciprocal and open-ended. From this perspective, some things that look like lectures might be in fact quite "dialogical"; while things that look like dialogues might be highly directive and narrow. Here, again, we need to move beyond "speech act" analyses (who speaks, how much they speak, etc.) to look at the discursive content and how it is heard and responded to by others. Despite the etymologies of "monologue" and "dialogue," the idea that all we have to do is count how many people are speaking in order to settle the pedagogical question appears quite crude and unhelpful:

Discourse is dialogic not because speakers take turns, but because it is continually structured by tension, even conflict, between the conversants, between self and other, as one voice "refracts" the other (Nystrand, et al., 1997, 8)

In *Dialogue in Teaching*, Burbules (1993) recommends the interaction of at least two distinct spectrums to characterize different forms of dialogue: the degree to which an interchange is *critical* or *inclusive* (a revision of the disputatious/friendly distinction noted above), and the degree to which the investigation is intended to be *convergent* (upon a single answer) or *divergent* (allowing for multiple conclusions). This two-by-two grid generates four different types of dialogue, discussed later. But a number of other considerations might be usefully added to these: the age of the persons who are engaged; the extent to which their participation is "active" (given various meanings of what might constitute "active" engagement); the range of affective as well as cognitive considerations that are considered germane to the subject at hand; the degree to which one participant is steering or directing the discussion, as opposed to an open-ended, "nonteleological" investigation; the degree of opportunity within a dialogue for questioning its presuppositions and scope – all might count as criteria marking off different types of dialogue.

Such considerations highlight the multiple considerations of form and purpose that can be raised about different pedagogical communicative relations, and how to demarcate some of these as dialogical in spirit. Clearly, situating any particular set of interactions along these dimensions will require judgments about a number of matters that cannot be read off a transcript of the interaction; moreover, such judgments will themselves involve assumptions about cultural norms and practices that are going to vary across the different groups or individuals who may be party to such interactions (for a study of forms of dialogue across

different cultures, see Maranhão, 1990). When something is to be called a "dialogue," and by whom, now comes to be seen as a social and political problem that runs to deeper assumptions about communication and social relations.

### The T/S model

Within the context of current educational practice in the United States, most discussions of dialogue are influenced by a predominant pedagogical communicative relation that we will term the *Teacher/Student* (or T/S) model. This model represents both a form of teaching practice, and also a paradigm of how teaching has been conceptualized for research purposes. In certain forms, the T/S model is antagonistic to dialogical possibilities; in other forms, it restricts dialogue to a very narrow range of communicative interactions. The problem, in our view, is not that this model is *never* appropriate; but that it often tends to "colonize" pedagogy, driving out alternative perspectives on teaching and learning and making its own assumptions seem "natural" or "inevitable" – and hence more invisible and harder to question.

The T/S model assumes, first, that the performative roles of teacher and student are given, distinct, and relatively stable. If one walks into a classroom, in any part of the country, and at virtually any grade level, who are the teachers and students should be readily apparent by their different communicative roles as well as other aspects of their behavior and interactions. The particular characteristics of persons – their gender, race, and so forth – are, within this framework, regarded as unimportant to these specific roles or their enactment of them: a teacher teaches and a student learns. Thus, the T/S model is part of a larger set of norms and assumptions about what "classrooms" are and what "teachers" and "students" are; these roles and patterns of performance are reinforced by adults' memories of their own school experiences, images in the popular media, and implicit, shared "scripts" by which these roles ought to be performed. Teachers stand in front of the class, initiate topics, question students, discipline misbehavior, write on blackboards, and so on; similarly, students raise hands, answer questions, pass notes, whisper to each other, and watch the clock pass time in slow-motion.

The T/S model assumes, second, that discourse in the classroom is primarily a medium for expressing information, for directing behavior, and for offering praise or other forms of evaluation; this assumes, in turn, that what the teacher says is what is most important, since the activities of expressing information, directing behavior, and evaluating performance are regarded as primarily, if not exclusively, teacherly prerogatives (Cazden, 1986).

The T/S model assumes, third, that teaching is centrally a matter of intentionally communicating content knowledge: either directly, in the form of didactic instruction; or indirectly, through guided readings of curriculum materials, through supervised work on problems and assignments, or through the review and rehearsal of what has been learned through structured question and answer (this latter activity is sometimes regarded as a kind of teaching through "dialogue").

The T/S model assumes, fourth, that education is an activity of instrumental practices directed intentionally toward specific ends, and that it can therefore be evaluated along a scale of effectiveness in meeting those ends.

The limiting case of the T/S model, its ideal type if you will, is the form of pedagogical communicative relation commonly known as IRE, or Initiation-Response-Evaluation (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989; Cazden, 1986, 1988; Gutierrez, 1993; Mehan, 1979; Nystrand, et al., 1997). The teacher questions, the student replies, the teacher praises or corrects the response:



Despite an emerging consensus about the sociocultural foundations and character of discourse, we discovered that most schooling continues to be based on a transmission and recitation model of communication (Nystrand, et al., 1997, xiv).

This basic pattern is so predominant in educational practices and institutions, so ingrained in the experiences of teachers (or the memories of students) that it constitutes an unreflective habitual pattern that teachers fall into even when they imagine that their teaching is dialogical in nature (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989; Alvermann, et al., 1990). On this model, all responses are filtered back through the teacher for recognition and approval. The teaching moment is unitary, constituted in the completion of one IRE cycle, to be followed by another unitary teaching moment.

The IRE cycle has its uses. There are many contexts in which the review and rehearsal of information is beneficial to learning; and a skillful use of questioning, even within this model, can go beyond merely the review and rehearsal of information. Moreover, for certain students a successful response to a direct question, followed by explicit teacher approval, can constitute a significant source of motivation and morale – which can, in turn, carry over into greater confidence in pursuing other, more independent, learning goals (so long, we would stress, as the IRE pattern organized around teacher questioning and approval is not the sole basis for opportunities to learn in the classroom). Sometimes, an apparent IRE pattern can actually mask a more dynamic teaching-learning encounter (Forman, 1989). As with the monological/dialogical distinction, we want to move beyond sharp dichotomies or simple value judgments here. But as a general model of dialogue, IRE is inadequate, and the danger is when the T/S model comes to dominate common conceptions of what "teaching" is. As the research of Alvermann shows, once entrenched as a habitual pattern, IRE comes to dominate more and more of how a teacher conceives and enacts teaching; Forman's work reinforces this insight, suggesting that whether critically *or* favorably, analyses of teaching tend to see "IRE" everywhere, even when something more complex is actually going on.

As an approach to teaching, and understanding teaching, IRE and other forms of the T/S model are confronting numerous contemporary challenges. The roles of teacher and student in classroom discourse, for example, can no longer be regarded as distinct, stable, or cultureless (Cazden, et al., 1996). On the side of teaching, educators have become increasingly aware of the fuzzy boundaries of discrete "teaching moments." An awareness of the hidden curriculum and the unintended teaching effects of offhand or inadvertent practices and habits, along with the burden of responsibility on teachers to carry out other social interventions that are related to, but distinct from, instruction *per se*, makes it frequently impossible to identify only particular activities as "teaching" and others not. Moreover, within this framework of understanding, the particular characteristics of teachers – their sex, their age, their racial or ethnic proximity to (or distance from) students – become inseparable from the effects they have in influencing, inspiring, intimidating, or inuring students to the benefits of education. From such a perspective it is deeply problematic to assume merely that a teacher teaches and a student learns: In classrooms of radical diversity, for example, the teacher should be actively involved in learning about the interests, needs, and learning styles of a range of different students, including "mainstreamed" students with special learning difficulties (Commeyras, 1992).

From the side of students, on the other hand, there has been a kind of "decentering" of the teacher's role and authority. For many students, learning opportunities in the classroom are supplemented, and sometimes overshadowed, by opportunities outside of it: in other peer interactions; in learning in their neighborhoods or other institutional settings; in information gleaned from books, television, other media of popular culture, or the Internet, for example.

It is hardly news that, at certain ages especially, interactions with peers in schools is much more important to many students than their interactions with the teacher. Especially when this incongruity of interests and priorities is reinforced by gulfs of racial, ethnic, or class difference from the teacher, the engagements of students merely as "students" in many classrooms is intermittent; and their learning opportunities are not delimited solely, or even primarily, in terms of relations with their teacher (Gutierrez, et al., 1995).

This problem is complicated still further by current understandings of diverse speech communities and learning. Contexts of diversity vastly complicate the preference for any particular pattern of pedagogical communicative relation. The benefits or effects of any single form of interaction cannot be expected to hold constant for all types of student; in certain cases, indeed, the effects may be directly contrary to the pedagogical purposes desired. Effects can be not only unintended, but multiple, and beyond even potential anticipation. In addition, changes in the relative influence of new information and communication technologies, and other media, are requiring teachers to find new ways to engage, challenge, and motivate students; the idea that a teacher can individually hold sway in the classroom, directing the interests of students along pathways that he or she can control, is increasingly outmoded, especially as students grow into middle or high school years.

Such challenges to the T/S model of teaching are largely social and institutional in nature. At the same time, however, the very conceptions underlying the T/S model, and the way in which it has functioned as a research paradigm, have fallen under criticism from more theoretical sources, derived from contemporary theories of discourse. As a result, it is easier to see how the assumptions of the T/S orientation to teaching have tended to shape interpretations even of alternative approaches to pedagogy, including dialogue: The forms classroom dialogue can take are often constrained by the T/S model's assumptions about classroom roles and interactions, about language, about learning, and about the relation between means and ends in education.

### **Toward new questions about teaching**

#### **The discursive perspective on language**

The notion that language is more than a vehicle for the transparent conveyance of information has an ancient tradition. In Western philosophy, the Sophists' focus on language as power placed rhetoric, the art that matches expression with idea, in the center of philosophy. Later writers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian continued to consider rhetoric as a topic of enormous practical and theoretical significance. Throughout the Middle Ages, various writers, such as Augustine, continued the tradition of seeking to understand the relations between language and idea, form and content.

The search to understand these relations made one of its most significant steps in the philosophy of Kant, who argued that our understanding of the world is both enabled and constrained by our capabilities for mental representation. It is our capacity to represent time, space, and causality, he claimed, that enables us to make sense of the otherwise restless confusion of the world in the way we do. Kant's emphasis on representation stimulated a vast field of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought, leading through Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer, and later thinkers.

But it was the linking of the British work in logic (such as Russell and Whitehead) with the Viennese thought of Wittgenstein and others that laid the foundation for a flourishing emphasis on language in the twentieth-century. From the positivist insistence on operational definitions to the hermeneutic account of texts as imperfect links across cultures, major

threads of twentieth-century thought have acknowledged that language does far more than simply convey information and that whatever it does with meaning cannot be described as transparent expression.

Despite this long tradition in the West, an intellectual historian working chronologically might be ill-prepared for the rupture in recent years occasioned by the shift of theoretical focus onto certain taken-for-granted relations between language and thought. One can label this broad shift of focus as *discourse theory*, or the turn to discursive analysis. The ideas in this movement have grown out of diverse traditions of scholarly and empirical studies, including at least: *reader-response criticism* (see Beach, 1993; Freund, 1987; Suleiman & Crosman, 1980; Tompkins, 1980), itself a large and diverse field, which has restored the reader to a central place in literary studies; *hermeneutics* (see Palmer, 1969), which includes ideas such as Gadamer's (1976) "fusing of horizons"; the *new rhetoric* (see Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987), which has examined rhetorical practices in diverse disciplines such as mathematics, history, economics, science, theology, and anthropology (Gross, 1990; Myers, 1990; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987); *critical social theory* (Foucault, 1972, 1980; Habermas, 1984; McCarthy, 1978); *language studies* (see Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Gee, 1990), which have explored the social, historical, cultural, and ideological dimensions of language use; *feminist studies* (see Commeyras, et al., 1996; Lather, 1991; Luke & Gore, 1992; Walkerdine, 1992); *cultural studies* (see Grossberg, et al., 1992; Hall, 1996); *semiotics* (see Barthes, 1974, 1985; Eco, 1976; Umiker-Sebeok, 1991); *composition studies* (see North, 1987); deconstruction (see Derrida, 1976); and *social constructionism* (see Rorty, 1979, 1989), which has questioned the epistemological foundations of Western philosophy.

What ties these eclectic traditions together is that they have all come to employ in one way or another textual or discourse analysis as a fundamental methodological tool (Graesser & Gernsbacher, 1997). In so doing, they speak of "understanding the discourse participants engage in" or "new ways of reading." They are concerned with issues of race, class, and gender as they are played out in talk and text. They examine different roles people take in social interaction, consider how meaning is constructed, and regard interpretation as central to the processes of representing and understanding in communication.

Discourse theory says that every word we utter draws its meaning from the social practices of which it is a part, or, recursively, from the sediment of prior practices. Thus, as we noted, for Bakhtin all language is deeply intertextual, each word invoking the history of its previous uses in diverse circumstances. Ultimately, these uses relate to the material reality of talk at any other time and place.

This conception of the material grounding of discourse has received added impetus from work on the sociology of science and technology (Bijker & Law, 1992; Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987; Latour, 1986, 1993; Star, 1988; Wenger 1993). Science seems to be the paragon of formalized methods of investigation and verification, objective knowledge, and operationalized language and description. Theories about science practices and scientific methods had once been limited to such idealized models and addressed only reluctantly the exigencies of ordinary scientific work. An important lack was any account of how the material components of science practice relate to the formulation of theories, data-gathering, and hypothesis-testing. Thus, with the exception of biographies (which were viewed as non-analytical), earlier descriptions often failed to acknowledge any role for notebooks, gauges, conference rooms, laboratory benches, microscopes, word processors, computer networks, and all the other artifacts that give structure to science practice (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Law, 1991; Star, 1989). But such artifacts are not incidental to practice. Close and extended examination of scientists' actual work has shown that their discursive practices are constituted out of human participation with these artifacts and other practices and social interactions. Abstract theories develop in the context of and through artifacts. This

perspective has tended to demythologize the cleanness and objectivity of scientific discourse, and to highlight the social, practical, and institutional dimension of all discourse; if it is true of science, where conscious effort is made to minimize such influences, how much more must it be true of more ill-structured contexts?

Discursive analysis has also highlighted the ways in which communicative practices and traditions are embedded in diverse communities. Cultural difference is expressed not only in strictly distinct languages or dialects, but in the ways in which "the same" language is *used* differently; and the ways in which differences in other practices affect how language is expressed and understood (Heath, 1983; Pratt, 1987, 1996). One important difference in discourse communities is sexual difference; and a good deal of research has revealed pervasive patterns in how men and women speak, listen, and pursue different aims in communication (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1989, 1990, 1994). The importance of this research is obviously crucial in considering the nature of discourse in the classroom, where most teachers (and half the students) are female. But studies of the effects of linguistic differences arising from class, race, and ethnicity have had equally sweeping significance in highlighting the ways in which inequities in school treatments affect students along multiple dimensions of identity (see, for example, Bernstein, 1972; Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Another kind of discourse community is a discipline or subject area, and here too discursive analysis has, in its own language, *reinscribed* nearly every field of humanistic and social science inquiry (Cazden, 1986; Luke, 1995). For example, one cannot talk about history, that is, engage with historical discourse, today, without some cognizance of how historical theorizing has been transformed by attendance to discourse and how language not only reflects but shapes the constructed rhetoric and reality of that field (Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987). The situation is similar in economics (McCloskey, 1985), anthropology (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), sociology (Strauss, 1986), biology (Myers, 1980), medical science (Foucault, 1986), psychology (Bazerman, 1988), technology studies (Ellul, 1980), statistics (Gigerenzer & Murray, 1987), literary theory (Scholes, 1985) theology (Klemm, 1987), and many other areas.

Discourse theories, then, have both changed the ways in which we think about language (and what constitute the boundaries of linguistic practices as opposed to other social practices) and revealed the fundamentally discursive character of other fields of inquiry. Discourse is the realm of *parole*, language in use, not language as a formalized object of study (*langue*). In this realm, language is materially grounded in texts, artifacts, gestures, actions, relations, situations; it has consequences and effects beyond expressions of meaning. The philosopher John Austin (1962) explored "how we do things with words" (promising, questioning, flattering, and so forth) as *actions*; similarly, Wittgenstein (1958) argued that the meaning of language *is* its use. Discourse analysis interrogates language in its sociohistorical situatedness and materiality. From such a standpoint, practices of expression and interpretation are specific enactments, carried out by agents in particular circumstances. Every utterance is susceptible to multiple interpretations and can have multiple effects; in accounting for such diversity, easy distinctions of form and content, intention and effect, or linguistic meaning and social consequence, are all fundamentally put to question.

In educational research, discursive analysis, as discussed earlier, has been joined with studies of inquiry, meaning-making, shared thinking, and classroom activity in general (see for example, Heap, 1985; Lankshear, 1997; Van Dijk, 1997), to illuminate and inform theories about, for example, reading (see for example, Raphael, et al., 1992); science learning (see for example, Burbules & Linn, 1991; Lemke, 1990; Michaels & Bruce, 1989; Rosebery, Warren, & Conant, 1992) and mathematics (see for example, Forman, 1989). Belying, to some extent, the stereotype of science and math education as the most content-driven and "technocratic"

areas of teaching, much of the research and theory that has pushed the envelope of ideas about inquiry, group thinking, and hands-on learning has come from investigators in these areas.

### Discursive critiques of decontextualized pedagogy

The issues just raised pose distinct challenges to the relatively decontextualized models of teaching proposed by the T/S perspective on pedagogy or, alternatively, certain dialogical pedagogies. These challenges include the following:

- *Who is speaking.* Forms of acceptable or conventional discourse are socially and culturally constituted. How individuals and groups prefer to speak, the practices and gestures that enact speech, the implications and inferences people make in interpreting the speech of others, and so on, differ substantially by the ways in which discourse is formed among social and cultural groups. Such considerations can mean widespread differences in the meanings and effects of speech acts, apart from whatever the "words themselves" might mean. For example, linguistic or gestural forms of politeness or respect may be understood at cross-purposes in settings of cultural difference.
- *When people speak.* Discursive engagements are historically situated, in the sense that language has a history, speech actors have a history, and the circumstances in which they come together (such as the form and purposes of curricula) have a history. These histories often inform and shape the ways in which discourse takes place, and can impose significant limits on certain discursive possibilities. For example, conventions of correct and incorrect usage in language are not only culturally but historically specific; they are neither "natural" nor inevitable.
- *Where people speak.* Discourse has a "materiality": it takes place in physical settings and circumstances, situated in space and time. Discourse is an activity wrapped up with other activities occurring along with it. It matters, for example, whether speakers are standing or sitting; smiling or winking; speaking face-to-face, on the phone, or through a computer link (which may make facial expressions moot or require iconic representations – such as "emoticons" – to replace them).
- *How people speak.* Discourse theory has also greatly expanded the forms of representation that can be fruitfully understood as discursive in nature. Humans use a variety of ways, consciously and unconsciously, to express meaning and intent. Moreover, the mode of discursive analysis can revealingly analyze elements that are not thought of as primarily representational (for example, the design of classroom furniture) to suggest meaning and effects no one might have intended.

From this discursive perspective, *both* T/S and dialogical models of teaching often suffer from limited attention to the *who*, *when*, *where*, and *how* of classroom interactions. Situating them in the context of discursive theory is a first step toward reconceptualizing these pedagogical communicative relations as something more than patterns of speech acts. A reconstructed conception of dialogue, our main focus here, will need to be responsive to the same pragmatic, theoretical, and research challenges we are posing against the T/S model.

A fruitful mode of analysis must therefore go beyond simple, sweeping assessments like "T/S bad," "dialogue good." *Both* of these forms have often reflected decontextualized,

abstract conceptions of discourse. Among other issues, we need to ask why the dialogical form (in certain incarnations at least) has been regarded as the paragon of education. What have been the educational consequences of promoting the idealized norms of egalitarian, open-ended, reciprocal communicative interaction? Is there anything about the dialogical form itself that protects dialogue from having discriminatory, damaging, and educationally counterproductive effects? What are the circumstances, and audiences, for which the ideal of dialogue is not only unobtainable but actually a harmful aspiration? Can the idealized image of dialogue as one of reciprocal engagement make it, ironically, *more* susceptible to manipulation or ulterior purposes? As Ellsworth (1989, 1997) asks, when might dialogue itself become oppressive?

The discursive perspective alerts us, then, to the larger social and institutional dynamics within which dialogue occurs. Sometimes these contexts introduce or reinforce real tensions that inhibit the possibilities of dialogical teaching and learning. For example Eckert (1989) shows how the primary activity for students in schools is identity-construction; Goldman (1991) similarly shows the strong interpersonal interactions that shape learning possibilities in the classroom. Studies such as Taylor & Cox (1997) or Anderson, Holland, & Palincsar (1997) analyze in detail how social processes can work *against* group sense-making and the negotiation of meaning:

Classroom conditions are often assumed to be the ideal place for all forms of learning. In our view they are, in fact, highly problematic. There is undoubtedly ongoing practice in the classroom, and there is learning. But the gap between these and the didactic goals of education is often severe (Brown & Duguid, 1993, p. 14).

The preceding sections of this essay have raised central questions that should guide a rethinking of dialogue as an approach to teaching. First, we need to go beyond the idea that dialogue can be simply characterized as a particular pattern of question and answer among two or more people. Many instances of pedagogical communicative relations that might have this external form are not dialogical in spirit or involvement, while interactions that may not have this particular form can be:

Pedagogical communication is not reducible to the formally defined relations of communication (sender-receiver), much less to the explicit content of the message. For in addition to whatever conscious symbolic mastery is conveyed, the educational process also communicates an implicit pedagogy, transmitting a kind of "total" knowledge of a cultural code or style (Ulmer, 1985, 171; see also Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1991).

Second, we need to attend to the complex genealogy of "dialogue" as both a philosophical ideal and a pedagogical method. Dialogue is not unitary but multiple, and while particular conceptions of dialogue (the "Socratic method," say, or Freirean critical pedagogy) hold currency for certain audiences, it must be pointed out that even those paradigms (the teaching styles of Socrates or those of Freire) were actually multiple, not homogeneous. No single approach holds the patent on dialogue and it is even "undialogical" to think that it can (Burbules, 1993). In all of these ways, then, we ought to find a way of explaining dialogue in teaching that goes beyond the "two people talking" stereotype. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to spelling out what such a reconception might look like.

## Rethinking dialogue

### From T/S to dialogue

The first step in this reconception is to detail the ways in which the who, when, where, and how of discourse have forced a rethinking of classroom interactions.

Who. The first theoretical shift reflects in part a demographic shift discussed earlier: the growing diversity of classrooms and an increasing awareness of the margins or borders of common school culture as it interacts with the very different values and orientations that students bring to the classroom. The conditions of globalization and mobility have promoted both direct forms of migration across national/cultural categories and (especially with the rise of new communication and information technologies) an increasing proximity and interpenetration of multiple lines of national/cultural influence. In this context, the central assumptions of common schooling – of a canon of texts, of a shared historical tradition, of a common language – are thrown into question, since even where a common aim or reference point might be retained, its value and significance are going to be regarded differently from different positions as teachers and students. In some cases they will be directly challenged. From this standpoint, the linear, goal-directed dimensions of the T/S model are incompatible with a context of multiple purposes and intentions, not all of which move in parallel lines. But a shift to a dialogical approach, in itself, many not remedy these limitations.

A dialogue is not an engagement of two (or more) abstract persons, but of people with characteristics, styles, values, and assumptions that shape the particular ways in which they engage in discourse. Any prescriptive conception of dialogue must confront the challenge of acknowledging persons who do not engage in communication through those forms, and who might in fact be excluded or disadvantaged by them. Conversely, an account of dialogue that acknowledges the enormous multiplicity of forms in which people from different cultures do enact pedagogical communicative relations (let alone communicative relations generally) needs to address the question of why some versions are counted as "dialogue" and others not.

The discursive perspective raises questions with the "who" engaging in dialogue, often regarded as if it were a fixed, given condition. Work such as Hicks (1996) explores the ways in which participants construct and change identities through the processes of dialogue. In many contexts, indeed, the formation and negotiation of identity may constitute the primary purpose in mind for some participants in a dialogical relation, supplanting more overt teaching-learning goals.

Furthermore, such dynamics may be only partly intended or conscious (and hence only partly susceptible to reflection or change). Participation in dialogue, even at the micro-level of apparent personal "choice," is not simply a matter of choice. The utterances that comprise an ongoing dialogue are already made (or not made) in the context of an awareness of the reactions – real, anticipated, or imagined – of other participants. The more that one pushes this sort of analysis, the more the achievement, or suppression, of dialogical possibilities comes to be seen as an expression of a group interdynamic, and not something achievable simply by changing the choices and actions of individuals.

When. The second theme from contemporary discourse theory challenges the utilitarian idea of language: We do not just use language; language uses us. As Bakhtin (1981) argued, the nature of discourse is that the language we encounter already has a history; the words that we speak have been spoken by others before us (he calls this "the internal dialogism of the word"). As a result, what we speak always means more than we mean to say; the language that we use carries with it implications, connotations, and consequences that we can only partly intend. The words that others hear from us, how they understand them, and what they say in response is beyond our unilateral control. This relation of speaker, hearer, and language is reflected not only in spoken communication but with authors, readers, and texts

of a variety of types. The multivalence of discourse situates specific speech acts or relations in a web of potential significations that is indeterminate, nonlinear, and highly susceptible to the effects of context and cultural difference. From this standpoint the roles of teacher and student, and other features of schools and classrooms that underlie the T/S model, must be viewed as historical artifacts, discursively constructed and institutionalized, not as inherent concepts that define the educational endeavor.

Yet the same point can be raised with many dialogical pedagogies. A dialogue is not simply a momentary engagement between two or more people; it is a discursive relation situated against the background of previous relations involving them and the relation of what they are speaking today to the history of those words spoken before them. These background conditions are also not simply matters of choice, and they impinge upon the dialogical relation in ways that may shape or limit the possibilities of communication and understanding. Often these relations are expressed as forms of power or privilege that shape the purposes and limits of discourse (Robinson, 1995) because of the relative positions of people that place asymmetrical constraints on who can speak, who can be heard, and who has a stake in maintaining a particular dialogue, or in challenging it. The form of philosophical dialogues, often entirely or partly imagined (even those that ostensibly report the dialogues of Socrates), has reinforced a view of dialogue as a finite and bounded engagement, often described with little or no context, and with scant consideration given to what might have transpired before or after the dialogue at hand. This has tended to support the idea of a dialogue as a unitary, goal-oriented conversation with a discrete purpose, and a beginning, middle, and end, not as a slice of an ongoing communicative relation (as it usually is in educational settings).

Where. The third shift has involved a greater emphasis on the social construction of knowledge and understanding. Within research on teaching and learning, as we discussed earlier, recent years have seen a growth of interest in such problems as situated cognition, group learning, the relation of expert and novice understandings, real-world problem solving, distributed intelligence, and a whole range of similar notions that address in different ways the actual means by which the learning of individuals occurs in the contexts of existing social relations and practices (Cazden, 1988; Cole, et al., 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll, 1994). One can identify in these trends a kind of neo-progressivist approach to teaching and learning, based not solely on a set of social and political values and assumptions, but on contemporary research on culture, cognition, and learning. This trend emphasizes two important principles that work against the T/S model. The first is an emphasis on process over outcome: that learning how to learn, developing a degree of metacognitive reflectivity, acquiring a flexible set of strategies for inquiry and problem-solving, are more important in the long run than learning any particular fact or idea. The second is an awareness that every teaching-learning moment has multiple outcomes, some having to do with a sense of social participation and solidarity, and others having to do with involvement in specific social practices and traditions, not only in deriving the specific answer requested.

Similar concerns apply to dialogue. The situatedness of dialogue, considered as a discursive practice, means that the dialogical relation depends not only upon what people are saying to each other, but the context in which they come together (the classroom or the gymnasium, for example), where they are positioned in relation to each other (standing, sitting, or communicating on-line), and what other gestures or activities work with or against the grain of the interaction. If dialogue has a materiality, this means paying attention to both facilitating and inhibitive characteristics in the circumstances under which it takes place (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988).

Nor is it simply a matter of the present context at hand, but also other contexts – including



anticipated future contexts of need or use – that shape the understanding of purposes that guide or direct a discursive production. For example, interactions at home, in the playground or lunchroom, or on the street before or after school may constitute contexts of teaching and learning that are at least as important for certain participants as the interaction in the classroom; and relative importance aside, they certainly impinge upon the thoughts, feelings, and motivations participants bring to the classroom.

How. Another aspect of this situatedness, or materiality, is that the texts and objects of representation that mediate classroom discourse can have distinctive effects on what can be said and how it can be understood. Where interaction takes place in an immediate, face-to-face circumstance, these "texts" include not only the words themselves, but facial expressions, gestures, and similar representational forms. The T/S model tends to conceive "text" too narrowly and instrumentally, as simply the means for achieving explicit instructional purposes.

Yet dialogue often also takes place in clearly mediated forms: a dialogue between a book's reader and its author; a dialogue between correspondents writing to one another; a dialogue over a telephone, or audio-visual link; a dialogue over electronic mail; and so on. The tendency of previous accounts of dialogue has been to ignore such factors or, if they are considered at all, to relegate them to trivial significance compared to what the words themselves express. Discourse theory has highlighted the ways in which the circumstances of form and medium are *not* trivial, but can influence what is said and how it is understood, and the ways in which these media are representational elements themselves (Lankshear, 1997). For example, a computer's user interface constitutes a discursive field with distinct, non-neutral properties. To take the predominant forms today, it is significant (i.e. it signifies) that the computer screen is based upon a "desktop," organized around "files," "folders," "trash cans," and so forth – artifacts of a particular sort of work environment (as opposed to a kitchen countertop, or a carpenter's workbench, etc.), and ones that shape assumptions about who will be working there and what they will be trying to do there. Such interfaces mediate and influence the dialogue one has with a computer (or with others, using the computer), how one uses it to create or articulate ideas, what one learns from it, and how one is changed by this non-neutral mediating text (Selfe & Selfe, 1994).

We want to stress here the growing impact of new information and communication technologies on educational aims and practices and upon the teacher and student roles (Bruce, 1987, 1991, 1997; Burbules & Callister, forthcoming; Spender, 1995; Turkle, 1984, 1997). It is not a matter of new technologies "replacing teachers," but of radically changing our views about what the teaching role entails. As vast amounts of information, opportunities for exploration and discovery, and media for communication become readily available in classrooms, teachers will need to see themselves more as guides and interpreters, not as sources of authority. In some cases the significance of a distinct "teaching" role recedes into the background. On the side of students (many of whom often end up teaching the teacher about how these technologies work and what can be found with them) their roles and identities are shifting in the digital context of direct communication (e-mail or chat rooms) and indirect communication mediated by web pages, avatars, MUD or MOO personae, and other representations of a "virtual" identity. Here too is an increasingly important context with which school and classroom priorities relate or (possibly) conflict.

In these ways, then, the traditional understanding of classroom discourse has been impeded by the formal, idealized models in which it has been described: impeded because these models have often not taken account of the situated, relational, material circumstances in which such discursive practices actually take place (see Dascal, 1985). As a result, such models have not always worked pedagogically, in particular circumstances, to good effect; often, indeed, they have ended up having effects quite contrary to the pedagogical purposes

desired. The problem here is not the T/S model itself, limited as it might be. It is not as simple (as if this were simple itself!) as transforming all teaching to a dialogical model. Attending to the social dynamics and contexts of classroom discourse heightens the awareness of the complexities and difficulties of changing specific elements within larger communities of practice. These communities may be the primary shapers of learning processes, but not always in ways that serve intended or ideal educational objectives; other purposes, such as identity formation or negotiating interpersonal relations, may predominate. The power of social processes may restrict lines of inquiry, distort discursive interactions, and silence perspectives in ways that conflict with the explicit purposes of schools.

At a different level of analysis, there has also been a change in the tools of research themselves. As researchers have come to think about classroom discourse in different ways, the means of recording and studying those phenomena have changed also. Where at one time it was thought sufficient to record verbal interactions and to base conclusions on the analysis of transcripts, looking for particular speech patterns (such as IRE), there is a greater awareness today of the ways in which discursive practices occur in complex relations with one another and with other, nonverbal phenomena. As a result, new research methods incorporate video recordings, more complex and detailed systems for coding, and more explicit analyses of artifacts. Continued work in the ethnography of communication and sociolinguistics (Cazden, 1988; Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1995; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Sudnow, 1972) has emphasized the connections between language use and social norms and relations. Earlier research that tended to employ formal models and relatively narrow conceptions of social context has been extended to address more macro-level aspects of social and institutional relations.

Rethinking dialogue as a discursive practice holds promise for developing theoretical accounts of dialogue that are richer, more complex, and better attuned to the circumstances of pedagogical practice. Dialogue, from this standpoint, cannot be viewed simply as a form of question and answer, but as a relation constituted in a web of relations among multiple forms of communication, human practices, and mediating objects or texts (Roschelle, 1996; Soloway & Prior, 1996). The T/S model, from this standpoint, becomes understood as one possible pedagogical communicative relation, not the fundamental ontology of the classroom. It has its uses, but it becomes constrictive and counterproductive when it defines the assumptions of what teaching is in general – yet here, again, it must be said that the same criticism could be leveled at many particular views of dialogue. It does remain useful to retain the prescriptive element of articulating which sorts of discursive interaction will be considered as "dialogue," and to offer a normative account of why some teaching ought to be pursued in those forms rather than in others. Yet, it must be said, this prescriptive account is itself a discursive endeavor, which entails its own questions of relations, circumstances, and effects; and so the questions of who, when, where, and how can be posed against it as well. To this topic we now turn.

### **Dialogue as relation, not speech act**

Counting a pedagogical communicative relation as dialogical cannot be based simply upon a momentary "slice of time" observation. It cannot be based simply upon counting the number of people involved. It cannot be based on finding a particular pattern of questions and answers. A dialogue is a pedagogical relation characterized by an ongoing discursive involvement of participants, constituted in a relation of reciprocity and reflexivity. Here "ongoing" means that the form of verbal interaction at any single moment may not appear "dialogical"; the question is not a matter of who is speaking and who is listening, but whether over time the participants are engaged intersubjectively in addressing the issue or problem at hand. A "relation of involvement among participants" means that active efforts at

interpretation, questioning, and rethinking the issue or problem at hand are continually open possibilities; a certain capacity for reflexivity, including comment on the discursive dynamic itself, must be a characteristic of dialogical engagement (see Ellsworth's (1997) account of "analytic dialogue"). A "reciprocal relation" means that the prerogatives of questioning, answering, commenting, or offering reflective observations on the dynamic are open to all participants. Impediments to these capabilities for interaction undermine the quality of the dialogical relation.

### **Dialogue and the teacher/student roles**

As should be clear from this discussion, then, the very demarcation of distinct teacher and student identities is only a feature of certain kinds of dialogue: in many cases of co-investigation or open-ended exploration, such roles might be actually counterproductive. Nor are these roles clearly distinct, stable, or cultureless.

Moreover, even when those roles do have a certain applicability, dialogue tends to promote a situation in which any participant can raise certain types of question – including questions about the necessity or benefits of these roles – as part of the engagement itself. A major element of the T/S model is that these roles are taken as givens and that many tacit assumptions about the appropriate ways of enacting those roles are shared by most of the participants. In dialogical relations, these roles are neither distinct nor stable: the activities of teaching and learning are open to all participants, at different moments, and in many contexts cannot even be separated – which is what "learning with" others entails. Instead of a Teacher/Student model, we might think about a *Teaching-Learning* relation, with the slant and hyphen themselves connoting different type of relation (one of separateness, the other of interdependence), and the change in verb forms a shift from *roles* to *activities*. Learning here is seen as intrinsically intersubjective, situated, and problem-based.

Beyond this point, the framework of dialogue presented here challenges the cultureless, decontextualized quality of the teacher and student roles. The attitude of responsiveness with which one formulates questions or comments in a dialogical relation (With whom am I speaking? How will they hear this? What are their possible responses?) requires actors to be aware of the particularity of other participants. Especially, though not exclusively, in forms of dialogue aimed toward intersubjective understanding or the possibility of agreement or consensus (though, as will be discussed in a moment, this is not necessarily a feature of all forms of dialogue), attention must be granted to the culture, experiences, and situations of others, and to the horizons of one's own culture, experience, and situation as a position from which to try to apprehend them, as well as vice versa.

This concern leads to the issues posed by what Gutierrez, et al. (1995) call the "third space": the construction of a zone of potential communication that is explicitly not the discourse of the teacher, nor of the students, but a zone of potential meaning and representation constituted by how those discourses relate. It provides a particularly striking illustration of how certain models of dialogue do not address the complex communicative *and* noncommunicative issues involved with creating and negotiating such a third space. The discursive model places such questions, and all their communicative difficulty and messiness, at the center of analysis.

We also want to highlight a tension, or paradox, in this analysis. On the one hand, there is a difficulty in maintaining the conditions of dialogue and "free" participation when the teacher is the one framing the scope and context of discussion; as Ellsworth and others point out, this may inadvertently restrict the possibilities and direction of dialogue, especially for certain participants. On the other hand, it is less than clear that any one participant in a complex context can actually manage things that strongly: elements of this context, and of

contexts outside this context, may be beyond the awareness and control of *any* participant; multiple participants may have conflicting understanding and purposes; actions toward intended results may actually impede those outcomes. This may be especially true in the case of discursive interactions such as dialogue, where the negotiation of purpose and direction is often an element *within* the exchange. What analyses such as Gutierrez, et al.'s "third space" suggest is a deep indeterminacy in shaping dialogue toward any particular teleological end.

### **Dialogue as situated**

Classical models of dialogue and, even more generally, standard models of talk coming out of classical linguistics, suggest an idealized, disembodied picture of verbal interchange. We can ignore how the participants stand or sit, what they wear, their physical attributes, the timbre of their voices, the ambient noise level, the relative humidity, the room decorations, the furniture, whether they are inside or outside. None of these things are thought to matter. These models of pedagogical communication have tended to support the liberal ideal that anyone can aspire to intellectual heights regardless of their circumstances of age, gender, race, culture, class, or physical conditions. What such views gain in inspirational potential they lose, unfortunately, in their engagement with the tensions and limitations of real school settings.

Every act of dialogue is, in fact, embodied and situated. We could say that each act participates in a material reality as much as it does in a mental realm, or, to avoid that duality, that the logical development of a dialogue is inseparable from its material grounding (cf. Haas, 1995; Luke, 1992).

As we have seen, the argument that all dialogue is grounded in this way grows out of a long line of theorizing about discourse, in which discourses are conceived as sociohistorically constituted. It has become difficult even to imagine a wholly decontextualized dialogue among abstract, unspecified participants. Thus, when we revisit *Meno*, we now want to ask new questions: What representational tools were available to the participants – a stick and sand, paper, hand gestures? How would the dialogue proceed differently with different tools for manipulating symbols? How did the participants position themselves physically? How did that relate to their understanding of each other's intellectual positions? How did their social status – slave, master, philosopher – affect their construction of meaning in the dialogue? Had the participants had prior dialogical interactions? How did those experiences shape their interpretations of the dialogue? And so on.

### **Dialogue as multiple, not singular**

Within these broad characteristics, as noted previously, dialogue can take a number of forms in the actual pattern of communicative performances, and in the purposes to which it might be directed. Elsewhere, Burbules (1993) has discussed the forms of inquiry, conversation, instruction, and debate as a variety of types of dialogical engagement. *Inquiry* involves a co-investigation of a question, the resolution of a disagreement, the formulation of a compromise, all as ways of addressing a specific problem to be solved or answered. *Conversation* involves a more open-ended discussion in which the aim of intersubjective understanding, rather than the answering of any specific question or problem, is foremost. *Instruction* involves an intentional process in which a teacher "leads" a student, through questioning and guidance, to formulating certain answers or understandings (this approach is often seen as the paradigm of the "Socratic method"). *Debate* involves an exchange less about reaching agreement, or finding common answers, to testing positions through an agonistic engagement for and against other positions; it may include a process of

problematizing even the terms of discussion themselves. The aim is that alternative points of view can each be clarified and strengthened through such an engagement. Burbules argues that any of these forms can serve educational purposes, and that each can take deleterious and antieducational effects as well – success or benefit are not built into any procedures of communicative engagement. Other forms of dialogue may be possible besides these four, and there are certainly hybrid cases; moreover, any ongoing dialogical engagement will pass through several of these forms in the course of interactions. The key point is that the actual form and tone of utterances in such interactions may vary widely: some are more critical, others more inclusive; some tend toward convergent answers, others toward a divergent multiplicity of conclusions. Yet all can be "dialogical" in spirit; and for each type many examples can be found in the philosophical and pedagogical literature on dialogue.

Our purpose in reviewing these four forms here is not to provide an exhaustive typology of all types of dialogue; as noted earlier, other analyses, given other points of emphasis, may establish different criteria of distinction. But these four forms illustrate that dialogue, in the sense of "a pedagogical relation characterized by an ongoing discursive involvement of participants, constituted in a relation of reciprocity and reflexivity," can take different forms and be directed toward different goals. A skillful teacher will have a repertoire of dialogical strategies from which to draw, and will be creative and flexible in shifting from approach to approach with different students, different circumstances, and different subject matters.

Yet this analysis can be pushed even further. The forms of dialogue may not always even involve active speaking back and forth. In certain cases silence – that is, the choice not to engage in dialogue – can express rejection, intimidation, boredom, irrelevance, etc. (Delpit, 1988; Fine, 1987; Lewis, 1990). It can be a "dialogue move" itself (Burbules, 1993). If *not* engaging in dialogue becomes a way of communicating, then we have the clearest possible case of where the communicative form itself cannot delimit what is and is not part of the "dialogue." Similar points might be raised with nonverbal communication (gestures, etc.), with texts that "speak for" others, with artifacts that are also forms of representation, and so on.

Still another concern is Emmanuel Levinas's (1981) exploration of what cannot be said, what remains incommunicable in any relation, what remains unknowable about the Other; and the way that this poses a sharp contrast to views, such as Gadamer's (1976) fusion of horizons and Habermas's (1984) uncoerced consensus, which assume the possibility and the value of more or less complete understanding or agreement in dialogue. In all of these cases the prescriptive model of dialogue leads to some potentially dangerous presumptions.

### **Dialogue with texts**

Classical models of dialogue were developed when textual interaction, that is, discursive interactions mediated by written symbols, were far from the norm. Few people could read and write, and those who could looked with suspicion upon symbolic representations of the assumed-to-be primal form of meaning-making through the spoken word. Plato's famous critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, even when given an ironic reading, nevertheless manifests not only a distrust of writing, but a view that this form of communication is qualitatively different from oral discourse.

Despite the fact that Plato's position on the oral/written divide has had a distinguished history in Western thought (Ong, 1982), recent work in communication theory says that any simple divide is difficult to maintain. Moreover, technological developments suggest that at the very least, the modality, such as audio versus written text, may be one of the least significant aspects of communication. How does a rapid-fire conversation over a synchronous network in a classroom differ from face-to-face oral exchange? There are

indeed many differences, but either can be dialogical, even though the former is constituted by the exchange of written texts, not spoken words. Conversely, an audio tape stores spoken words, but Plato's accusation that writing is mute (i.e., static and unchanging) must apply equally to the tape. Where do we classify electronic mail, video conferencing, hypertexts, lectures, note-passing in class, broadcast television, subtitled movies, text produced by speech recognition software, talk radio, or stored audio on a web site? What is clear is that dimensions of interactivity, temporal or spatial commonality, direct address, and so on, often matter much more than oral or written modality per se.

This raises the question: Can one have a dialogue with a text? For some, the answer has long been "no." Indeed, dialogue might be *defined* as a form of communication contrasted with (the non-interactive) text. For others, the answer has been "yes." Hutchins (1952) argues that the defining characteristic of the West is dialogue; moreover, the Western ideal is the Great Conversation as embodied primarily in the Great Books. Thus, dialogue is not opposed to reading, but rather, finds its highest expression through reading (Pearce, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1978). Hutchins's position finds support in the major threads of twentieth-century literacy theory, especially through various varieties of reader-response theory. This is not the place for an overall account of reader-response theories. Nevertheless, it is important to show at least cursorily how such theories enlarge our conception of dialogue.

A capsule account of the reader-response move, and why it is significant, follows that of Freund (1987). She starts with Abrams's model of the situation of a work of art, in which the Work of art, the artifact itself, is at the center. Those aspects of nature or life that it represents are signified by the Universe. The other nodes are the Artist who creates the Work and the Audience to whom it is addressed. Abrams argues that a comprehensive critical approach would need to address all four elements and the relations among them.

At first thought, a focus on reader-response would seem to highlight the Audience in Abrams's model, or perhaps the Audience-Work relation. In fact, Rosenblatt's (1978) classic talks of turning the spotlight on the heretofore "invisible reader." But as Freund and others have pointed out, opening up the reader's perspective does more than shift the spotlight. It is not just a matter of exposing a different piece of the geography, but more like a tectonic shift that challenges the privileged position of the Work.

This perspective puts the Audience at the center, not the Work itself. The whole structure destabilizes as we give serious consideration to the Audience's construction of the Artist, the Work, and the World to which it refers. New questions emerge, such as what *stance* the Audience takes with respect to the Work, or, more accurately, to the Audience's conception of what counts as the Work (Beach, 1997; Hartman, 1990; Rosenblatt, 1978; Umiker-Sebeok, 1991). Stance implies an active role for the reader in dialogue with a text. If anything, reader-response accounts, both conceptual and empirical (Beach, 1993; Bruce, 1981), have tended to show active, often idiosyncratic, readers who construct meaning in divergent ways with little regard for conventional depictions of the Artist, the Work, or the Universe – much less to received critical analyses of how these elements "should" be interpreted or understood. Such constructions of meaning shift our models of reading or interpretation away from trying to guess what something "really" means, or what an author "really" intended, to interpretations of the reader's situation and outlook. The nature of the relation between text and reader is more interactive, and hence more indeterminate, than an acquisition of "received" meanings.

Models of reading that may have served reasonably well in the past have thus been challenged. Literacy research is now reaching beyond its familiar boundaries to consider alternative conceptions of reading, writing, and sense-making. In particular, the field of literary studies and its concern with issues such as how understanding across "horizons" is

possible, how readers adopt different stances toward a text, and how the meanings of authors, readers, and communities interrelate, leads inexorably to new conceptions of literacy (see Cazden, et al., 1996). From this standpoint, it is helpful to reconceive the relation of reader to text as a kind of dialogue.

The radical reconfiguration entailed by the reader-response movement has further consequences for Abrams's model. His choice of the inclusive term "Work" and the nonspecific "Audience," so as to allow for a wide range of artistic productions, is obviated by current conceptions of "text." Because the Audience constructs the relation, text is no longer restricted to the literary Work, nor even to some broader category of published documents. Instead, the term is increasingly applied today to any and all representational forms, that is, to any object that the Audience can construct as bearing meaning. Thus, texts can include menus, street signs, electronic mail, World Wide Web pages, or cloud writing. Beyond alphabetic or ideographic representations, maps (Monmonier, 1991; Star, 1989), photographs, paintings, instrument gauges, even room keys in a hotel (Latour, 1991) can be texts. Texts can be dynamic, as on television or film. They can even include practices, such as dress or rules of etiquette (Barthes, 1974, 1985).

Among the practices that can be read as text are interactions through speech, including dialogical interactions under any of various definitions. Thus, the constructivist account of reading comes full circle to encompass the earlier conception of dialogue. Rather than saying that dialogue with or through texts shares some of the characteristics of standard oral dialogue, or that it is almost like oral dialogue, this view leads us to the position that dialogical interactions through speech are simply one of the many ways in which people can interact dialogically. Each of these ways enables a diverse set of readings by participants or observers.

This expansion of the term "text" may at first seem to threaten a dilution of meaning. But it has proven to be a useful analytic step, because while eliding differences across media, it brings to the fore the relation of discourse to other social practices, the construction of meaning by participants, and the possibility of textual analysis as a unifying construct across disciplines. Scholes (1985) argues that when students learn textual analysis in this broader sense they develop a rigorous and general practice far more valuable than understandings of any particular readings. As Beach (1997) notes, once we consider these multiple reader stances and reader identities, we recognize how the meaning of individual texts emerges out of a relation to multiple other discourses in which both text and reader participate. This means that reading involves a relation to a text in front of us (oral or written), but a "reading" also of these larger intertextual relations.

### **Dialogue and difference**

Dialogue, understood within the discursive context, engages the issue of difference at various levels. First, there is the fact of diversity as a condition of all learning: It is precisely where people differ in outlook, background, belief, experience, and so forth, that dialogue creates an opportunity for some to learn from and with others. Such diversity, however, does not only create a set of possibilities and opportunities; it also constitutes a potential barrier – for it is these very same differences that can lead to misunderstandings, disagreements, or speaking at cross purposes. Dialogue exists at the points of tension and difficulty between these possibilities.

At a second level, differences speak to positions in broader contexts that go beyond the identities of the persons engaged in dialogue. In many cases, these differences are invested with elements of power and privilege in relation to one another; these elements can be highlighted or exacerbated even further when they overlap with elements of power and

privilege invested in institutionalized roles (including "teacher" and "student"). The discursive view of dialogue presented here means always situating the particular dialogical relation within the web of other relations that exist between and among participants.

At a third level, the issue of multiple effects, broached earlier, complicates the picture still further. No social act ever causes only what it intends. The perspective of difference adds to this complexity. Multiplying the dimensions along which we see ourselves and others as related or different makes it impossible to focus on unidirectional effects, on straightforward intentions, on clear demarcations of purpose and responsibility. As we have seen, even who the agents are is a shifting determination; so is the language with which they speak. The complex dynamics between teacher and student have multiple effects (and effects that are different for different types of students), not all of which can be subsumed under intentional teaching acts. While problematizing the sense of predictability and responsibility in any dialogical relation, this view of difference also introduces another imperative for dialogue: that where persons cannot know all that they intend, cannot know all that what they say signifies for different hearers, or cannot see all the effects that their acts produce, it becomes all the more important to keep open a process in which others can call to attention, question, or challenge the nature of the dialogue itself and the consequences it might have for them. This also implies that the boundaries of who is "part" of a dialogue, or who has a stake in it, can themselves be contested.

At a fourth level, difference raises question with the very aims of "understanding," "agreement," "consensus," and "community" that are typical objectives of dialogue. In some cases, differences may be so great that incommensurabilities simply frustrate the process of dialogue from going very far. In other cases, the history and context of differences put some persons and groups in asymmetrical positions relative to goals like "consensus" or "community": to be *with* means to be *like*; but to be *like* means to be alienated from qualities of self or relations to others. The risks and temptations of this sort of dynamic can be very subtle, infused with all sorts of mixed intentions (including those of sincerely trying to "help" people). Dialogue, because it derives from humanistic traditions, because it explicitly eschews methods of overt domination or coercion, and because it expresses values such as reciprocity and respect for all participants, is (ironically) all the more susceptible to the trap of good intentions.

Instead, the perspective argued for in this chapter means situating judgments about particular pedagogical communicative relations in the tripartite context of the elements of discursive practice, the multiple relations and activities that engage persons around those discursive practices, and the nature of the objects and texts that mediate those relations. Differences – differences of identity and position relative to one another, differences in the meanings that language has for different people, differences in the stakes that persons have in the varied activities and practices at hand and in their consequences, differences in the ways that people engage and experience the mediating objects and texts that represent discursive elements – all run through this context and problematize the effort to analyze it in simple cause and effect terms or to delineate certain effects as "pedagogically" relevant and others not.

### **Beyond the prescriptive model of dialogue**

The considerations about dialogue raised in this section yield a significant shift in thinking about dialogue as a pedagogical communicative relation. Instead of traditional models of dialogue, which have tended to prescribe a particular form of communicative interaction, and which have been generated out of a priori assumptions about the ways that language *should* work, the view developed here is articulated specifically with the perspective of discursive analysis in mind. This account yields a more multivalent account of dialogue: that



it can take very different verbal (and nonverbal forms); that it can arise in very different sorts of circumstances; that it can be mediated by very different sorts of textual or representational practices; that it can be directed toward quite different purposes, and can have still further effects apart from how it may be intended; that these different forms will have different degrees of familiarity or utility for different sorts of people, and different degrees of suitability for different subject matters.

In our view, the significance of this approach to understanding dialogue is not that it abrogates the value of prescriptive norms. Rather, it identifies these norms as themselves discursively constituted, not as givens. Moreover, it interrogates the consequences in practice of invoking certain models of dialogue, and their norms, in discursive contexts where the potentialities *in principle* of dialogue run up against contexts of situated roles, of institutionalized power and privilege, of multiple forms and styles of discourse, of cultural and other kinds of difference, and so on.

At the same time, however, we also want to emphasize the prescriptive elements inherent in any discursive model. As Habermas (1984), Apel (1987), and others have argued, the success of any communicative process depends on a set of shared, if often tacit and unspoken, norms about the acceptable forms and purposes of communication. As is often the case with such norms, they are typically invisible in the ordinary course of events, and become salient only when they are breached, or when one or another participant wants to question them. Difficulties emerge, of course, when these implicit norms vary, as they do, between or across different communities of discourse; although we believe that there are strong reasons to conclude that they cannot differ entirely, and that some norms appear to be inherent to the communicative process itself. As a result, one important educational aim is to identify these norms and to seek to foster respect for them so that learners can engage in successful communication and diagnose what is happening when communication goes awry.

This shift in viewpoint has enormous implications, both for our views about how education should proceed and what aims it should serve. First, it reveals the fundamental tension between ground-level assumptions about the teacher as authority, as director of classroom dynamics, as provider of information, and as evaluator of student responses, with an awareness of classroom discourse as an arena of intersubjective meaning-making in which multiple voices have a share. Second, it makes educators aware of the nonneutral features of dominant discourses, both in the sense of formal languages and in the dynamics of language in use, as factors in shaping, limiting, and in some cases excluding discursive possibilities for certain participants. Where these dynamics are linked with identity-formation and interactions with contexts outside the classroom, the issues go far beyond the questions often associated with public debates over ESL and bilingual education (for example, whether learning one language or another is helpful on the job market). A deeper issue is when and how engagements with different patterns of discourse can create the conditions for developing multiple literacies that do not require simple choices or priorities among primary and secondary languages; the conditions of dialogue involve accommodation along *two-way* paths, and not simply reorienting those who are different along dominant patterns and norms. Third, then, this means a reflection on our larger educational aims, beyond the dichotomy of unquestioned goals of assimilation with dominant norms and beliefs, on the one hand, versus a rejection of what is common and the desire to preserve discrete cultural elements and traditions at all costs. We believe that educators need to think beyond these options, to an awareness of how a respect and tolerance for difference is necessary even when one is trying to pursue common learning goals and, conversely, how the melding and transformation of culture and language is inevitable in moments of discursive engagement. As a result, the sensitive problem becomes a matter of educators appreciating the potential for creating conflict, suffering, or resistance even when the explicit purpose is one of transmitting information or teaching "valuable skills" while, at the same time, being

prepared to question assumptions about the neutrality or value of dominant forms of discursive engagement (simply because they happen to be dominant).

For example, the assumptions of the (apparently neutral) school stance of dispassioned objectivity and distance toward texts (often termed the "essayist" stance; see Scollon, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1981) seem to highlight some potentially valuable educational goals: analyzing what the "text itself" means, holding personal judgment and response in abeyance, being able to articulate and defend views one may not personally hold, and so on. What researchers have shown, however, is that this essayist stance comes into conflict with the ways that certain readers define their identities in relation to a text or conversational exchange (see also Gee, 1990; Keller-Cohen, 1994; Michaels, 1981). What the more dialogical analysis of difference suggests is that there are multiple ways of approaching texts, and that movement from one discourse pattern to another is not simply a matter of learning new skills or linguistic conventions, but may create deeper crises in the negotiation of identity in the classroom, especially for students from nondominant cultural groups.

### **Dialogue and new research questions**

It is not within the scope of this chapter to attempt to stipulate a set of future research issues surrounding dialogue and teaching, nor is it consistent with the exploratory, pluralist approach we have tried to emphasize here. However, we do want to acknowledge a set of questions that have arisen for us in the course of surveying this literature and trying to reframe some of the theoretical issues at stake. Perhaps some of these issues will be salient for others as well.

The first, and perhaps the most difficult, is to apply the discursive perspective to our own activity here. When we refer to dialogue as "a pedagogical relation characterized by an ongoing discursive involvement of participants, constituted in a relation of reciprocity and reflexivity," what is at stake in offering such a definition? Given the concerns expressed throughout this essay with the prescriptive approach, it cannot simply be a matter of saying that this definition fits the literature better, or carves out the "right" issues, or constitutes a generalizable educational ideal. We need to ask what work such a definition does, what effects it might have; we need to ask whose definition it is, and whose perspectives may not be represented by it; we need to consider the range of contexts in which pedagogical communication occurs, and explore how the definition may work differently in different contexts. What we think recommends this definition is that it is generated from within a discursive perspective itself. As we have characterized it here, it is grounded in ideas of situatedness, multiplicity, and difference and so explicitly acknowledges a range of forms of communicative interaction that can constitute "dialogue." Moreover, the element of reflexivity puts *within* the concept of dialogue the possibility of renegotiating, as part of an ongoing dialogical engagement, questions of inclusiveness, linguistic difference, bias, domination, and so forth. None of this guarantees the success of such attempts to identify, critique, and renegotiate those limits; but one need not necessarily step outside of the dialogical relation in order to challenge them. This conception even acknowledges that silence and withdrawal from dialogue are possible moves within it – "within it" in the sense that they may constitute necessary steps for eventual dialogue (even critical dialogue) to be possible.

Other questions arise from the multiple forms that dialogue can take, and their relation to specific subject areas and particular students. For example, when can "debate" work as a teaching-learning relation, and when not (and for whom)? More specifically, How do different discursive practices, such as treating information as problematic, relate to students' abilities to make conceptual changes? A wide variety of research on knowledge-building, mediating objects and texts, and discourse is beginning to show a more fine-grained

connection between dialogue and particular learning goals.

Other questions arise from the changing technological environment in which pedagogical communication and information-sharing are taking place. Some questions, for example, have to do with how conversation on-line changes the ways people engage in dialogue, and how different participants experience the advantages and disadvantages of indirect conversation rather than face-to-face (Bruce, Peyton, & Batson, 1993).

Other questions concern the "communicative competencies" (Habermas's phrase) that enable students to engage in certain kinds of dialogue effectively. For example, What role do questions play in various forms of dialogue (Benyon, 1987; Dillon, 1983, 1987, 1988; Gall 1970, 1984; Hintikka, 1982; Macmillan & Garrison, 1983, 1988; Morgan & Saxton, 1991; Wilen 1984)? When do certain utterances operate pragmatically as questions? When is a question likely to elicit an educationally fruitful answer? How do students learn to ask questions? Similar questions relate to other "communicative competencies" that teachers must master to be successful: How does a teacher's background knowledge of content prepare him or her for being able to ask fruitful investigative questions, and in what ways does this constitute a special area of "pedagogical content knowledge" that teachers need to learn (Shulman, 1987)? Is learning to foster dialogue a general pedagogical skill, or a subject-specific one?

What are the contextual circumstances, practices, and relations that encourage students to engage in certain kinds of dialogue effectively? Which students? Which students not? What features of schools and classrooms promote dialogue, and which features inhibit it (see Burbules, 1993)?

Once one regards the Teaching-Learning relation as such, and not as an enactment of discrete Teacher/Student roles, questions arise about the reversibility and interdependence of that relation. Palincsar & Brown's (1984; see also Palincsar, 1986) approach to reciprocal teaching, for example, asks what happens when the roles of teacher and student are reversed; similarly, what happens when they are challenged and contested? What possibilities do such challenges create in specific settings, and which do they tend to close off?

We find rich issues raised by Gutierrez, et al's idea of a "third space" constituting the zone in which dialogue can take place. What happens when specific discourses engage one another? How different or conflicted can they be before no practical engagement is possible or worthwhile?

Following on this point, How necessary are specific learning outcomes for pursuing various kinds of dialogue? When can specific teleological goals interfere with inquiry and discovery, or true reciprocity and open-endedness? What happens to a dialogue when "no one is steering"?

We are interested in the ways in which dialogue, as a constructivist pedagogy, can foster general capabilities to pursue inquiry on one's own, or with new partners. To what extent, if at all, is dialogue an intrinsically "critical" mode of discourse, as Freire and others suggest (Bridges, 1988; McPeck, 1990; Paul, 1987; Young, 1990, 1992)? What are the multiple meanings of "critical" in such contexts (Burbules & Berk, forthcoming)? What is it about dialogue that tends to promote this aim; or are there tendencies in certain kinds of dialogue that can work against it?

Finally, and in a way that comprises many of these other issues, are the implications of strong views of difference and diversity for dialogue. What happens when one tries to reconcile prescriptive approaches to pedagogy with the reality of diverse linguistic forms,

attitudes, values, and experiences? Is dialogue inherently "normalizing," or can it be adapted to broader horizons of inclusiveness? On the other hand (perversely), when it does succeed at being more inclusive, is this at the cost of requiring participants to give up or compromise elements of their difference? Can a theory of dialogue that accommodates radical difference – we ask by way of closing – still be a theory of *dialogue*? And would it still be a *theory*?\*

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