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“Like a Whole Thing”: Dialogic Sensemaking in One Sixth Grade Classroom

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the  
College of Education and Social Work  
West Chester University  
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

By

Catherine Bienkowski

April 2023

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West Chester University

## Dedication

*“Often really what you need is someone who will believe in you, who will encourage you to believe in yourself.” — Gail Kelly*

I am honored to dedicate this labor of love to the people I love the most, Greg, Jackson, and Paige, who gave me the courage and space to pursue my passions, who recognized my need to be present in my work and sometimes absent in our home, who made me coffee and listened to my late-night pitches and who I could never have done this without...I love you all.

## Acknowledgements

In 1989 when launching her Foundation for Family Literacy, Barbara Bush said, “The home is the child’s first school, the parent is the child’s first teacher, and reading is the child’s first subject.” My family is my foundation; my parents instilled in me a love of reading and a love of learning. I am who I am and where I am because they always pushed me to believe in myself and reach for my dreams. They have been my fiercest supporters in every aspect of my life for the entirety of my life. I could never repay their love and support, but I promise to pay it forward with my own children. Mom, Dad, I hope I make you proud.

These last three years have possibly been harder on my husband than they have on me. From running the kids to all of their events, to making dinners and doing housework, he just generally kept our lives in order. Whether I needed a shoulder to cry on or a giant nudge to get my act together, he helped me find the motivation to ‘finish the marathon’. I will forever be grateful for him pushing me through my last ‘two miles’. Greg, I could not have done this without your love and support. I love growing old with you.

My children both gave me the space and the understanding to accomplish my dream. I hope they always remember that they too can do hard things. Jackson and Paige, as you supported me, I will always support you. I will always have your back too. I love you both to the moon and back.

Throughout my tenure as a teacher, I have been privileged to know and work with many incredible educators. Without the encouragement of a few key players, I would never have embarked on this journey. I am forever grateful to Lisa for increasing my responsibilities, allowing me the opportunity to rise to new challenges, and sharing in my hopes and dreams; to Anthony for taking a chance on me so many years ago, reigniting my passion for learning, and

for leading by example in how to always be growing as an educator; to Adam and Amy for making me realize that I “can do it” and giving me the courage to try.

Having the courage to begin and sustaining the journey are two entirely different mountains to climb. Late night texts and impromptu phone calls with John and Gerry carried me through my 2 years and 10 months—I would not be writing these final pages without them. Dr. Backer, my advisor and sounding board, guided me through to the end. He calmed me when my anxiety got in the way, making a monumental task manageable. His wealth of knowledge was an invaluable resource providing precious feedback and countless suggestions during my research process. My committee members Drs. Santori and Lightner willingly shared their insight and expertise and believed in my project enough to jump on board. I am so grateful to have had such distinguished mentors in my corner.

Finally, my friends from Room 411. I want to thank Tina for seeking me out as an expert when we are both fully aware who the real expert is, for always having my back and for a friendship that is tried and true. To my little ‘menu’ of students for taking this journey with me, sharing their true selves, and just being all around awesome kids. Room 411 will forever have a special place in my heart and my nine friends who jumped on board and shared their true selves with the world are simply—amazing. I am grateful to each and every one of them and to the caregivers who took a leap of faith and allowed them to participate.

My learning journey does not end here...

## Abstract

This qualitative study used a constructivist approach to better understand how students in one sixth grade classroom participate in dialogic discussions while making sense of texts. Participants in the study attended a suburban, public, high-performing middle school in Pennsylvania. Drawing on Sociocultural Learning Theory and Transactional Reading Theory, the researcher observed one English Language Arts class. Nine students participated in five reading events over a period of two months. Data collection, informed by linguistic ethnographic methods, included audio recordings, transcriptions of reading events, fieldnotes, and transcriptions of one on one and small group interviews. In Vivo coding of the interview data helped to honor the voices of the participants, while initial coding of the dialogue led to the development of four themes centering on the talk moves students made when making sense of texts through dialogue: affirming ideas, testing ideas, teaching ideas, and holding onto ideas. Focusing on the perspectives of the students participating in the dialogue, the study revealed specific instructional frames and practices such as carefully constructing questions, providing access to discussion norms and sentence starters, and providing frequent opportunities to engage in dialogue, that enhance the ethos of the classroom community. The classroom culture was further enhanced by an understanding of how to engage in collaborative discussion and a sense of value in the group. The discussion includes implications for future educational practice based on these key findings.

**Keywords:** dialogic discourse, sensemaking, sociocultural learning, transactional reading

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	x
List of Figures .....	xi
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Rationale for Study .....	6
Significance of Methods .....	7
Limitations of Study .....	9
Definition of Terms.....	11
Summary .....	12
Chapter II: Literature Review .....	14
Contextual Clarity: Dialogue .....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	16
Sociocultural Learning Theory .....	16
Transactional Theory of Reading.....	19
Literature Review.....	22
What is Dialogic Education? .....	22
Teacher Epistemology .....	24
Dialogue Form and Function .....	25
Dialogic Education: Practice or Pedagogy?.....	27
The Reading Event.....	27

Common Core and Close Reading .....	28
Sensemaking .....	29
Academic Benefits of Dialoguing About a Text.....	32
Bridge or Barrier? .....	34
Dialogic Education—Where it Stands .....	40
The Future .....	43
Summary .....	44
Chapter III: Methodology .....	46
Setting .....	47
Participants.....	48
Teacher.....	48
Students.....	49
Instrumentation .....	50
Interviews.....	50
Fieldwork/Observations and Interactional Data .....	53
Trustworthiness.....	53
Researcher’s Bias and Observer’s Paradox .....	55
Transferability.....	57
Procedures.....	57
Schedule .....	57
Establishing Trust in the Field .....	58
Analysis and Coding Procedures .....	59
Informed Consent.....	63



Protection of Human Subjects .....	64
Respect for Persons .....	65
Beneficence.....	66
Justice.....	67
Summary .....	68
Chapter IV: Findings.....	69
It's All a Buzz .....	69
The Reading Events .....	71
Reading Event One .....	72
Reading Event Two.....	73
Reading Event Three.....	74
Reading Event Four .....	75
Reading Event Five.....	75
Making Sense of Texts.....	73
Affirming Ideas .....	78
Testing Ideas .....	84
Teaching Ideas .....	94
Holding onto Ideas .....	101
Barriers to Dialogic Sensemaking .....	105
Tangents .....	105
Dismissals .....	107
Time/Timing .....	108
Summary .....	111

Chapter V: Discussion .....	113
Summary of the Study .....	113
Application of Theoretical Framework to Findings.....	114
Classroom Culture .....	116
The Reading Events .....	121
Discussion of Results .....	125
Making Sense of Texts.....	125
Students' Experiences .....	130
Limitations of the Study.....	132
Limitations in Site Selection .....	132
Limitations in Methodology .....	133
Limitations in Analysis .....	135
Transferability .....	136
Implications of Future Educational Research .....	136
Summary .....	137
References.....	139
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form Teacher .....	155
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form Student .....	158
Appendix C: Assent Form Student .....	162
Appendix D: Teacher Interview Protocol .....	164
Appendix E: Small Group Interview Protocol.....	165
Appendix F: Individual Student Interview Protocol.....	166
Appendix G: Member Check Confirmation .....	167

Appendix H: Let's Talk Sheet .....168

**List of Tables**

- Page 48**      **Table 1:** *Student Participant Demographics*
- Page 58**      **Table 2:** *Transcription Conventions*
- Page 68**      **Table 3:** *The Reading Events at a Glance*

**List of Figures**

- Page 21**      **Figure 1:** *Theoretical Framework*
- Page 56**      **Figure 2:** *Study Timeline*
- Page 67**      **Figure 3:** *Student Perceptions of Dialogic Sensemaking*
- Page 73**      **Figure 4:** *Student Groupings per Reading Event*
- Page 74**      **Figure 5:** *Dialogic Sensemaking: Four Themes*
- Page 75**      **Figure 6:** *List of Words of Affirmation*
- Page 81**      **Figure 7:** *List of Words of Conjecture*
- Page 111**     **Figure 8:** *Dialogic Sensemaking in Room 411*
- Page 114**     **Figure 9:** *Room 411 Discussion Norms*

## Chapter I: Introduction

Animated voices fill the room as my co-teacher and I circulate, listening to each small group discussion. Tables abuzz, there is not a silent group among them. While an outside observer might associate these discussions with students playing games or socializing, this is in fact a middle school social studies class, and the students are making sense of a text about the spice trade.

Walking around the room, I hear students sharing opposing views and using the text as evidence of their thinking. The discussion is not fiery—there is a little disagreement, but students are listening to and learning from each other's perspectives. This is exactly the type of dialogue my co-teacher and I had hoped for. Slowly, the discussions come to a close and the students finish up their learning tasks. As they pack their bags, the bell rings, and they exit. They are barely out the door before my colleague begins the debrief.

“In all my years teaching the kids have never been so into learning about the spice trade.”

I smiled. My coaching voice kicked in, “What do you think made this lesson different?”

“Talking about the reading. I could tell by what they were sharing that they really got it.”

“You were nervous they would not focus on the right ideas if we did not ask specific questions. Do you still feel that way?”

“No. They definitely got it. Some kids even came up with ideas I never thought of myself. They used evidence from the text and shared different perspectives. I didn’t expect them to go that deep. It was great.”

This short exchange with my colleague was a game changer for her (and for me). I had co-taught in her classroom many times, but this lesson took place during my third year as a

Literacy Coach, right on the heels of reading *Disrupting Thinking: Why How We Read Matters* (2017) by Kylee Beers and Bob Probst, which introduced me to the idea of creating dialogic opportunities for students by giving them permission to be the sensemakers and providing space for them to explore ideas through collaborative dialogue.

The use of classroom dialogue and pedagogical spaces that encourage open, collaborative discussion was not completely new to me. I had used the Socratic seminar strategy over the years, but it was the idea of dialoguing with students more regularly, and being open to unplanned outcomes that piqued my interest anew.

Pairing with my colleague, we picked a lesson that was traditional, with a teacher lecturing and students copying notes from slides. We carefully curated some readings and re-designed the lesson, letting the students be the sensemakers, sharing their ideas with their peers. We used simple structures and let the kids guide the discussion. And it worked. The dialogue was focused, detailed and long, and the students wanted to keep talking. We heard kids sharing unique perspectives, using text evidence, challenging each other, and explaining their thinking. It was not perfect, but it was powerful practice, and we immediately set out to create more opportunities for students to do the heavy lifting in the classroom.

We did not remake every lesson, as not every lesson can or *should* be rewritten, but we realized that when opportunities arise to put the onus of the learning into the hands of the students by making them the sensemakers, we should try. We owe it to them. They are living in a literacy rich world, with endless information at their fingertips. By learning to engage in dialogue about texts, students can better understand the world around them and begin to explore ideas about personal growth and societal change. It is our responsibility as educators to do more than

just give kids the answers, we need to develop critical thinkers that can collaborate successfully with others. Learning with and through dialogue can help.

### **Problem Statement**

The purposeful use of language has a long history in teaching and learning (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019) and recent definitions of what it means to be literate have expanded from the long-accepted ability to read and write to a much more complex construct that includes collaborative problem solving and communicative abilities (ILA, 2020; NCTE, 2019). While the definition of literacy continues to expand, many public schools remain governed by standards-driven curricula and skill-based measures (Teo, 2019). Because of this, many educators engage students in passive reading acts that result in students simply seeking the right answer to a question (Sinclair, 2018) with little time left for students to explore a text's meaning with peers through dialogue (Kamil et al., 2008; Kathard, 2015; Nystrand et al., 2003; Nystrand, 2006).

The teaching style that dominates the majority of classrooms in the United States is Eurocentric, valuing practices like competition, casting the teacher as expert, and individualism rather than cooperation (Hollie, 2018). Schools require students to take standardized assessments in which they abandon their own voices and ideas in order to match the text interpretations of test makers who might come from very different backgrounds than the test taker (Carillo, 2019; Lewis Ellison, 2019). Schools still relying on traditional teaching methods that posit teachers as experts will need to pivot their focus to allow more student voices to be heard, more perspectives to be honored, and more purposeful dialogue in the classroom. This shift will better prepare students for a future rooted in collaboration with others and result in more reflective and open-minded citizens (Cuenca, 2010; Teo, 2019).



As the world becomes more interconnected, students will need to learn the skills necessary to participate and succeed in a “global future” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019, p. 9). Considering the diversity of cultures and individual belief systems present in society, educators should support students in understanding and valuing the perspectives of others (OECD, 2019). Schools should look to engage students in activities that not only require collaboration with others, but also work to build students’ capacity to recognize and accept multiple perspectives and ideas that may be discordant with their own (Teo, 2019).

Students today have access to a plethora of resources where people publicly share their ideas and viewpoints—social media platforms, news stations, websites, blogs, podcasts, and so many more. By simply turning on the radio or television, or opening their smartphone, students are inundated with information. Unfortunately, of late, these varying perspectives do not result in meaningful dialogue, but instead sow discord and confrontation (Alexander, 2019). During these confrontations, people typically rely more on emotion rather than facts to support their ideas. In this way, knowledge becomes subjective (Reznitskaya & Wilkinson, 2017).

Reznitskaya and Wilkinson (2017) suggested that schools should not only help students learn to seek the truth (by searching for fact-based reasoning) when navigating all of this information, but schools should also support students in learning to reconcile viewpoints that conflict with their own. Similarly, Shields (2000) proposed that schools should help students learn to embrace the differences that individuals bring to the classroom, working toward building community. In doing so, students gain perspective and deeper understandings of the world around them. Teachers can work to accomplish these goals of truth-seeking and embracing

diverse perspectives by prioritizing collaborative discussion in the classroom (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007).

This study contributes to research on this problem by looking at how students use dialogue to make sense of texts and considering students' perspectives of this dialogue. By observing students engaged in dialogic discussions, teachers, researchers, and policymakers can better understand the social aspect of the dialogue and amplify their perspectives in regard to dialogic sensemaking. The inclusion of student interviews will shed light on the individual experiences of students engaged in the dialogue, focusing on internal growth or change not necessarily present in the dialogue.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (2019) found that traditional forms of teaching (most centered in authoritative or single-viewed practices) prevent students from engaging in productive dialogue and collaboration that have the potential to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all” (p. 10). Students can begin to incorporate their unique perspectives and better engage with and understand material, when teachers provide opportunities for students to be the sensemakers in the classroom by collaboratively discussing their thinking (Applebee et al., 2003).

While not measured on skill-based, standardized assessments, various learning standards prioritize collaborative discussion (Walsh & Sattes, 2015). The English Language Arts Standards included in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) calls for students to “effectively engage in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Many iterations of this standard exist across grade levels as well as non-CCSS states and other disciplines such as

Common Core Standards for Mathematical Practice, Next Generation Science Standards, College, Career, and Civic Life Framework, and English Language Proficiency Standards (Walsh & Sattes, 2015).

Since collaborative discussion is essential to being literate and a core component of learning standards, it should be prioritized in English Language Arts classrooms. This study focuses on a single sixth grade English Language Arts classroom bound by skills-based curriculum, in a district required to administer standardized assessments. Understanding the need to adhere to federal, state, and local mandates, the classroom teacher is also committed to engaging learners. The purpose of this particular study is to better understand how students in this sixth grade classroom use dialogic discussions to make sense of texts, by highlighting the experiences of students who participate in these dialogic discussions.

### **Research Questions**

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do students in one sixth grade classroom participate in dialogic discussions while making sense of texts?
2. What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community?

### **Rationale for Study**

Despite the need for collaborative discussions, most research indicates that teacher-driven, authoritative practices still dominate many classrooms in the United States (Kamil et al., 2008; Kathard, 2015; Nystrand et al., 2003; Nystrand, 2006; Wilkinson, 2017). Backer (2017) added to these findings when he identified recitation (in the form of teacher initiation—student response—teacher feedback) as the dominant process (method of teaching) and product (type of

learning) found in classrooms across grade levels. Additionally, Gilles (2010) pointed out that while students practice and learn reading and writing each day, little time is devoted to practicing and learning speaking and listening. In fact, Kamil et al. (2008) reported a distinct lack of classroom discussion, with an average of just 1.7 minutes per one hour of instruction. This lack of dialogue is likely due to the fact that the traditional, recitation-style practices present in many classrooms, require only simple regurgitation of ideas, brief recall, and the lack of accountability to defend personal ideas or judge the ideas of others (Chan, 2020). These traditional methods do not afford students the opportunity to explore ideas deeply and engage in sustained collaborative dialogue.

If, as stated above, academic standards regard dialogue as an essential component in what it means to be literate, more teachers need to prioritize dialogue by shifting away from traditional practices and employing collaborative dialogue, specifically dialogic discussion, as a valuable instructional tool. This study specifically considers how students participate in dialogic discussion while making sense of texts. While many studies convey the social and cognitive benefits of dialogic practices, few studies highlight the experiences of the learners engaging in dialogic discussions (García-Carrión et al., 2020). At the same time, naturally occurring dialogic talk as a tool for sensemaking is an understudied field in secondary classrooms in the United States (Segal et al., 2017). As evident in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, much of the current research focuses on dialogic talk post intervention, or post teacher development program.

This qualitative study focuses specifically on students' perspectives about and talk moves used when engaged in dialogic discussions. The goal of this study is to better understand how one sixth grade class makes sense of texts through collaborative discussions during naturally occurring learning tasks. Such studies can help researchers and practitioners better understand

how dialogic discussions might fit into classrooms bound by standardized assessments and recitation scripts (Segal et al., 2017).

### **Significance of Methods**

Qualitative research takes place in authentic settings, takes context into account, and assumes multiple truths (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) which makes it ideal for understanding dialogic discussions and sensemaking activities. Several studies found in the literature on dialogic discussion, used linguistic ethnography demonstrating its usefulness in examining various aspects of dialogic discussions (Lefstein et al., 2020; Segal & Lefstein, 2017; Snell & Lefstein, 2018). Qualitative research also takes into account the human in the research (Lichtman, 2013), as every human being sees, hears, and interprets things differently. Since I am interested in the experience of individuals, this is essential to my research. Therefore, I use methods informed by linguistic ethnography to afford me the opportunity to consider how individuals participate within the larger social context (Shaw et al., 2015).

In this study, I use a qualitative approach informed by linguistic ethnography to better understand the community culture in one sixth grade English Language Arts class. Linguistic ethnography can be described as an “interpretive approach which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures” (Copland & Creese, 2015, p. 13). Using methods informed by linguistic ethnography, I can examine the influence of language and culture in routine classroom practices (Lefstein & Snell, 2019).

Ethnographic studies focus on groups of people and the culture they share rather than focusing on an individual (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). Since the focus of this study is the transactions among the class and/or small groups of students as they discuss texts and make

sense of their reading, classroom culture plays a critical role. Ethnographic methods such as the use of fieldwork (in the form of observations), and semi-structured interviews will comprise my data sets. In linguistic ethnography, linguistic data such as discourse or analysis of dialogue from a transcript provides additional insight into the broader scope of the classroom culture (Copland & Creese, 2015). Likewise, ethnographic data, such as close attention to body language or arrangement of students in the class, may help inform the discourse—the two data sets are inseparable and are integral to the study (Copland & Creese, 2015).

While the length of the study is not typical of an ethnography, my established status as a member of the school community supports the use of ethnographic methods. I have taught in the same building for 22 years, many of those years co-teaching with the teacher I observed. I will have to gain the trust of the student participants, but as I am a frequent presence in the building, it will not disrupt their environment.

This study will consist of five classroom observations in which students discuss a text they have read in a small group. Through interviews, the teacher will share her experience with the learners as she creates dialogic opportunities, and the students will share their perspectives and experiences with dialogic discussions. By interviewing both teachers and students, I will have a deeper understanding of the classroom community. Closely studying a classroom bound by standardized curricula and skill-driven assessments where the teacher still creates room for students to engage in meaningful dialogue about texts, can help other educators consider how to create similar learning communities for their students (Segal et. al., 2017).

### **Limitations of Study**

As with any study, this one has several limitations. First, my insider status within the school community must be considered. Students are familiar with my presence in the school and

in an observational capacity in the classroom, but knowing they are part of a research project, or that they are being recorded may alter their words and actions. Some may want to please me or “put on a show” knowing the purpose of the research, while others may be intimidated to participate knowing their discussions will be analyzed. At the same time, the purposeful selection of the teacher participant, as she is a long-time colleague, could influence her participation in the study as well. Finally, my insider status may limit my ability to adequately describe the environment or aspects of the school community.

In regard to the school community, and the classroom in particular, ethnographies typically entail researchers being immersed in the culture for extended periods albeit school ethnographies can be shorter (Lichtman, 2013). Since the extent of my observations occur over a brief period, it is possible that this is not enough time to truly understand the classroom community. As a researcher, and due to the fact that I will spend multiple hours in the classroom, my role may shift from that of an absolute observer to an observer participant (Lichtman, 2013). If students gain trust or a certain level of comfort, they may turn to me during a lesson for direction or clarification. These shifts in observer status may influence my view of the classroom community or analysis of the data (Lichtman, 2013).

Due to the aforementioned limitations, and as with any study using ethnographic methods, the results of this study are not generalizable (Lichtman, 2013); however, qualitative studies can generate knowledge or findings that are transferable to other contexts or situations (Tracy, 2010). In Chapter IV, I the transferability of this study.

My positionality influences the way in which I view the community and analyze the data. I have strong beliefs in literacy practices that engage students and encourage student voice. As an educator, a student, a mom, a citizen, I believe strongly that it is our job to inspire students to

engage with the world around them. Providing students with opportunities to read a variety of texts, in various formats, and across various genres, and time to think critically about those texts, to write about them, to discuss them, to challenge them, is perhaps the most important job of an educator. We need to equip students with tools to engage in meaningful dialogue, share their ideas and open their minds to the perspectives of others; in this way we can prepare students for a future dependent on global cooperation and acceptance.

### **Definition of Terms**

There are several key terms pertinent to this study. In the following section, I define how these terms are used in the context of this study.

**Dialogue** can be defined as sustained talk (Alexander, 2006) in which participants engage with the ideas of others (Calcagni & Lago, 2018), building upon or transforming their own or others' thinking, through a balance in turn taking (Mercer & Howe, 2012), in order to build understanding (Alexander, 2006; Calcagni & Lago, 2018; Mercer & Howe, 2012). Throughout this dissertation, I will use dialogue, dialogic discussion, and collaborative discussion synonymously. A more complete view on dialogue is offered in Chapter II.

**Diverse**, as it is used in this paper, refers to the heterogenous points of view, experiences, perspectives, and understandings unique to each individual student (Cuenca, 2010).

**Linguistic ethnography** can be described as an “interpretive approach which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures” (Copland & Creese, 2015). It uses ethnographic tools (i.e. interviews, interactional data, and observation) to study natural settings and social practices along with linguistic analysis to more closely examine more intimate



aspects of social life (Lefstein & Snell, 2019). In this study I use methods informed by linguistic ethnography.

**Literacy**, a key learning target of many educational systems, not only includes the ability to read and write, but also “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context” (International Literacy Association, 2020). Literacy enables people to meaningfully engage in the world. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization recognizes the need to be literate as it is used to assess the health and competency of communities around the world. They define literacy as “a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world” (UNESCO, 2018). To be literate in today’s society requires collaboration and communication skills.

**Sensemaking** is the “[structuring] of the unknown...grounded in both individual and social activity” (Weick, 1993, pp. 4-6). Sensemaking goes beyond understanding specific stimuli and includes the understanding of complex ideas and events (Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2019). In this study, students participate in dialogue to make sense of texts they have read independently.

**Transaction** is the preferred term for describing the relationship among a reader, the text, and the context in which the text is read. In a transaction, the elements are integral to the wholeness of the situation. A transaction is in contrast to an interaction which would see each element (reader, text, context) as separate entities acting on and impacting one another (Rosenblatt, 1985).

## **Summary**

Collaborative discussion is a necessary component of any educational system and one which teachers need to prioritize in the classroom. Unfortunately, most classrooms in the United States still adhere to traditional teaching methods that place the teacher at the center of the learning experience (García-Carrión, 2020). Using dialogue in the classroom provides opportunities for students to be at the center of the learning experience, exchanging ideas and learning from one another. The literature review in Chapter II will further explore dialogue as an educational tool.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

The overall purpose of this study is to better understand how students in one sixth grade classroom participate in dialogic discussions to make sense of texts. The literature offers significant evidence to support the inclusion of collaborative dialogue in the classroom. Yaqoob (2011) and Teo (2019) noted that teaching practices that value lectures, textbooks, and recitation scripts over student discourse and sensemaking cannot effectively prepare students to be critical thinkers in a discourse-centered future. Despite the fact that research encourages more dialogue, dialogic education is not prevalent in classrooms across the United States (Kathard, 2015; Nystrand, 2006). I believe its general lack of presence in classrooms is largely due to some tensions included in the literature. Because of this, the literature review itself is designed in such a way as to present a multiplicity of views, some complementary and some contradictory.

I begin by offering some clarity around the term dialogue and then introducing my theoretical framework, explaining how I see Transactional Reading Theory and Sociocultural Learning Theory working together within a sociocultural lens of reading to create sensemaking opportunities for learners. Moving into the review of literature, I provide a comprehensive definition of dialogic education, then connect dialogic education and reading events. I examine the established social benefits of dialogic education and finally, consider some of the potential barriers to teachers universally adopting dialogic education.

Multiple researchers emphasized the need to prioritize student talk in classroom communities (Alexander, 2010; Chi & Wylie, 2014; Nystrand, 2006; Rapanta et al., 2020). In general, sociocultural theorists regard talk as a necessary component of learning, since they view learning itself as a social activity (Rapanta et al., 2020). Khong et al. (2019) recognized the usefulness of talk as a tool in education as it helps students learn how to refine their own thinking

processes while sharing, negotiating, and challenging the ideas of others. Furthermore, Chi and Wylie (2014) argued that as cognitive engagement in learning increases, so too does learning, and they identified dialogue as the most effective means of engagement. Keeping all of this in mind, educators can design much needed opportunities for secondary learners to engage in talk opportunities in the classroom (Alexander, 2020). While the definition of talk is broad and varied, this literature review will focus on a specific type of talk, dialogue, which I define below.

### **Contextual Clarity: Dialogue**

Various types of talk exist within a classroom for a variety of purposes and within different contexts (Warwick & Cook, 2019). Talk is perhaps the most powerful tool teachers can employ for both cultural and pedagogical intervention (Alexander, 2010). It is truly powerful when students are actively engaged in the discussion, contributing, listening to, and building ideas collectively (Alexander, 2020). Chi and Wylie (2016) referred to these exchanges as dialoguing. They posited that in order for dialogue to yield learning benefits, participants must engage collaboratively in turn-taking. In their research, Calcagni and Lago (2018) established a clear distinction between talk which refers to “any verbal exchange,” and dialogue meaning “talk that has particular features and educational value” (p. 2). They claimed that through dialogue learning can shift from simply the transmission of material to one that prioritizes engagement and understanding (Calcagni & Lago, 2018).

Cazden (1988) noted that dialogue in the classroom can lead to productive conflict and enables students to address more complex tasks by sharing the cognitive load. According to Mercer and Howe (2012) dialogue occurs when participants listen for and consider the ideas of other participants. Walsh and Sattes (2015) used the term discussion to refer to these interactions

stating, discussion is “a process through which individual students give voice to their thoughts in a disciplined manner as they interact with others to make meaning and advance individual and collective understanding of the issue in question” (p. 33). Alexander (2020) had a similar view of dialogue in that the participants engage in sustained talk allowing ideas to build upon each other. Throughout this paper, I use dialogue, dialogic discussion, and collaborative discussion synonymously to refer to sustained talk in which participants engage with the ideas of others, building upon or transforming their own or others' thinking in order to build understanding.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study focuses on reading as a social process and is situated within a sociocultural view of reading. By combining aspects of Sociocultural Learning Theory and the Transactional Theory of Reading, I examine how students participate in dialogue while making sense of texts.

#### ***Sociocultural Learning Theory***

Sociocultural learning theory is attributed to the work of Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who argued that social interaction plays a critical role in cognitive development (Adams, 2013). Vygotsky situated learning as a social and cultural task deeply rooted in dialogue (Adams, 2013). According to Vygotsky (1978), “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). In other words, human learning is reliant on social activity. Sociocultural learning theory is more than “cooperative learning” as it pays close attention to the “discourse, norms, and practices” associated with specific communities (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). The intent of such learning is to guide students to engage in learning through talk and other tools that reflect the community in which the learning is introduced (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). In fact, human action and interaction is mediated by semiotics such as language (Wertsch, 1991). Halliday (1993)

asserted that meaning making, a semiotic process, is a unique characteristic of human learning, with language being the “essential condition of knowing” (p. 94).

Dialogue, as an educational tool, traces its roots back to philosophers such as Plato and Socrates (Phillips, 2014). Socrates warned that words themselves carry distinct meanings outside of dialogue and argued that true meaning occurs within dialogue (Phillips, 2014). Where monologic views assume single correct meanings, dialogic views assume at least two meanings simultaneously and leave open the possibility of many more (Wegerif et al., 2019). In his distinction between objective relations (“I-it”) and subjective relations (“I-thou”), Buber emphasized the importance of the subjective stance as necessary to dialogic orientations (Buber, 1958). This epistemological orientation extends to the space between the dialogue, recognizing that speech is the link between I-thou that creates a We. It is only by recognizing Thou and the logos of their words that humans are in genuine search for meaning (Buber, 1958). For discussions to be dialogic, participants must be present in the dialogue, open to a multiplicity of interpretations, and be respectful and responsive to all participants (Bakhtin, 1984; Buber, 1958).

Dialogic discussion opens the possibility for all points of view to be valued as opposed to relying on universal truths (Bakhtin, 1984). Classrooms have the potential to be dialogic spaces where meaning is developed and transformed among learners (Wegerif, 2019). Participants in dialogic discussion invest in cognitive growth, but also share a vested interest in their commitment to the dialogue through ideals such as mutual respect and open-mindedness (Burbules & Bruce, 2001). Participating in dialogue not only presents opportunities for the joint construction of knowledge, but for individuals to change their reality (Wegerif et al., 2019).

Discussion is more likely to be dialogic if participants engage in collective (working together), reciprocal (listening to and sharing viewpoints), supportive (free of embarrassment), cumulative (building on ideas), and purposeful (rooted in specific learning goals) processes (Alexander, 2020). In a classroom this means that the teacher is not the sole purveyor of information, but rather the students and teacher work together to establish meaning (Alexander, 2020). A teacher's orientation toward dialogue plays an important role in advancing dialogic practices in the classroom (Bakhtin, 1984; Burbules & Bruce, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Wegerif, 2019).

Teachers who subscribe to dialogic methods ask authentic questions, provide students opportunities to co-construct meaning, and engage in uptake—the extension of a previous idea (Nystrand et al., 2003). Dialogic teaching recognizes the potential for dialogue to further students' thinking and understanding (Alexander, 2020). Using dialogue to make sense of texts, positions reading as more of a social phenomenon. Through this socialization, “transmissions of meanings of culture and connection of generations in the history of civilization” occur (Lazutina, et al., 2016). Students can collaboratively make sense of a text in reading events when teachers create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and honor students' unique text interpretations, rooted in personal, cultural, or social understandings.

In literary theory, the idea that each reader and text transaction is a unique, individualized experience traces back to the work of Roman Ingarden who theorized that a reader's act of responding to a text is just as important as the text itself (Iser, 1972). Reading is an essentially social process due to the transactions that take place during a reading event: the reader transacts with the author, the language used in the text is derived from years of language use, and the

interpretation of the reader encompasses all past experiences and schemata (Au, 1998). In the context of the classroom, this means that each reading transaction is unique.

Sociocultural theory builds on social linguistic theory which values the use of language in the reading process. Meaning is made between the text and the reader and between readers during a reading event (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). According to Halliday (2007), language through this lens serves multiple functions—the meaning to the individual reader and the meaning that is enacted when it is shared with others—making language both personal and interactive (Halliday & Webster, 2007). Language never exists as just itself because we inherit it from others and it is shaped by interpretation and shared conventions (Gee, 2015). It cannot be independent of “other stuff”—culture, politics, values, attitudes, etc. (Gee, 2007, p. 1). This ‘other stuff’ is always present in a reading event and impacts each reader uniquely. The political, social, and economic circumstances, as well as the lived experiences of each individual influence the construction of meaning and serve as a critical part of a reading event (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). This study honors the unique interpretations of each individual reader and how readers make sense of a text through dialogue (a social experience).

### ***Transactional Theory of Reading***

A literary work exists between two “poles,” the artistic and the aesthetic, with the artistic being the intention of the author and the aesthetic the realization by the reader (Iser, 1972, p. 279). Readers make meaning when these two poles converge in a reading event (Iser, 1972). In fact, each text has the potential for several different interpretations by the same reader (Bakhtin, 1984; Iser, 1972). Texts are “polysemic spaces,” open to many or multiple interpretations and cannot be seen as a single product (Barthes, 1981, p. 37). As readers transact with a text and experience blockages, omissions, or unexpected turns in the story, their prior knowledge and



experience helps to “fill in the gaps” thus establishing a unique interpretation of the text with each reading event (Iser, 1972). When the context of the reading changes, or the experiences of the reader grow, these gaps may be filled differently, resulting in an entirely new reading experience (Iser, 1972; Rosenblatt, 1988).

Louise Rosenblatt (1988) considered each individualized interpretation of text as a transaction between the reader and the text describing each reading event as an act among the reader, the text, the time, and the context in which the reading takes place. In fact, the role of the reader is so critical to the reading process that the Transactional Theory of Reading is commonly referred to as Reader-Response. Each reader brings into the experience their stance which is primarily aesthetic or efferent based on the intention of the reader entering the reading event (Rosenblatt, 1985). Readers wishing to glean knowledge from a text or retain aspects of the text approach with an efferent stance where readers whose purpose is to live through the text, drawing on personal ideas and emotions, approach from an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1985).

Reading events draw from both the aesthetic and efferent stances as an efferent reading may evoke emotions as well as an aesthetic reading might result in the retention of knowledge (Rosenblatt, 1985). Rosenblatt established that due to the polysemic nature of texts, there can be no single correct interpretation; however, when discussing texts with others, readers can agree upon certain cultural and social norms to guide interpretations and come to mutually agreed upon understandings (Rosenblatt, 1988). The transactions that occur during a reading event are not linear but are rather an ongoing, dynamic process (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Groups of readers who share a set of conventions for understanding literary works in certain ways are interpretive communities (Fish, 2004). Reading consists of a series of interpretive strategies and when readers employ interpretive strategies each individual may arrive

at the same meaning, or a completely different meaning of a text. Interpretive communities open the opportunity for discussing the meaning of a text with others, but often refer to reading events in which readers share similar interpretive strategies (Fish, 2004). Dialogic discussions on the other hand invite a multiplicity of text interpretations which may have similarities, but also may conflict.

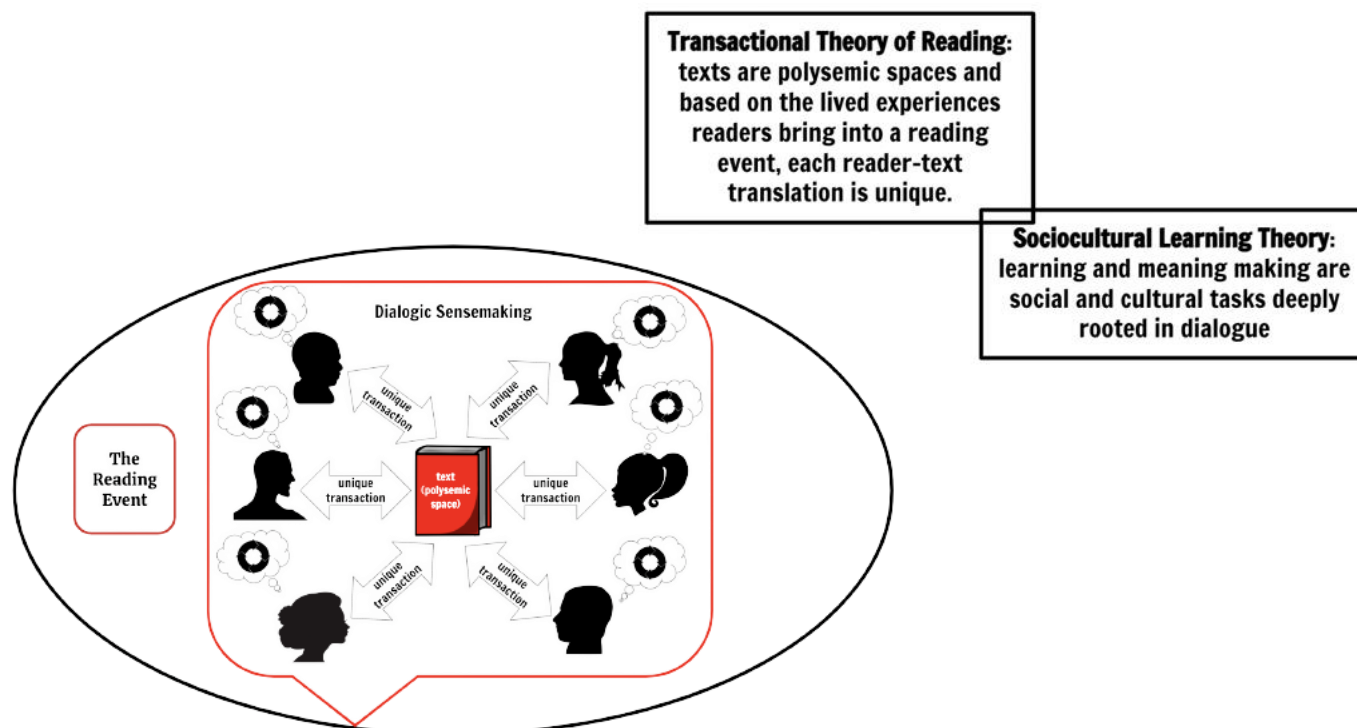
Mercer (2000) referred to collaborative intellectual activity through the use of language as “interthinking” (p. 16). As is prominent in dialogic teaching and learning, interthinking is both cumulative and collaborative (Mercer, 2000). Interthinking can be applied specifically to sensemaking. For instance, Aukerman (2013) proposed the need for comprehension-as-sensemaking pedagogy which engages students in dialogue about a text, reshaping or even transforming their understanding through hearing the diverse perspectives of others (p. A7). Meaning is not predetermined, but rather the combination of individual sensemaking combined with the perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of the social group (Aukerman, 2013). Likewise, intercomprehending involves the social process of making meaning of a text (Aukerman et al., 2017). Aukerman et al. (2017) defined intercomprehending as “emergent, responsive work that readers undertake to make sense of a text while engaged in dialogue that builds and builds on a collaborative ideational repertoire, a range of textual ideas generated before, during, and after reading in order to construct and ponder the text’s meaning(s)” (p. 489). Intercomprehending occurs through the “interanimation” of an individual reader, the text, and discussion with other readers (Aukerman et al., 2017, p. 504).

The following study considers how one sixth grade class makes sense of texts through this type of ‘interanimation’. Each reader in the group transacts with the text resulting in a unique interpretation of the text. Then, through dialogue, readers share their interpretations,

building on their own and each other's ideas to make meaning. This process is represented visually in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework*



*Note:* The number of readers participating in the dialogue during the reading event can be any number greater than one.

## Literature Review

The following review of the literature provides a more comprehensive picture of dialogic teaching and learning, specifically within reading events. While there are many aspects of dialogic education present in the literature, this review focuses specifically on its use in the sensemaking process.

### *What is Dialogic Education?*

Researchers lack consensus regarding a single definition of dialogic education (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). Dialogic education differs from monologic education since monologic education results in transmissive and recitation-style processes where students simply receive information, often just repeating the ideas of others (English, 2016). Dialogic practitioners object to authoritative teaching methods for their single lens of promoting ideas and ignorance towards the different perspectives individuals bring to a learning experience (Nesari, 2015).

Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and scholar who lived and worked in the early twentieth century, considered the transactions among an author, a text, and each individual reader and the role of language in understanding meaning. Language, he believed, was an abstract system situated within the social and historical context ultimately impacting the understanding of the receiver of the language (Bakhtin, 1935). Bakhtin referred to spoken language as an utterance and claimed that every utterance was influenced by these contexts. “Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (Bakhtin, 1935, p. 272). This idea of heteroglossia was central to his view of the dialogic.

Heteroglossia, according to Bakhtin, assumes that every utterance, as it is understood, is unique to a particular person in a particular context (Bakhtin, 1981). Nystrand (2006) emphasized that dialogic discourse is defined by its use of heteroglossia, “the productive tension and conflict between the conversants” (p. 399). Such a way of thinking opens up a space for a multitude of perspectives and understandings during interactions (Nystrand, 2006). Rather than relying on a universal truth or single-lens interpretation of a text, Bakhtin proposed a dialogic

lens, allowing for all points of view to be valued (Nesari, 2015). The multiplicity of dueling perspectives uplifts student voice and strengthens the learning experience.

One basic tenet of dialogic education is the inclusion of multiple voices (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Nystrand, 2006; Wegerif, 2019), but there is still some discrepancy over the significance of teacher epistemology, the idea of discourse form versus function, and whether dialogic teaching is an overall pedagogy or a specific discourse practice (Alexander, 2020; 2018; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Wegerif, 2019).

### ***Teacher Epistemology***

Dialogic education creates a social space where teachers and learners work together to make meaning (Nystrand, 1997). Dialogic teaching and learning requires more than ensuring students are speaking or sharing ideas, it considers how those voices are positioned and valued. Applebee (1997) and Nystrand (1997) argued that epistemology is important to dialogic education. The role of the teacher, the types of questions they pose, their responses to learners, as well as how they structure tasks all relate to their epistemological stance (Nystrand, 2006).

When considering classroom dialogue in general, Boyd et.al (2019) emphasized the need for teachers to have a strong epistemological commitment to creating an environment where students feel safe and supported to explore ideas openly. Their research found that when establishing an environment that welcomes dialogue, the continued use of speculation and reasoning words promotes students to listening, thinking, and talking together to explore and elaborate on ideas. Students gain confidence and develop a culture of trust that results in more critical dialogue (Boyd et. al, 2019).

Johnston et al. (2001) found that the epistemologies of the students in the class closely mirrored that of the teacher. If teachers took on the role of constructed knower (knowledge is

constructed through interactions between or among individuals) rather than received knower (knowledge is “out there” and transmissible as fact) then students were more likely to do the same (Johnston et al., 2001). Through their instructional design, teachers can create opportunities for students to establish their own epistemology toward dialogue.

Beers and Probst (2017) asserted that the teacher can also create a safe environment by the types of questions they pose. Dialogic questions invite multiple correct answers and offer opportunities to “teach kids to look for evidence and reasons” to support their thinking (p. 152). This is different from a teacher asking an open-ended question and allowing students to share their thinking just to provide a previously contrived answer in the end (Beers & Probst, 2017). Questions that do not lead to immediately wrong answers give students a safety net to share their thinking and open doors to discussion. Likewise, Nystrand et al. (1997) theorized specific question types and interactions that promoted dialogic discussion. They emphasized the use of authentic questions (questions for which there is no specific answer) that “challenge students to think and reflect on the consequences of their ideas” and uptake (asking another conversant about something another conversant said) as important to dialogic instruction (pp. 72-73).

When students do not fear ridicule for being incorrect, they are more likely to share their ideas. Boyd et al. (2019) proposed that through “cultivating a repertoire of oratory practices,” educators “create open, safe opportunities for students to share and explore their thoughts without fear of negative consequences” (p. 26). Establishing routines and scaffolding language for students, frames dialogic interactions in ways that allow students to engage in safe but meaningful discussions that build pathways to critical thinking.

### ***Dialogue Form and Function***

Boyd and Markarian (2015) echoed the importance of teacher epistemology, but noted that when engaged in dialogic teaching, educators should not only consider the form the dialogue takes but also the function of the dialogue as a whole. In other words, educators should be evaluating the role of classroom talk as a whole (Boyd & Markarian, 2015). Cazden (1995) noted that considering functions of classroom dialogue are important but that considering language forms are equally important. In other words, thinking about the words that students use in service of the dialogue (Cazden, 1995).

Many researchers agree that oftentimes classroom dialogue is comprised of a three-part interaction between the teacher and a student —initiation (the teacher poses a question), response (a student offers a response), and a follow-up or feedback by the teacher (IRF sequence) (Lemke, 1990; Mercer, 1992; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Wells, 1999). This three-part loop is often indicative of authoritative interactions as the teacher closes the loop and other students do not engage in the dialogue (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Mercer (1992) considered the value of IRF exchanges in monitoring knowledge, or guiding learning. Wells (1999) contended that IRF exchanges are neither good nor bad, based on the function they serve within the dialogue. Nystrand et al. (1997) offered that teachers could engage students in uptake as a way to open the dialogue and extend the IRF exchange. Boyd and Markarian (2015) referred to such a move as “response-ability,” how the teacher responds to the student in the third turn (p. 278). Teachers can use the third turn as an opportunity to engage in uptake, extend inquiry, or any number of ways to extend the dialogue (Boyd & Markarian, 2015).

Alexander (2020) developed a framework that includes a repertoire of talk moves encompassing both form and function that teachers should draw on when enacting dialogic education in their classrooms. These repertoires fall into three broader categories: culture and

organization, patterns of exchange, and from transaction to move (Alexander, 2020, p. 136). The eight underlying repertoires include: the need for an interactive culture, the need for an interactive setting (which includes student relations, groupings, space, and time), consideration of the various types of learning talk, various types of teacher talk, questioning moves, extending moves, and decision, deliberation, and argument. He argued that there is no specific formula or “either or” thinking that equates to dialogic teaching, but rather a combination of justifications (for a dialogic stance, principles, and repertoires) that work together to enact dialogue (Alexander, 2020).

### ***Dialogic Education: Practice or Pedagogy?***

Like Alexander (2020) this study views dialogic education as a general pedagogical approach; however, specific strategies exist which fall into the realm of dialogic teaching. In this way, some teachers may adopt a dialogic stance as a strategy for one particular class period, or activity. Some such strategies include Accountable Talk (Michaels et. al., 2010), Philosophy for Children (Lipman, 1982), and Thinking Together (Mercer & Wegerif, 2011). Several researchers noted that with classroom culture and stance playing critical roles in the implementation of dialogic education, that it qualifies more as a general pedagogical approach adopted by teachers (Alexander, 2020; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Wegerif, 2019). Like Alexander (2020), Kim and Wilkinson (2019) emphasized the need for teachers to draw on a repertoire of talk practices, including authoritative scripts, in order to enact dialogue. Such scripts become appropriate specifically within the context of some curricular structures (particularly teachers balancing the use of dialogic and the need to prepare students for standardized assessments) that many teachers are bound to within their classrooms (Wegerif, 2019).

### ***The Reading Event***



As stated, traditional approaches to teaching continue to dominate classrooms in the United States. This is especially true when it comes to reading and comprehension (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017).

### ***Common Core and Close Reading***

New Criticism, a literary theory that gained popularity in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, emphasized the text above all else in a reading event (Carillo, 2019). While modern interpretations of New Critics honor the text above all else and preach the need for “close reading” (Brooks, 1979), the development of New Critical practices can actually be traced back to the work of I.A. Richards (North, 2017). The origin of this movement was rooted in the fact that the audience is essential to the understanding of a work of art (text) and that the work of art cannot be “considered in isolation” (North, 2017, p. 31).

The institution of the Common Core and close reading practices in the United States has placed the focus less on the reading event (which includes the reader) and more on reading to get an answer correct (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). Sinclair (2018) theorized that the Common Core State Standards have removed readers from the reading experience thus privileging the text above all else. When students adopt a close reading framework they are encouraged to rely solely on the text (Thomas, 2018), and little to no value is placed on the perspectives they bring into the reading experience. Text interpretations developed by test or textbook makers and essentially packaged as ‘the author’s intent’, leave no room for students to have a voice in the reading experience (Ferguson, 2014). Teachers guide students in thinking about texts in a preconceived way rather than teaching students to analyze and think about literature through a critical lens, drawing on their prior knowledge and experiences in the world (Yaqoob, 2011).

Such teaching methods are a far cry from the original intentions proposed by Richards. Teachers who subscribe to traditional methods of teaching reading inadvertently silence student voices and make reading more about correctness than the human experience by keeping students focused solely on the words and not the context or multiple interpretive meanings. By drawing on more reader-centered approaches, educators can teach students to attend closely to a text while also honoring student voice and prioritizing sensemaking.

### ***Sensemaking***

Sensemaking occurs when educators value varying text interpretations equally and they make space for the role of the reader to be prioritized over that of the text (Aukerman, 2013; Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2019). Sensemaking is an important part of comprehension. Students must have authorship of the meaning they draw from texts in the process of comprehending (Aukerman, 2013). Harris and Hodges (1995) defined comprehension as “the construction of meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message in a particular communicative context” (p. 39). In other words, comprehension is taking what an individual already knows and combining it with information gleaned from the text to develop an understanding.

Vygotsky and Bakhtin both prioritized sensemaking over meaning in that sensemaking is fluid, changing with context or situation (Cazden, 2017). More recently, Aukerman (2013) tied the concept of sensemaking to reading comprehension pedagogies. She proposed that teachers utilize comprehension-as-sensemaking pedagogies to place students and their individual interpretations at the center of learning experiences. She defined comprehension-as-sensemaking as the “hypothesizing that a reader undertakes as she wrestles with textual meaning” (Aukerman, 2013, p. A5). She further contended that in order to make hypothesizing meaningful, teachers

must hold each of these interpretations in the same regard, despite alignment with their own thinking, by accepting that multiple interpretations of a text exist. She argued that educators must reserve their personal judgement so students can sense-make outside of an authoritative lens yet clarified that educators should challenge implausible ideas or rectify meanings that are nonsensical in regard to the text (Aukerman, 2013).

Aukerman (2013) also addressed the need for tensions in a dialogic comprehension-as-sensemaking pedagogy which she stated is “not a matter of simply nurturing and celebrating student understandings, but rather of engaging students in dialogue about text in which understandings are transformed through encountering the perspectives of others” (p. A7). Understanding should not be predetermined, but rather the combination of individual sensemaking combined with the perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of the social group (Aukerman, 2013). Such dialogue provides students an opportunity to author their own understanding based on the experiences and ideas they bring into a text and engage in discussions that are more reflective of those present in the real world-complex, dynamic, and rarely with one definitive outcome (Beers & Probst, 2017).

One approach to reading that supports student sensemaking is reader-response theory. As framed by Larson (2009), reader-response allows “readers [to] breathe life into texts through their prior knowledge and personal experience” (p. 108). Woodruff and Griffin (2017) believed that utilizing the reader-response theory with students renews students’ interest in reading because of the connection it affords between the reader and the text as well as its deviation from “correctness”. Likewise, Yaqoob (2011) stated that an advantage to reader-response is that it actively engages learners in the learning process. The reader becomes the meaning maker and is encouraged to relate texts to their lives and the world.

At the secondary level reader-response is increasingly important because it allows students to approach texts critically. Instead of relying on the interpretations of a teacher, students formulate their own ideas and rely on the text for evidence to support their interpretations. In fact, McGinley et al. (2017) argued that reading from a strictly academic standpoint, in search of the correct answer, privileges one way of thinking over another and has the potential to undermine the diversity of perspectives brought by the various religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds present in our global society.

Sinclair (2018) also emphasized the need to view reading as a transaction between the text and the reader. Drawing on the work of Freire, she warned against passive reading or “reading as spectacle” and urged teachers to engage readers in a type of reading that accounts for lived experience (Sinclair, 2018, p. 27). The reader cannot be removed from the act of reading. Inviting the reader in and providing opportunities to connect experience to text are important components of a reading event.

Educators should make room for affect and imagination when considering students’ reading experiences with literature (McGinley et al., 2017). The ability to engage in critical reading and analysis relies heavily on the reader’s ability to engage with the hearts and minds of others. Through stories readers can connect to their own lives, but more importantly they can both empathize with and examine the lives of others. McGinley et al. (2017) determined that affective engagement and imagination helps readers to truly understand the perspectives of others and helps readers learn about the lives of others. The act of reading is “enmeshed in the social, in lived experience, in the fabric of the world” (p. 38) and therefore should be dialogic and engaged in the world (Sinclair, 2018).

Readers who are given the opportunity to access their lived experience, to breathe life into the reading experience, begin to make sense of the world and have a voice in their learning, but considering the role of the reader is just the beginning. In reader-response, the teacher “acts as a catalyst for discussion” ensuring that both individual and collective understanding build (Woodruff and Griffin, 2017, p. 111). In reader-response theory, discussion and dialogue become a critical part of the learning experience and the teacher becomes more of a facilitator acting to deepen inquiry rather than doling out information (Yaqoob, 2011). Reading, when engaged in the right way (as a collaboration between reader and text and a means to understand the world in new ways), can lead to societal dialogue that will strengthen our democracy (Beers & Probst, 2017, p. 162). As the world continues to be flooded with information, the need to create people capable of thinking critically on their own and synthesizing ideas with others, is equally important.

### ***Academic Benefits of Dialoguing About a Text***

A critical thinker, as defined by Kuhn (2018), is “a thinker regarded as consistently exercising epistemic vigilance” (p. 122). In other words, a critical thinker is someone who assesses not only the quality and value of ideas, but also the reliability of the source of those ideas. Kuhn (2018) asserted that critical thinking consists of two skill sets, inquiry skills, which actually function in the service of argument skills. She furthered this definition by stating that recent research defines argument as a collaborative, social, and cultural practice more clearly delineated as argumentation. In this context, argument skills and values must be developed in environments that facilitate “sustained and dense practice” (p. 123).

Since critical thinking encompasses both inquiry and argument, it stands to reason that educators should create meaningful opportunities for students to engage in this type of dialogue

with others. Dialogic education provides opportunities for students to engage in social comprehension through dialogue that explores multiple perspectives and encourages students to question ideas and refine their thinking (Wegerif, 2019). As previously mentioned, the role of dialogue frequents academic standards; therefore, the role of dialogue is recognized as a critical component of academic achievement, most specifically comprehension.

Applebee et al. (2003) used correlational research to examine the relationship of discussion-based approaches and academic understanding in 20 secondary schools. They found the development of ideas that unfolds within the course of open discussion is a “powerful tool for learning” (Applebee et al., 2003, p. 722). Likewise, in their meta analysis of nine approaches to classroom discussion used in both elementary and secondary, Murphy et al. (2009) found that regardless of the approach, classrooms engaged in discussion resulted in high-level comprehension of text, further demonstrating the need for talk-intensive pedagogy. Comprehension in this instance should be clarified as the comprehension of the specific text discussed in class and not overall performance on general comprehension tasks (Murphy et al., 2009).

Sedova et al. (2018) also conducted correlational research in 21 ninth grade Czechoslovakian classrooms to determine the relationship between participation in classroom talk and academic achievement. They found that the impact of classroom talk on academic achievement depended on how actively an individual student participated in the discussion (Sedova et al., 2018). Chi and Wylie (2016) concluded that in order for dialogue to yield learning benefits, participants must engage collaboratively in turn-taking. This research further justified the need for dialogic and talk-intensive pedagogies in a reading event because engaging students

in collaborative discussions deepens understanding and actively engages students in the learning process (Sedlacek & Sedova, 2019; Sedova et al., 2018).

A growing number of studies show that when students engage in dialogue with peers and teachers reading comprehension strengthens (Nystrand, 2006). Murphy et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of nine approaches to classroom discussion and categorized the approaches into the following stances: critical-analytic, efferent, and expressive. The authors found that many of the approaches were highly effective at increasing both literal and inferential comprehension and increasing student talk while decreasing teacher talk (Murphy et al., 2009). Pennell (2014) further contended that discussion-based reading practices, most specifically those rooted in philosophical inquiry, had a positive impact on reading comprehension. Nystrand et al. (2003) came to a similar conclusion in their study of 974 middle and high school students. They found that discussion-based instruction had significant positive impacts on reading comprehension (Nystrand et al., 2003).

In her work of analyzing philosophical inquiry as a means for improving comprehension, Pennell (2014) noted three elements as essential to reading development: dialogic discourse (including high level talk), fluidity of the text (meaning the text is socially situated and the catalyst for multiple interpretations), and readers' experiential knowledge. Hence, establishing dialogue is a critical component to comprehension. That said, Nystrand (2006) asserted that classroom dialogue is effective when used as an instructional method, and not as a "treatment" intended for daily instructional gain.

### **Bridge or Barrier?**

Besides benefits to reading comprehension, dialogic pedagogies afford students the opportunity to learn from the perspectives of others. O'Connor and Michaels (2007) asserted that

it is through dialogue that learners can begin to understand the varied meanings of signs [words] and begin to construct knowledge together. They deduced that the way in which children engage in dialogue in the home institutes culturally valued reasoning practices learners carry into the classroom (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007). These variances in understanding and synthesizing information open the door for student voice in the classroom. Students draw on personal experiences in order to make sense of new information and share these new understandings during discussions. In this way, talk is an “invaluable tool” in the learning process (Elliot-Johns et al., 2012).

Gill and Neins (2014) described dialogic pedagogy as a specifically humanizing approach to learning. They proposed that dialogic teaching could be used specifically to raise awareness of divergent perspectives and oppressive power structures thus enabling students to act as agents of social change (p. 24). Engaging in deliberative dialogue and embracing the perspectives of others prepares students for collaborative dialogue in an increasingly diversified world (Rapanta et al., 2020). Several researchers agreed on the potential power of dialogic education to build democratic principles and prepare students to engage in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue (Cuenca, 2010; Teo, 2019).

Cross-cultural dialogue is essential as the diversity of cultures present in our classrooms continues to expand. Maine et al. (2019) considered this diversity and proposed dialogic teaching as a means for developing cultural literacy. They described cultural literacy as a social practice situated within particular contexts relational to cultural and linguistic diversity (Maine et al., 2019). By engaging in collaborative dialogue, students share their diversity of perspectives building a collective knowledge of the group (Mercer & Howe, 2012).



English (2016) considered the differences evident in dialogic teaching as beneficial since students can find value in multiple, sometimes opposing viewpoints. Through dialogue, learners engage in what she referred to as “limit situations”—situations in which they recognize the narrowness of their own or others’ thinking and work to broaden their perspectives (English, 2016, p. 167). In dialogic discussions, learners also engage in meta-level reflection, elaborate on their thinking, and collaboratively develop meaning (Reznitskaya, 2012). Teo (2019) claimed these are necessary aspects of 21st Century teaching and learning. He emphasized the need for collaborative discussions that build on the ideas of others, weigh the value of ideas and information, and generate co-constructed knowledge as a critical aspect to prepare students for a globally connected future (Teo, 2019).

Dialogic education also has the potential to elevate individual student voices (Cuenca, 2010). Segal and Lefstein (2016) defined voice as expressing one’s own ideas in a creation of ideas rather than reproduction of another’s thought. According to their work, there are four conditions of voice: opportunity to speak, expression of one’s own ideas, speaking on one’s own terms, and being heeded or acknowledged (Segal & Lefstein, 2016). Dialogic discussions have the potential to create school communities in which all student voices are heard and valued, celebrating differences as students gain perspective and deeper understandings of the world (Shields, 2000). Rapanta et al. (2021), echoed the need for dialogue to understand and acknowledge varying and multiple perspectives, as a necessary component of citizenship education [in a democratic society]. The authors emphasized classroom and school culture as critical components in establishing a space for students to freely share their viewpoints and value the views of others (Rapanta et al., 2021).

Mercer and Hodgkinson (2008) emphasized the need for a sense of trust amongst participants that results in students feeling confident sharing their perspectives. Edwards-Grove (2014) also described a need for classroom cultures where students are not afraid to make a mistake or share an opposing viewpoint. In order for the classroom to become a space of trust and open dialogue, Mercer and Hodgkinson (2008) proposed that teachers institute certain ground rules for discussion. They claimed that ground rules can teach students how to participate in dialogue that is educationally effective and safe for students to share their unique ideas (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008).

Dialogic discussions welcome the unique voices of individual learners (Wegerif, 2019) in a social space where teachers and learners work together to make meaning (Nystrand, 1997). Honoring unique voices and the lived experiences of participants in dialogic discussions allows students to build on their identity rather than pushing them into the dominant view of a traditional classroom curriculum (Zipin et al., 2012). Such an approach begins to put students on equal footing rather than privileging the viewpoint of a particular culture or that of the teacher or textbook makers, which is essential when building a classroom community of learners that values each individual (English, 2016). While there are strong arguments for the social benefits of dialogic teaching, some researchers caution that dialogic teaching, if not implemented well, can be harmful to a classroom community including certain populations of students.

Some researchers have found that dialogic practices have the power to exacerbate existing inequities in the classroom (Ellsworth, 1989; Lambirth, 2006; Lefstein et al., 2020; Segal & Lefstein, 2016). It is possible that these issues arise in classrooms claiming to use dialogic teaching, but where dialogic teaching is not truly enacted (English, 2016). Sedova et al. (2014) claimed that while many educators tend to express a desire to implement dialogic

teaching, the realization of true dialogic teaching in a typical classroom is very difficult to achieve. In their work, they found that the literature situates dialogic teaching in such an idealized way that teachers find it difficult to enact all of the principles of dialogic teaching in their daily practices (Sedova et al., 2014).

Due to constraints of curriculum and the characteristics of participants (such as academic learning needs and number of students in the class) there are times when dialogic principles (cumulative, collective, reciprocal, supportive, purposeful) might conflict with each other (Sedova et al., 2014). For instance, if teachers ensure the dialogue is collective (the whole class participates) it might interfere with reciprocity (exploring or expanding on ideas) (Sedova et al., 2014). Additionally, dialogues that require the input of all participants could be challenging if classes are heterogenous—some students may not have the capacity to participate fully in the dialogue (Sedova et al., 2014; Snell & Lefstein, 2018).

English (2006) also expressed concern over requiring participation in dialogue. When building a collaborative community of learners, teachers need to consider the differences that exist within the classroom, which includes language. In a dialogic discussion, the use of a dominant language can have a limiting, sometimes oppressive impact on some learners (English, 2006). Through their inability to participate in the dialogue, students are left out of the learning experience (English, 2006). Lambirth (2006) considered this when he examined the potential dangers of implementing ground rules for talk into dialogic discussions. Ground rules or structures used to guide discussion often privilege the dominant linguistic culture of the classroom, which could in turn silence the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ellsworth, 1989; Lambirth, 2006).

Silence during dialogue is another issue that researchers investigated. English (2016) claimed that dialogue requires silence in order for participants to listen to the ideas of others, but that silence at times can be an indicator that students are being excluded from the dialogue. If students feel their ideas are not valued, or if their perspectives diverge from the majority, they may choose to remain silent, impacting the diversity of voices needed for dialogic discussions and impacting the community of the classroom (English, 2016). At times, however, silence may be a way for students to feel valued by choosing to remain out of the dialogue (Lefstein et al., 2020). This “suspension of dialogue” is one way to protect students and allow them to be their true selves (Ford, 2014, p. 389) In fact, Lefstein et al. (2020) recommended that it is sometimes appropriate for dialogic discussions to embody the principle of the “right to remain silent” as a way to honor the identities and experiences of all students (p. 122). They examined a classroom episode that focused on a moral dilemma and required participants to contribute to a confessional style discourse around the topic and found that dialogic episodes shaped by moral issues have the potential to privilege certain stances while judging others (Lefstein et al., 2020). Allowing for silence protects the voices and identities of all learners (Lefstein et al., 2020).

Honoring individual student voice (defined above) is a critical component of classroom dialogue (Segal & Lefstein, 2016). Segal and Lefstein (2016), found that most classrooms claiming to engage in dialogic teaching actually consisted of spaces where teachers dominated the floor and students regurgitated the thinking of the teacher or the textbooks, even though they frequently participated in the dialogue. They referred to this phenomenon as “exuberant voiceless participation” and claimed it to be a frequent, unintended consequence of dialogic discussions (Segal & Lefstein, 2016). An increase in collaborative dialogue does not necessarily result in authentic realization of voice in the classroom (Segal & Lefstein, 2016). In order to be

effective, dialogic teaching must strike a delicate balance between participating in the dialogue and honoring the diverse social and academic needs present in the learning community (Sedova et al., 2014).

### ***Dialogic Education—Where it Stands***

Traditional teaching practices in which teachers exercise control have been found to dominate classrooms in the United States (Nystrand, 2006). In fact, several studies of contemporary classrooms found that teacher talk and recitation practices dominated between 50%-85% of instructional time (Nystrand, 2006). Classroom interactions exist along a continuum from monologic (recognizable by command and control) to dialogic and despite the benefits of dialogic instruction, research continues to show largely monologic trends in education (Kathard et al., 2015). A large-scale American study of 200 classrooms (Nystrand et al., 2003) found that secondary teachers (8th and 9th grade) utilize predominantly monologic interactions. Segal and Lefstein (2016) in their study in 112 Israeli classrooms (primary school) also found that sometimes what appears dialogic, is still recitation of another's ideas (be it teacher, text, or other student). Teachers asked seemingly open-ended questions, but ended up steering students to a preconceived answer (Segal & Lefstein, 2016). Likewise, Kathard et al. (2015) studied teacher-learner interactions in 15 classrooms (grades 4-7) of low-performing schools in Western Cape, South Africa and found that 88% of the interactions were characterized as monologic. These studies confirm a global need to consider dialogic education in classrooms, as quality of talk is closely tied to the quality of student problem solving, understanding, learning (Murphy et al., 2009), and sensemaking (Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2019).

**Problem(s).** Several researchers cite the following reasons for stagnation in the adoption of dialogic education: teacher to student ratio, valuing written artifacts over oral, lack of teacher

knowledge in facilitation of discussion, and the idea of teacher as proprietor of knowledge (Reznitskaya et al., 2009; Sedova et al., 2014; Teo, 2019). Kathard et al. (2015) also considered several reasons teachers may hold on to monologic principles—belief in control, desire to maintain discipline, pressure to complete curriculum, and lack of training to communicate with learners in interactive ways. Aukerman (2013) cited institutional boundaries as a concern, while English (2016) recognized that discussion-based practices and the outcomes they engender are to some extent “invisible,” making it difficult to measure student success (p. 172). While these barriers exist, several researchers proposed ways to include dialogic education in the classroom.

**Solution(s)?** Aukerman and Schuldt (2017) examined whether dialogic goals (valuing student voice, “interanimation of voices,” and heteroglossia) could still be achieved in a classroom using a scripted, “authoritative” reading curriculum (pp. 413-414). In their observations of an epistemologically committed teacher, they found that with a willingness to use the teacher’s guide loosely, the teacher was able to operate within a dialogic pedagogy. Santori and Belfatti (2017) also proposed a way to work within more traditional frameworks. They acknowledged the need for close reading as it relates to the Common Core State Standards, but proposed that it need not rely so heavily on the teacher. Instead of teachers creating text-dependent questions prioritizing content they deem worthy, students could generate their own text-dependent questions to act as a springboard for analysis and discourse (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). These changes to otherwise authoritative practices shifted into modes of learning that amplified student voice and created room for student sensemaking.

Some researchers have suggested more in depth ways to support teachers in shifting to dialogic practices that promote student sensemaking. Kathard et al. (2015) proposed that one way to support teachers in working to achieve more dialogic discussion is to engage with speech

language pathologists who “have a rich variety of theoretical and practical resources on communication” (p. 232). By engaging in this collaboration, teachers may feel more comfortable in creating opportunities for dialogic teaching and learning. Fitzgerald and Palincsar (2019) proposed a need for professional development that focuses on teachers generating opportunities for student sensemaking, including discourse moves. They also emphasized the need to include such practices in preservice teaching programs (Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2019). Finally, Wilkinson et al. (2017) advocated for purposeful and sustained professional learning to help teachers shift their epistemic beliefs toward more dialogic practices. If educators and educator preparatory programs embrace dialogic sensemaking pedagogies as necessary, then true change can begin to occur in classrooms.

Furthermore, in considering classroom dialogue, O’Connor and Michaels (2007) proposed the institution of a revoicing move—a clarification or restatement of the students interpretation. By taking student-teacher interactions from a three-part move (initiation—response—feedback) to a four-part move (interaction—response—feedback—revoicing) the teacher and the student have a moment where they are positioned as equals in the dialogue (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). The act of revoicing establishes a collaborative effort to explain or build knowledge. Woodruff and Griffin (2017) also considered that the teacher can act as “a catalyst for discussion” ensuring that individual and collective understandings build (p. 111).

Also considering classroom dialogue, Walsh and Sattes (2015) created a framework that ties the Common Core State Standards and focuses on both teacher and student dispositions. They proposed that educators must explicitly teach students effective discourse practices and dispositions that embody skillful discussants (Walsh & Sattes, 2015). Alexander (2010) also provided a framework for dialogic practices. He emphasized that teachers must draw on a

repertoire of types of talk (talk for everyday life, learning talk, teaching talk, classroom organization) for effective dialogue to occur. Considering these practices and repertoires, teachers can shift existing classroom talk toward the dialogic and in turn open the floor for students to be the sensemakers.

One way to combat the obstacles facing dialogic education is to turn resources and attention to the teachers. More strategic professional development equipping educators with the means to act as facilitators is needed to give teachers the confidence to build environments that support collaborative dialogue (Kamil et al., 2008). Administrators and institutions designing learning opportunities for both preservice teachers as well as current educators might consider centering learning around dialogic principles (Sedova et al., 2016). Khong et al. (2019) described four ways in which educational institutions can provide training for teachers: workshops, workshops paired with in-class coaching, video-based training, and long-term on-site professional development (p. 342). Sedova et al. (2016) also emphasized the need for educators to participate in professional development in regard to dialogic or talk practices. Since educators are responsible for creating the environment for discussion, they would likely benefit from opportunities to understand how those conditions look, sound, and feel. Sedova et al. (2016) examined professional development studies related to classroom talk and found that a program's success was dependent on feedback gleaned from video analysis of a lesson. When educators received targeted feedback, they were more likely to change their instructional practices (Sedova et al., 2016). Professional learning is an important aspect to consider when working to enact pedagogical change.

### ***The Future***



In addition to professional education, Mercer (2010) in his analysis of classroom talk methods and methodologies, noted a lack of empirical evidence to tie classroom talk to educational outcomes. According to his research, classroom talk studies and analyses (thus far) rely heavily on qualitative measures. He called for researchers in the field to prioritize large-scale, mixed-methods research to increase the evidence-based measures policy makers use to enact institutional change (Mercer, 2010). Wilkinson et. al (2015) recognized a similar need in regard to research that specifically links collaborative discussions to reading comprehension. Such research would need to center on assessing whether students can transfer the dispositions and practices used in discussion to new texts and tasks. In order to explicitly tie discussion to reading comprehension the research should include experimental and quasi-experimental studies (Wilkinson et al., 2015).

In addition to the educational outcomes, more research is needed to tie dialogic education to socially relevant results. Few studies highlight the experiences of the learners and teachers involved in dialogic discussions (García-Carrión et al., 2020). By giving a voice to those involved in dialogic discussions researchers can better understand their overall experience. This study focuses specifically on students during dialogic discussions and considers their perspectives in regard to participation in dialogic discussions.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with a conceptualization of dialogue as it will be used throughout this study, since there are varying ways in which educators and researchers refer to forms of talk within the classroom (dialogue, discussion, discourse, talk). I explained my theoretical framework which interweaves Sociocultural Learning Theory with the Transactional Theory of

Reading in the sensemaking process. Considering the strong ties between reading events and dialogue evident in the literature, these theories provide a strong frame for this study.

The chapter closed with my literature review which brought into focus a clearer definition of dialogic education, highlighted some of the cognitive and social considerations of using dialogue in the classroom, and considered the use of dialogue in reading events when students collaborate to make sense of texts. I also attempted to capture a snapshot of the current landscape of dialogic education, including potential barriers and solutions, as well as pathways for educational researchers to further study dialogic education. My theoretical framework and the pertinent literature were significant to choosing the methodology which I will detail in the next chapter.

### Chapter III: Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, specifically methods informed by linguistic ethnography, to observe one sixth grade English Language Arts class. Linguistic ethnography is an “interpretive approach which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures” (Copland & Creese, 2015). Using methods informed by linguistic ethnography I can examine language and culture in routine classroom practices (Copland & Creese, 2015).

Ethnographic studies focus on groups of people and the culture they share rather than focusing on an individual (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). Since the focus of this study is the transactions among the class and/or small groups of students as they discuss and make sense of texts, classroom culture plays a critical role. Ethnographic techniques were among the first to be adapted for use in school studies due to the distinct culture found in each school building and even the variation among classrooms within each building (Lichtman, 2013).

This study consists of five classroom observations in which students discuss a text in a small group. Closely studying a classroom that is bound by standardized curricula and skill-driven assessments yet creates room for students to engage in meaningful dialogue about texts, is necessary to help other educators understand how to create similar learning communities for their students (Segal et. al., 2016).

In general, qualitative research is appropriate for the study of classroom talk as it often focuses on how language is used in a specific context (Rapley, 2018). Language does not exist in a vacuum, so simply considering classroom talk through a quantitative lens is not adequate when considering the function of talk in a classroom (Mercer, 2010). Mercer (2010) notes several specific strengths in using qualitative methods to learn more about classroom talk. Among them

he lists the ability to see talk in context and the ability to use examples of talk and interactions in research reports in order to have concrete examples of an analysis (p. 8).

The fact that qualitative research takes place in the natural environment, considers context, and assumes multiple truths (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) makes it ideal for understanding dialogic talk in pursuit of sensemaking. The very nature of dialogic talk is that it assumes multiple truths and perspectives and takes place in a social context.

This chapter describes the participants and setting used in the study as well as its instrumentation, procedures, and relative measures taken to limit bias and researcher influence. To that end, I also discuss my positionality in relation to the study as well as certain limitations.

### **Setting**

I have been working in the same building for the entirety of my career (22 years). Due to the various roles I have employed over my tenure, I have established a rapport with many of the teachers and administrators. In addition, I have co-taught with many teachers and know the types of practices they use in their classrooms. Specifically, as the literacy coach, I have observed or taught with every English Language Arts teacher in our building and know there are teachers who use collaborative dialogue regularly during reading events. For this reason, I chose to conduct my study in my place of employment, a suburban, public, high-performing middle school (grades 6-8) in Delaware County, PA, which serves approximately 1,150 students. Only 8% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, with the average household income of \$113, 777 (US Census Bureau, 2019). The student to teacher ratio is 12:1.

In this middle school, students are members of an academic team. This means that approximately 90-100 students share the same core teachers for Mathematics, English Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies, and Science. Math and ELA classes are pre-established based on

academic level (Enrichment and Grade Level which I will define further in the section describing the participants). This study focuses on students in one sixth grade Enrichment English Language Arts class.

### **Participants**

While the majority of this study focuses on the experiences of the learner participants, I included the classroom teacher in the data as well to gain a deeper understanding of the classroom community. Both the teacher and learners are described below.

#### ***Teacher***

I recruited the teacher participant in this study using purposeful concept sampling, (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018), as this study relied on recruiting a teacher that regularly engaged students in collaborative dialogue when making sense of a text. Having served as an instructional coach in the building for the past seven years, I had first-hand knowledge of many teachers' classroom practices and could purposefully select a teacher using dialogic practices in her reading lessons. In my capacity as the literacy coach in the building, I co-taught with this teacher on multiple occasions as she facilitated sensemaking and dialogue during reading events.

The participating teacher is a White, female, also with 22 years of experience as an English Language Arts teacher. While she has spent her entire tenure as an educator working with middle school students in this district, she spent 17 of those years teaching seventh grade, with the last four teaching sixth. Mrs. Riley's bachelor's degree is in English (Grades 7-12), and her master's degree is in Applied Technology. She is both a reflective practitioner and curious learner. Mrs. Riley is committed to helping students become deeper, more critical thinkers, willing to share their perspectives and explore meaning with others. She attributes this stance to her background as an English major as well as her years of professional learning reading texts

from renowned educators such as Harry Wong and Kylene Beers. The teacher consent form is available in Appendix A.

### *Students*

Students in this study were all sixth graders placed in the Enrichment level English Language Arts course. Students in this course typically perform stronger than their peers on reading and writing related tasks as demonstrated on benchmark assessments (such as NWEA: Measures of Academic Progress) and standardized assessments (such as Pennsylvania System of School Assessment). While it is important to note this characteristic of the group, academic achievement is not the reason for selecting this class. After talking with the teacher about the scope of the study, she selected this class for two specific reasons: a) this particular class had a higher instance of students coming from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Although the school is overall predominantly White, this particular class was comprised of less than 50% White students; b) the teacher noted that this particular class tended to engage in rich discussion. Unfortunately, while there may have been a high rate of participation in classroom discussion overall, few caregivers consented to student participation in the study, resulting in few participants.

After sending multiple emails home to the caregivers of all students in Room 411 (23 in all), I received only a small set of signed consent forms (N=9). A parent consent form is included in Appendix B. All nine students also assented to participate in the study. A student assent form is included in Appendix C. Of those students two identify as female and seven identify as male. For the purposes of confidentiality, all students chose a pseudonym. To give them ownership in the process, I allowed participants to choose their own pseudonyms. With this being a group of middle schoolers, it got interesting rather quickly. One girl requested to be referred to as Noodle.

Of course, the rest of the participants loved the idea of everyone having a food name, and their excitement made it hard to say no. And so, Table 1 is not an actual food menu, but rather the demographics for the participants in Room 411.

**Table 1**

*Student Participant Demographics*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Home Language</b>	<b>Academic Services</b>
Acorn	male	SE Asian	English	Gifted
Jalapeño	male	White	Unknown	
Jello	male	White	English	Gifted
Lasagna	male	White	English	
Macaroni	male	White	English	Gifted
Noodle	female	SE Asian	English	
Radish	male	White/Asian	English	Gifted
Ratatouille	female	Asian	non-English	Gifted
Tomato	male	SE Asian	English	Gifted

**Instrumentation**

Since I sought to understand the experience of the learner participants, interviews played a crucial role in this study. I identified key participants (the teacher and several students for both small group and individual interviews) to gain insight into the learning community. In addition to interviews, ethnographies are reliant on researchers learning about a culture by immersing themselves in the field, therefore fieldwork is also an essential component of ethnography (Lichtman, 2013). I describe both interview and fieldwork protocols below.

***Interviews***

First, I recorded all interviews using a recording device, and then, I transcribed each of the interviews in their entirety and verbatim with the support of a password protected computer program called Scribie. I also replaced all references to a student or the teacher's name with their chosen pseudonym and removed any other utterance that could potentially compromise a participant's identity. Once I completed the transcription process, I emailed the interviews back to the participants for member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The participants determined the accuracy of their responses, and if they found any discrepancies, I updated the transcripts to accurately reflect the participant's responses.

Once we confirmed the transcripts, I hand coded them using In Vivo coding (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). I organized and categorized the initial codes into patterns that informed the development of the themes reflected in my findings (Saldaña, 2021). I chose In Vivo coding for interview coding because the goal of the study was to amplify the voices of the students and teachers who use dialogic practices and In Vivo coding emphasizes the language of the participants in code creation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saldaña, 2021). I provide a more in-depth discussion of my coding procedures later in the chapter. Each of the interview protocols can be found in the Appendices. All interview transcripts are available upon request.

**Teacher interview.** First, I interviewed the teacher using a semi-structured approach (Copland & Creese, 2015). The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and consisted of ten initial questions. A few follow-up questions occurred naturally within the interview. The interview shed light on the teacher's experiences incorporating dialogic principles in reading events in a classroom governed by standardized curricula. Questions focused on developing a classroom culture that invites dialogue, creating opportunities for students to engage in extended



talk about a text, perceptions of student experiences with dialogic discussions, and barriers to incorporating dialogic opportunities. The teacher interview protocol is found in Appendix D.

**Small group student interviews.** Shortly after one classroom observation, I interviewed a small group of students (N=3). I purposefully selected (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018) this group from the discussion participants and asked questions specific to the reading event. The small group interview helped inform my understanding of the students' experience with sensemaking and consisted of questions about the purpose of the discussion as well as individual takeaways. I conducted the interview in a face-to-face format, in the Library during Goal Oriented Academic Learning or G.O.A.L. (a block of time during the school day set aside for independent learning), so students did not lose instructional time. The interview consisted of seven questions with a few follow-up questions and lasted approximately twenty minutes. I met with Lasagna, Jalapeño, and Ratatouille for the small group interview because they had an interesting dynamic with a range of participation during reading event five. The small group interview protocol is found in Appendix E.

**Individual student interviews.** While compiling field observations, I interviewed five students individually. I selected participants for these interviews based on participation in class dialogue. The student interviews provided insight into students' perceptions of dialogic discussions. With this in mind, I purposively selected students based on their contributions to the discussions, in order to gain a range from low contribution to high contribution (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). The face-to-face interviews utilized a semi-structured approach and lasted between ten and 15 minutes. Similar to the small group interview, students attended the interview during G.O.A.L. period to not miss out on class time. Questions focused on factors that influence contributions to discussion, perceived benefits or limitations to dialogic discussions,

and comparisons of dialogic discussion to other experiences of making sense of a text. I selected Macaroni, Noodle, Tomato, Radish, and Ratatouille for individual student interviews. The individual student interview protocol is found in Appendix F.

### ***Fieldwork/Observations and Interactional Data***

Throughout the course of the study, I observed five reading events where students collaboratively made sense of texts. The reading events ranged in length from approximately ten minutes to 30 minutes. Since I did not have permission from all of the students in the class to be included as participants in the study, I focused on small group (consisting of only participants) discussions about texts. I used an iPad to audio record each small group discussion and then transcribed each discussion (again using the password protected computer program, Scribie). Upon completion of transcription and editing, I printed the documents for hand-coding analysis. In all, the analysis consisted of approximately 110 minutes of collaborative discussion.

An important part of the observation process included the development of fieldnotes to capture the physical environment as well as non-verbal gestures and body language present in the dialogue (Copland & Creese, 2015). I recorded fieldnotes in a notebook (paper and pencil) and used a three column note-taking structure. In column one, I recorded the actions of the teacher and captured some key dialogue. In column two, I recorded the actions of the students, and when allowable (due to whether or not the student speaking was a participant) recorded some student responses. The third column contained a time stamp. I bracketed all observer's comments within the first two columns and placed any additional notes or observations at the bottom of the protocol. While the room was vacant of students, I used an iPad to take images of the classroom.

### ***Trustworthiness***

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness is essential to qualitative studies as reliability and validity are to quantitative studies. Trustworthiness is comprised of four concepts: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I will discuss the trustworthiness of my overall study further in Chapter V. Here I address the trustworthiness of my instrumentation.

I established a protocol for the semi-structured interviews. While there were times that I asked a few follow-up questions to a participant, the core seven questions remained consistent (Cresswell & Gutterman, 2018). I used triangulation as a way to corroborate my findings (Cresswell & Gutterman, 2018). I conducted both individual and small group interviews to gather evidence of students' experiences and included how those same students participated in discussions through the use of fieldnotes and transcripts from the discussions. Triangulation leads to accuracy of findings by drawing on several sources to analyze and interpret when reporting findings (Lichtman, 2013).

I used member checking as a method to increase credibility in this study. Following the transcription of an interview, I shared the transcript with the interviewee to ensure I captured their thoughts and responses accurately (Lichtman, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). With their input, I rectified any discrepancies.

I maintained a consistent method in regard to recording and transcribing all conversations as well as fieldnotes. The protocol for field notes consisted of a three-column structure with bracketed observer comments (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I handwrote fieldnotes during each observation and then cleaned and transferred the notes to the password protected computer.

Finally, I kept record of all the data collected and research-related materials, including raw interview data, audio recordings of classroom discussions, fieldnotes, etcetera, to establish trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

### **Researcher's Bias and Observer's Paradox**

I approached this study from a constructivist paradigm as I was actively seeking multiple perspectives and maintained a closeness to my participants throughout the research process (Cresswell & Clark, 2017). Researchers adopting this paradigm actively acknowledge and use their personal bias throughout the research process (Cresswell & Clark, 2017).

I would be remiss if I did not address my observer's paradox. I have a very close relationship with the site in which I conducted research. Besides teaching in the building, I live in the district and my own children attend (or have attended) the school. I coach sports within the community and have many prior relationships with both students and caregivers in the building. I accounted for this during the selection process and while I do have a prior friendship with the teacher participant, I had no prior connections to the student participants.

As stated earlier, I have taught in the building for 22 years and have close relationships with many of the teachers. For the past seven years, I have worked as an instructional coach. In this capacity, I work with teachers to continuously incorporate best teaching practices into their classrooms. Typically, when I observe or work with a class, I "jump right in" to support the students. In the role of the researcher, I have had to take a step back and remain an observer as much as possible; however, that does not mean I had no impact on the data. As Lichtman (2013) stated, "the notion of an unobtrusive observer...is not only an illusion, but also does not recognize the integral role of the researcher in mediating the situation" (pg. 77). Likewise, I believe based on personal experience, that an observer in a classroom has an impact on the

environment no matter how unintentional. That said, I engaged in reflexive behaviors throughout my research, by memoing throughout each stage of the research process and using member checking, when appropriate (such as after interview transcriptions), as an attempt to reflect on my thinking and reveal myself to the reader (Lichtman, 2013).

Qualitative research accounts for the human in the research, which is essential as every human being sees, hears, and interprets things differently (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Since no two students (or people for that matter) enter a reading experience with the same perspectives and histories, the ways in which readers understand any given text will differ. I wholeheartedly believe in the power of dialogue to build understanding. When you give students opportunities to talk about texts and develop their own ideas and understandings, it works. Engaging in dialogue around interpretations of texts, helps kids better understand the world around them and begin to explore ideas about their own growth and societal change.

Giving students time to explore through dialogue has become a passion of mine. Unfortunately, state test makers make authentic discussion around a text a challenge. Since students are required to conform to the perspectives and interpretations of test makers, often teachers focus on steering students to a ‘correct’ answer instead of affording time for students to engage in sustained and exploratory discussion that brings about collaborative understanding based on multiple perspectives (Carillo, 2019; Lewis Ellison, 2019). I think teaching students to talk about texts (written, visual, or audible) should be the highest priority in our classrooms. Listening to the ideas of others, learning from the perspectives of others, and learning to share your own ideas and perspectives are invaluable tools in the multi-faceted and global world in which we live (OECD, 2019). Considering all of this, I must recognize that my personal experiences may influence my perspective and understanding of the data. At the same time, I

believe that my years of experience in the classroom as well as knowledge of dialogue for learning enhance my understanding and analysis of the data.

### **Transferability**

The purpose of most qualitative research is to study humans in their natural environment to understand some aspect of their behavior, culture, interactions, etc. (Lichtman, 2016). Since qualitative research focuses on humans which are unique and relies on a researcher's interpretations of data (a subjective reality), it is typically not considered to be generalizable outside of the actual study (Lichtman, 2013). Tracy (2010) argued that despite the inability to generalize findings, qualitative studies offer knowledge that might be transferred, or applicable, to other contexts and populations. Transferability occurs when the readers of the research find overlap and applicability to their own situations (Tracy, 2010). By examining the specific context (environment, teacher, students, etcetera) of the study, future researchers as well as the reader can determine if the results are transferable to other situations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

### **Procedures**

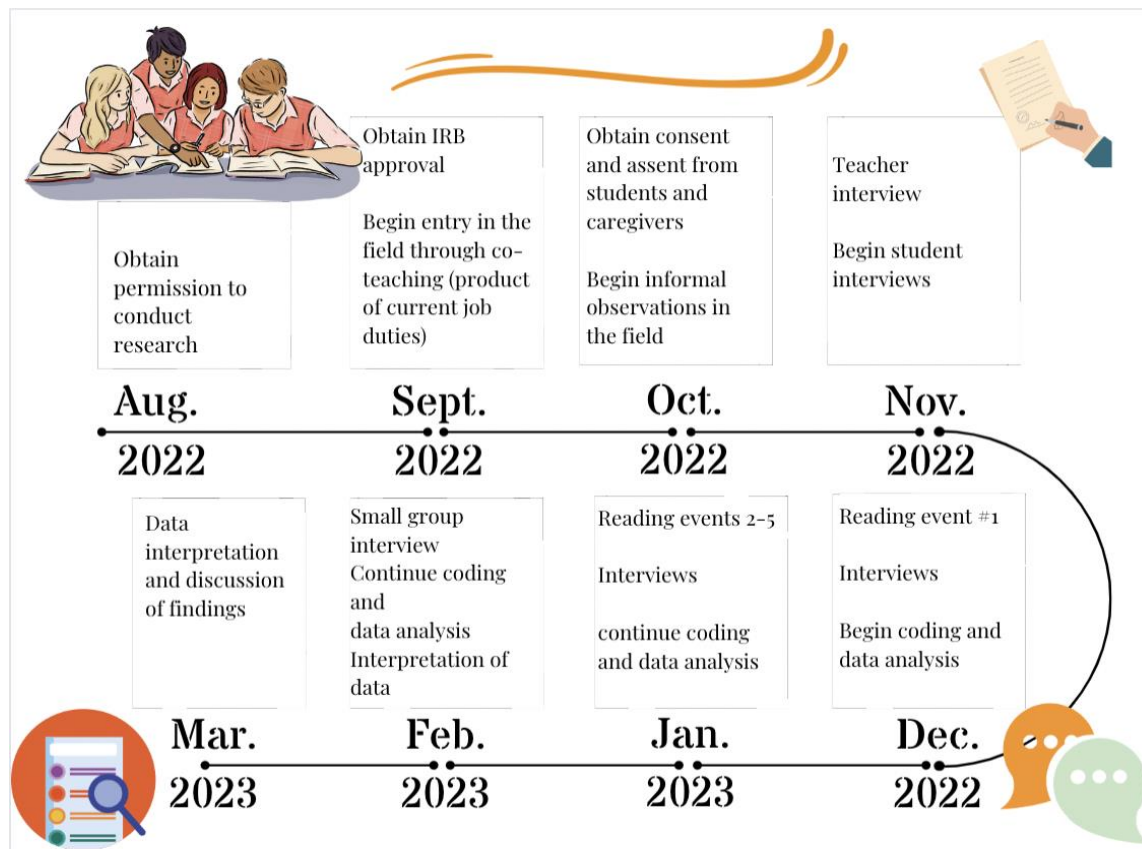
The following sections detail the procedures I followed when conducting the study. This includes a timeline of events as well as analysis and coding procedures for all data sets.

### ***Schedule***

While ethnographic studies tend to take place over an extended period of time, school ethnographies involve a condensed time frame while providing opportunities for detailed studies in natural settings (Lichtman, 2013). The timeline for this study is included below in Figure 2.

### **Figure 2**

#### ***Study Timeline***



### *Establishing Trust in the Field*

As stated previously, I am an Instructional Coach at the site where I conducted this study. I have worked in the building for 22 years and have well-established relationships with many of the teachers, including the teacher who participated in this study. Students in the building are well-acquainted with my presence and position. My office is located in the library, a central hub of learning in our school. All of the students in the building are accustomed to seeing me in the library, hallways, and various classrooms.

While I could not begin formal observations in Room 411 prior to approval from the Institutional Review Board and obtaining consent from caregivers and assent from students, my role as an educator allowed me to begin establishing trusting relationships with the class from day one of the school year. Several times in the months leading up to the study, I had the

opportunity to co-teach the ELA class, conference with students about the books they were reading, share in book talks with the class, or just pop-in for a few minutes to observe. At the same time, as an Instructional Coach, I work across the curriculum with all teachers. While the students in Room 411 did not travel to other classrooms together, I did have interactions with them at various other times throughout their day: observing in a math class or co-teaching a social studies or science lesson. In this way, I had unique opportunities to continuously build relationships and establish trust with participants outside my role as a researcher.

### ***Analysis and Coding Procedures***

In qualitative research there is no straightforward way to analyze the data. I used several different coding methods including In Vivo (Saldaña, 2021) coding for interviews, thematic coding (Lichtman, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 2020), initial coding, and methods used by discourse analysts, such as focusing in on an episode, considering lexical choices, and language function and structure (Rapley, 2018).

**Coding.** “Qualitative research moves from the concrete to the abstract” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 19). Qualitative researchers use the data to come to an understanding rather than testing a hypothesis or theory (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018; Lichtman, 2013). While I used different coding methods for each data set, I relied on inductive coding methods throughout the entire study. Additionally, coding and analysis took place concurrently with data collection to help refine data collection procedures and reduce potential “blind spots” (Miles & Huberman, 2020).

**Fieldwork/Observations.** Within 24 hours of each observation, I cleaned the fieldnotes and uploaded images of the environment to the password protected computer (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I analyzed fieldnotes using thematic coding to better understand the ways in which students situated themselves and used body language in their conversations (Copland &



Creese, 2015). Fieldnotes reflected the entirety of the reading event and were not limited to just the small group discussion. In this way, the fieldnotes and observations added a unique and more comprehensive insight into the classroom culture.

**Interviews.** For all interviews (teacher, small group, and individual student) I transcribed the entire interview verbatim with the exception of any utterance that compromised a participant's identity. To aid in transcription, I used a computer-automated, password protected program called Scribie. After the initial transcription from Scribie, I played the multiple times, stopping it often to revise the transcript as necessary. I repeated this process until I felt I had the most accurate representations of the dialogue (Rapley, 2018). When generating the transcriptions, I used the symbols and notations represented in Table 2 consistently and throughout all of the transcripts.

Once complete I reviewed the transcript with the participants for member checking. Participants read over the transcript and signed a form verifying the accuracy of their ideas. This form is included in Appendix G. Following member checking, I coded the transcripts using In Vivo coding. After initial coding, I created categories to reflect larger chunks of data (Miles & Huberman, 2020). I used these categories in conjunction with the codes produced from the student dialogue to generate important themes in the data.

By combining the words of the participants with what was actually happening during the discussion, I generated a more complete picture of dialogic sensemaking in Room 411 (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). Since In Vivo coding emphasizes the language of the participants during code creation, it is a fitting choice for this study whose purpose was to amplify the voices of students who participate in dialogic discussions (Marshall & Rossman,

2016; Saldaña, 2021). Additionally, Saldaña (2021) proposed In Vivo coding as “particularly useful in educational ethnographies with youth” (p. 91).

**Table 2**

*Transcription Conventions*

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Example</b>
[2.0]	Pause of about 2 seconds (used for various # of seconds)	JELLO: Yeah, um [2.0] I feel like they live in a cold place.
[ ]	All instances of “stage directions”	ME: [laughs] Okay, what does that feel like?
[overlapping]	One student interrupts another student either cutting off completely or finishing a sentence; students talking at the same time	LASAGNA: [overlapping] She like stayed in the kitchen.
—	Student changes chain of thought and does not complete a word	But I mean—
=	No pause before the next speaker	JELLO: What does she tell her? That her mother is Japanese, and that her father is = RADISH: Maybe like African or African American
xxx	Unable to determine what is said by the speaker	It would have been less polite if she stuck ou-out her xxx.

<b>bold</b>	The word/phrase/sentence demonstrates the theme being discussed	The very next day she was like, <b>hey, I want to go see that dog.</b> <b>Why? Like why? Why?</b>
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*Interactional Data.* Copland and Creese (2015) referred to interactional data as data that is collected using a small recording device. Audio recordings only reflect the small group discussions as the remainder of the reading event included students who did not consent to participate in the study. I recorded each small group conversation using either an iPad or a recording device (depending on availability) and transcribed verbatim (with the exception of any references to personal identity). To aid in transcription, I used a computer-automated, password protected program called Scribie. After the initial transcription from Scribie, I played the recording over and over again, stopping it often to revise the transcript as necessary. I repeated this process until I felt I had the most accurate representations of the dialogue (Rapley, 2018). When generating the transcripts, I used the symbols and notations represented in Table 2 consistently (throughout all the transcripts). Sacks (1984) theorized that transcriptions are by nature “translations” as they cannot represent the entire context in which a discussion occurs.

That said, it is common for analysts of naturally occurring talk to use recordings as a central source of study (Sacks, 1995). Dialogue can be analyzed to consider “how social actions and practices are accomplished in and through talk and interaction” (Rapley, 2018, p. 79). For all student dialogue, I read through the transcripts repeatedly, stopping at each conversational turn of talk to ask myself questions such as ‘What is happening here?’, ‘What is going on in this transaction?’, ‘What does this transaction show?’, and ‘What might these words mean or signify?’ Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) define a conversational turn as “the utterances that occurred until someone else spoke” (p. 263). During the first cycle, I used initial coding to

broadly consider what was happening at each turn (Saldaña, 2021). “Initial Coding is breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 102). Initial coding is appropriate for beginning researchers and is useful in determining analytic leads in most qualitative studies (Saldaña, 2021).

After initial coding, I re-read through the transcripts looking for specific instances where students were a) engaged in collaborative discussions and b) making sense of the text as these are critical elements to my study. Using the initial codes applied to these excerpts I looked for patterns and strings of utterances that indicated specific talk moves used by students. Talk moves can be used to describe “simple families of conversational moves intended to accomplish local goals” (Michaels & O’Connor, 2015, p. 334). While the term talk moves typically refers to moves that a teacher makes while facilitating discussion (Michaels & O’Connor, 2015), I believe it is an apt term to describe the way in which students used dialogue to make sense of texts together, as the dialogue functioned in a similar way.

During this process, I considered both the function of the talk as well as the participant’s lexical choice (Rapley, 2018). These talk moves informed the themes presented in my findings. Analysis of the dialogue was integral to understanding how students made sense of text in Room 411. Through analysis of the dialogue, I took into account how students interacted with each other (Schiffrin, 1994) and focused on how shared understanding occurred through jointly constructed dialogue (Richards, 2006).

### **Informed Consent**

Once I obtained Institutional Review Board approval, I began the teacher recruitment process. I contacted the teacher individually in a face-to-face format, explained the study in full

and responded to any questions. I provided the participating teacher with two written copies of the consent form (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018) and asked her to sign and return one of the forms at her convenience. She retained the other copy for her records.

During the last week of September, I reached out to caregivers via the school's electronic information system to begin recruiting participants for the study. My email included the purpose of the study, all procedures, potential risks and benefits, as well as the option to cease participating at any time (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). I offered caregivers the opportunity to attend a follow-up Zoom meeting approximately three days after the email was sent to pose questions and gain clarity in regards to the study. No caregivers attended the Zoom meeting. I sent two subsequent emails prior to meeting with student participants to gain their assent.

Following the collection of caregiver consent, I hosted a meeting for students who had permission in the Library during G.O.A.L. At this time, I explained the study, including the purpose, all procedures, potential risks and benefits, as well as the option to cease participation at any time (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). After fielding questions, I distributed the assent forms and then collected the forms with student signatures. In order to participate in this study, both caregiver consent and student assent were required (N=9). Students without permissions maintained full access to all learning activities but were not included in the data collection.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

There are always ethical and legal considerations to take into account when proposing a research study. This study took place in a public middle school and included the use of children as participants. The purpose of the study was to better understand the collaborative culture of one suburban middle school classroom using dialogic discussions to make sense of texts. I used

ethnographically informed methods including observations and fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of the dialogue.

The Belmont Report summarized three basic ethical principles to consider when conducting research with human participants: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Below, I consider each of these principles in regard to my study.

### ***Respect for Persons***

First, this study involved observing student discussions and interviewing middle school-aged children. Considering that children are designated a vulnerable population (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), I needed to obtain both assent from the student participants and consent from their respective caregivers. To that end, I generated a consent form for caregivers explaining necessary components of the study and adjusted the language to generate an assent form that was accessible for student participants (Skarbek et al., 2006). Additionally, I met with students in a face-to-face format to explain the study and their part in it. I hosted a Zoom meeting for caregivers to gain clarity on the study and answer any potential questions. Students were only included in the study once I received both assent from the student and consent from their caregiver. While the teacher in the study was not considered a vulnerable person, the same considerations were afforded. She was provided with the consent in writing, and I also explained the details of the study in a face-to-face format in order to answer any questions and provide clarity.

Since I used ethnographic methods, I also had to consider respect for the class community, as members of the culture sharing group (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). As an

Instructional Coach in the building, I was able to gain early access into the classroom and established rapport with the group early in the school year. While this was a short-term study, my insider status allowed me to gradually exit the field and not disconnect from the participants in an abrupt way.

### ***Beneficence***

Since I am an educator (which could be viewed as a position of authority) in the school building where I conducted research, there was a risk of unintentional coercion (Martin, 2013). Some students and their caregivers may have felt the need to please by participating in the study. While this imbalance of power was unavoidable, I attempted to minimize the conflict by emphasizing the participants ability to cease involvement at any point throughout the study (Skarbek et al., 2006). I ensured the ability to withdraw was clearly worded in a way that was accessible to all participants in both the consent and assent forms that caregivers and participants signed prior to participation in the study (Skarbek et al., 2006). Likewise, I emphasized this point when I explained the study to students in our face-to-face meeting. I also explained the ability to decline to caregivers in the consent form, and clearly articulated that students declining participation in the study would still be included in all classroom learning activities. Declining participation had no impact on student learning or grading in any way (Martin, 2013).

I provided the teacher participant the same message in terms of choice in participation. Again, I explained the process of declining in writing as well as in our face-to-face meeting. All participants were clearly told they could decline from the outset of the study, or they had the autonomy to withdraw from participating at any point throughout the study.

The informed consent and assent were essential for participants to have a clear understanding of the study and its perceived benefits and risks (Martin, 2013). While the

literature documents several cognitive and social benefits to collaborative dialogue and making sense of texts, I could make no guarantee that the students in this particular classroom would reap those benefits. I shared potential benefits including, learning from the perspectives of others, engaging in open discussion, sharing ideas and interpretations of text, and broadening understanding of a topic, because they were connected to the purpose of the study, but it was clearly stated that there was no assurance that students would reap said benefits.

Anytime research includes human participants, there is also a chance of harm (Skarbek et al., 2006). In this study, the most risk lied in my ability to maintain confidentiality and ensure anonymity (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2018). All of the participants in this study, including the students considered vulnerable, received adequate protections. I kept all handwritten fieldnotes and paper copies of assent and consent forms in a locked filing cabinet when at school and in a locked safe in my home. I stored all digital files, such as classroom audio recordings, interview recordings, typed transcripts, etcetera, on a password protected laptop. All files, digital and paper, will be destroyed within three years.

While anonymity cannot ever be guaranteed, I attempted to minimize the ability to identify any participants in this study. I used pseudonyms for the teacher participant and all participants in all transcripts and reporting. I also attempted to shield the identity of the study setting and carefully explained the difference between anonymity and confidentiality during the consent and assent stages of the study.

### ***Justice***

In order to ensure fairness to all participants I made every effort to record and report data in an unbiased way (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). In my data collection and analysis, it was necessary to



acknowledge all perspectives and consider the voices of all members (with consent to participate) of the culture sharing group. Using the principle of justice, I tried to be thoughtful in my data collection and reporting.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of my methodology including the specific procedures I used to identify participants, collect data, and analyze my findings. I also outlined where my researcher bias might be evident and considerations in terms of trustworthiness and transferability. Finally, I discussed the measures I took to protect the individuals who participated in the study. In the chapters that follow, I will share my findings and discuss the results and implications for future research.

## Chapter IV: Findings

Through the use of fieldnotes, interviews and observations, I gained deep insight into the learning community in Room 114. In this chapter, I present key findings that emerged from the data.

### **It's All a Buzz**

Walking into Room 411, it was immediately obvious that the students were comfortable in the environment. Desks were arranged in small groups of either three or four and students chattered amongst themselves as they settled into their spaces. The teacher was at the door greeting students as they entered the classroom, smiling. The agenda for the period was projected on the board and the students had a clear understanding of what was expected in the first moments of the period. As soon as the bell rang, the teacher called the class's attention and introduced the learning. (fieldnotes, 12/12/22)

From my first moments in this classroom, it was clear that the energy was collaborative. The students were at ease with each other, with the teacher, and they were used to engaging in discussion—this was not a “sit and get” environment. The classroom itself was conducive to frequent, small-group discussions, with the desks being clustered together. It was also clear that reading was a priority as the walls were lined with books for the students to choose from.

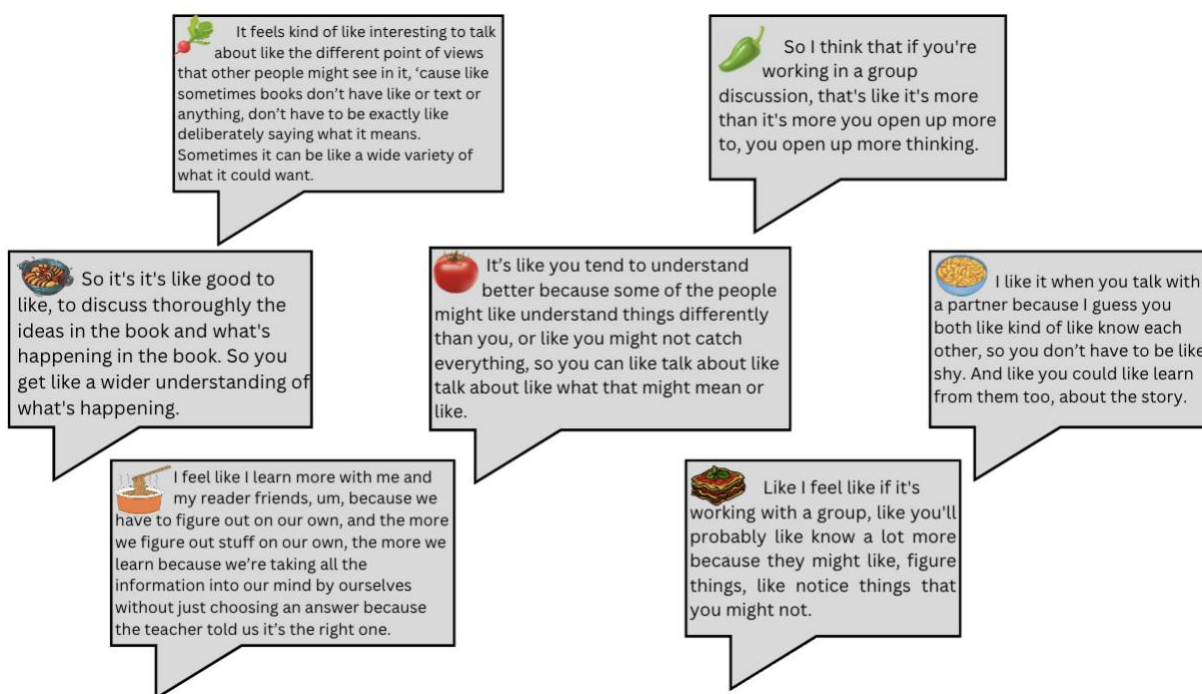
Collaborative discussions that generate exploratory talk and sensemaking do not happen by accident. In this class, both the teacher and the students recognized the importance of learning how to engage in dialogue and the tools and circumstances necessary to ensure that all voices are valued and heard. Students readily understood that collaborative discussions enhance learning experiences:

It's good hearing everybody else's opinions and like thinking, like what can I change with my own that like—. 'Cause sometimes when I think of things, I don't think of like all the things I could've and somebody else says it, and it kind of just like, kind of fills my like idea in a little more (Ratatouille, small group interview transcript, 2/8/23).

In fact, when I asked participants how they felt about participating in discussions after reading a text, the responses were all positive. Figure 3 portrays a snapshot of these responses.

### Figure 3

#### *Student Perceptions of Dialogic Sensemaking*



In this study, I observed groups of students participating in dialogic discussions as part of their natural classroom practice. Specifically, I sought to better understand how students in one sixth grade classroom used dialogic discussions to make sense of texts, by highlighting the experiences of students who participated in those discussions.

To do this, I asked the following questions:

1. How do students in one sixth grade classroom participate in dialogic discussions while making sense of texts?
2. What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community?

In this chapter, I share my findings by combining interview data (both the individual student interviews and small group student interviews), interactional data, and field notes.

### **The Events**

Over the course of two months, I observed five different reading events in Mrs. Riley's classroom. Since only nine students consented to participate in the study, I could not record whole class interactions. Instead, I recorded three small group discussions for each event, for a total of 15 small group discussions. In total, I recorded approximately 110 minutes of collaborative discussion. Group size and participants varied depending on the number of students present and the specific reading event. Figure 4 depicts student groupings. As described in Chapter III, I replaced all participant names with pseudonyms the students chose for themselves (which happened to be foods).

In order to better understand the discussion excerpts used throughout the chapter, I have briefly summarized each of the reading events. Table 3 (included below) provides an overview of all five reading events.

**Table 3**

*The Reading Events at a Glance*

<b>Reading Event/Date</b>	<b>Length of Event</b>	<b>Length of Discussion</b>	<b>Text(s) Being Discussed</b>	<b>Instructional Frames Provided by the Teacher</b>

1	20 mins	$\cong$ 7 mins	“A Room in the Past”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the text three times</li> <li>• Notice and Wonder</li> <li>• Keeper Sheet with poetry terms and definitions</li> </ul>
2	25 mins	$\cong$ 8 mins	<i>Full Cicada</i> <i>Moon</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop and Jot</li> <li>• Let’s Talk* sheet with response frames</li> </ul>
3	10 mins	$\cong$ 4 mins	<i>Full Cicada</i> <i>Moon</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protagonist/Antagonist graphic organizer</li> </ul>
4	30 mins	$\cong$ 6 mins	<i>Full Cicada</i> <i>Moon</i> and “Surface Pressure”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare and Contrast</li> <li>• Let’s Talk sheet with response frames</li> </ul>
5	30 mins	$\cong$ 11 mins	<i>Full Cicada</i> <i>Moon</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It Says, I Say, And So</li> </ul>

\*A copy of the Let’s Talk sheet is available in Appendix H.

### ***Reading Event One (December 12, 2022)***

During the first reading event, the teacher planned a dialogic discussion to gauge what prior knowledge students had in regard to poetry. She provided students with a list of poetry terms and devices to reference during the discussion but did not provide instruction on the poetry terms. Students independently read a short poem called “A Room in the Past” (Kooser, 1985), a poem about a kitchen that seems frozen in time long after a grandmother has passed on. Students

read the poem three times—once for meaning, once to ‘notice and wonder’, and once to consider how elements of poetry contributed to the meaning of the poem. After considering the poem independently, the students participated in small group collaborative discussions for approximately seven minutes. To wrap up the event, several groups shared out in a more whole group collaboration.

Three of the students who consented to participate were absent for this observation. The teacher kept the students in their typical groupings, leaving three sets of two students for the interactional data collection (fieldnotes, 12/12/23).

### ***Reading Event Two (January 6, 2023)***

Prior to this observation, the class began reading a class novel, *Full Cicada Moon* by Marilyn Hilton (Hilton, 2017). The novel was set in Vermont in the late 1960s and followed the journey of a teenage girl named Mimi, who was biracial (African American and Japanese). In addition to racism, Mimi faced gender discrimination as she had aspirations of becoming an astronaut. There were a lot of heavy themes in this novel, and the teacher allotted many opportunities for discussion. Reading events two through five focused on this text.

The teacher read the text aloud for the first ten minutes of class, asking students to ‘stop and jot’ in their novels along the way. Each student had a copy of the novel that was theirs to keep, so they wrote directly in the book. Prior to beginning the discussion, the teacher gave students about six minutes to prepare their own ideas and brainstorm a list of potential literary elements to include in their conversations. The teacher prompted students to take out a ‘Let’s Talk’ sheet (a sheet consisting of sentence frames to access when agreeing, disagreeing, clarifying, citing evidence, or making a connection during discussion) and begin their

collaborative discussions. Small group dialogue lasted for approximately nine minutes followed by a whole group share out.

All participants were present for this observation. With the configuration of the class, this would have resulted in four groups of two. Rather than have four groups for recording, the teacher combined two groups of two, making one group of four, one group of three, and one group of two (fieldnotes, 1/6/23).

### ***Reading Event Three (January 10, 2023)***

Prior to arriving in class, students independently generated a list of character traits they noticed about the protagonist, Mimi, and potential antagonists popping up in their reading. At this point, the class was approximately 100 pages into the novel. The teacher provided the students with four minutes to prepare for the discussion by making any last-minute notes or marking parts of their text. Unfortunately, the discussion in this class was cut significantly short. Just three and a half minutes into the dialogue, the afternoon announcements interrupted the class. Since the students were used to announcements signaling the end of the day, they began to pack up their things and prepare for dismissal, despite it being four minutes prior to the end of the period. The teacher attempted to bring the group together by asking for students to share their thinking as a group, but the commotion made this a challenge.

After the previous observation, the teacher and I discussed mixing up some of the groupings to ensure students were hearing more diverse perspectives. For instance, in the first two observations, the two girls were in their own group and not mixed in with the boys. Likewise, the boys were with their typical partners, so we made just a few small shifts in groupings. As all students were present, this resulted in three groups of three students each (fieldnotes, 1/10/23).

***Reading Event Four (January 19, 2023)***

This reading event began with a short lesson on a reading strategy called Again and Again (Beers & Probst, 2013). As a class, students revisited parts of *Full Cicada Moon* that contained what the teacher referred to as Again and Again moments—instances in a text when an author repeats something that typically signifies a deeper meaning (foreshadowing, conflict, theme). One phrase that repeated over and over in the novel was “drip, drip, drip”. Mimi, the protagonist, and her father used this phrase to help each other remember to persist through the challenges they face in life (specifically when dealing with racism).

After the students re-acquainted themselves with these excerpts from the text, the teacher introduced a second text, a song, “Surface Pressure” (Miranda et al., 2021). The students read the lyrics while listening to the song. This song was about a girl who carried the burdens of her family, appearing strong on the outside, while under the surface she was anxious and afraid of letting everyone down. The refrain in the song contained the phrase “drip, drip, drip”. While listening, students considered characters and big ideas and how they might be similar to or different from *Full Cicada Moon*. Students used their notes as a catalyst for a collaborative discussion. The discussion lasted approximately six minutes, followed by a whole group share out.

To keep with three groups, we asked the students to consolidate for the discussion. All students were present, so this again resulted in three groups of three.

***Reading Event Five (January 27, 2023)***

To begin this reading event, the teacher introduced another strategy called Words of the Wiser. Similar to Again and Again, this is a strategy for students to access deeper meanings in a text. The teacher described the strategy as when an older, wiser, character provides advice or a



life lesson to another character. To apply the strategy, students specifically considered how the words of the character contributed to characterization, conflict development, or theme.

Prior to the lesson, students read a section of *Full Cicada Moon*. The teacher extracted quotes from the text for students to use in their discussion. During their discussion, the teacher tasked the students with filling out a specific framework called It Says, I Say, and So. Essentially, after reading the quote (it says) students recorded what it meant based on their initial interpretation and prior knowledge (I say) and then after discussion, recorded what it might mean in relation to the text as a whole (and so). After collaborative discussion time, groups shared out as a whole.

While the students had a lengthier time for discussion (approximately twelve minutes), the discussion was not as robust for this observation. The biggest difference evident in the data was that the teacher tasked students with recording their thinking while talking rather than before or after talking. Again, all students were present for the discussion. The teacher assigned students to groups in an attempt to see another iteration of groupings. This resulted in three groups of three.

**Figure 4**

*Student Groupings per Reading Event*

Reading Event 1	Group 1 Lasagna & Macaroni	Group 2 Jello & Radish	Group 3 Ratatouille & Noodle
Reading Event 2	Group 1 Lasagna, Macaroni, Tomato & Acorn	Group 2 Jalepeño, Jello, & Radish	Group 3 Ratatouille & Noodle
Reading Event 3	Group 1 Ratatouille, Jalapeño, & Tomato	Group 2 Lasagna, Acorn, & Macaroni	Group 3 Jello, Noodle, & Radish
Reading Event 4	Group 1 Lasagna, Jello, & Tomato	Group 2 Jalapeño, Acorn, & Radish	Group 3 Noodle, Ratatouille, & Macaroni
Reading Event 5	Group 1 Macaroni, Tomato, & Jello	Group 2 Acorn, Radish, & Noodle	Group 3 Ratatouille, Lasagna, & Jalapeño

As noted in Chapter I, sensemaking is the “[structuring] of the unknown...grounded in both individual and social activity” (Weick, 1993, pp. 4-6); it’s going beyond the understanding of specific stimuli to include the understanding of complex ideas and events (Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2019). This structuring of the unknown and digging deeper into the text to include complex ideas and events was evident throughout the five reading events and across each of the groups’ transcripts.

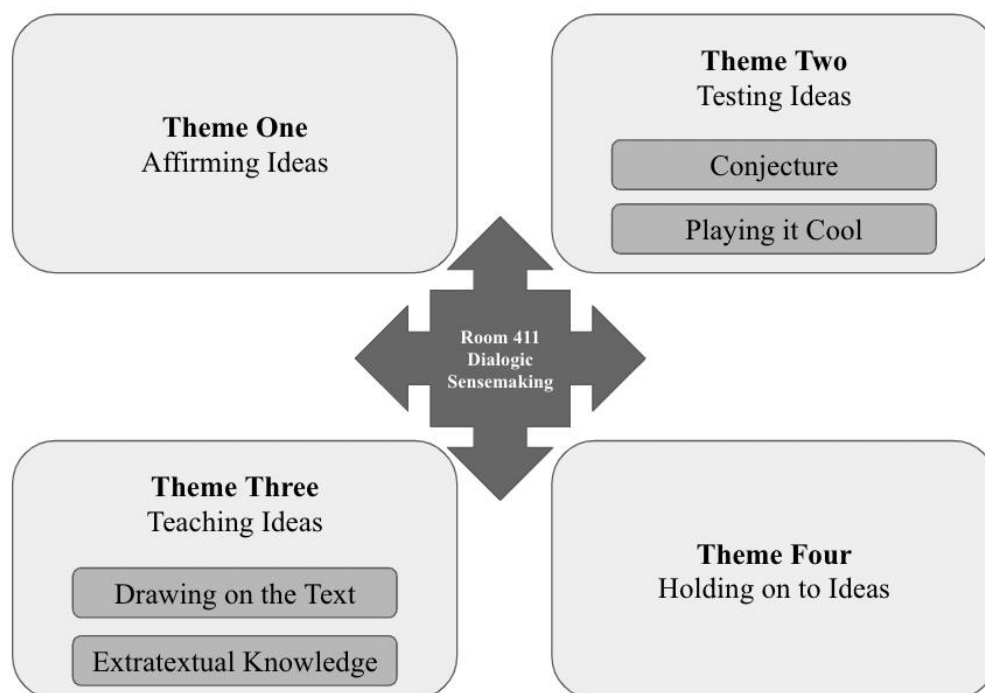
In addition to seeking out instances of sensemaking in the transcripts, I also focused on stretches of dialogue that sounded more dialogic in nature. Since the teacher essentially provided the context for each reading event, the dialogue fell within the parameters of being purposeful (rooted in specific learning goals). Additionally, all instances of dialogue used to develop the following themes also reflected the ideas of being collective, reciprocal, supportive, and cumulative.

The themes I developed reflect how students made sense of the texts during their discussions. To focus on how, I asked myself questions such as, ‘What is happening here?’, ‘What is going on in this transaction?’, ‘What does this transaction show?’, and ‘What might these words mean or signify?’

While these questions revealed a variety of answers, I focused my findings on the talk moves that surfaced in multiple events and within multiple groups that also resulted in dialogic sensemaking. Figure 5 highlights these four themes.

## **Figure 5**

*Dialogic Sensemaking: Four Themes*

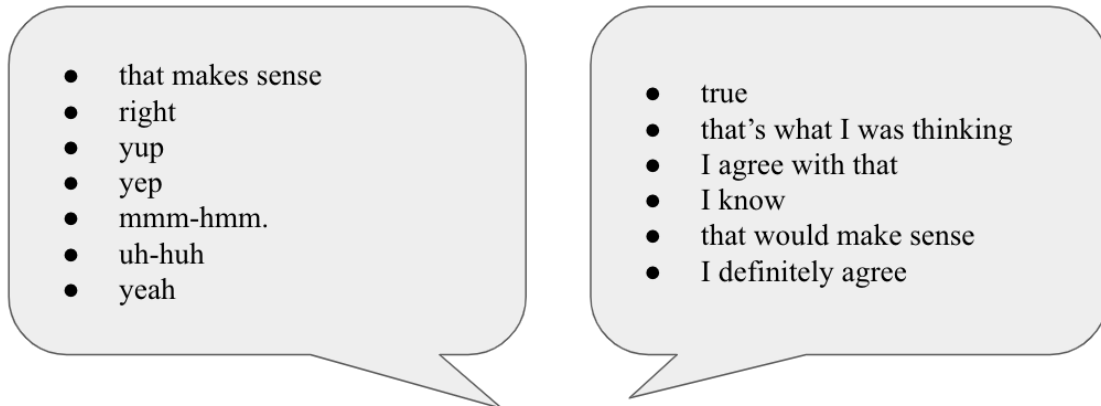


### *Affirming Ideas*

Participants often offered affirmations, recognition of an idea as correct, to fellow students during the discussion. Affirmations, when used in the collaborative dialogue and between students, functioned differently than affirmations commonly offered by classroom teachers. Affirmations, a type of feedback provided by teachers, typically result in the end of discussion as students interpret affirmations as a sign of ‘correctness’. This is commonly evidenced in the initiation—response—feedback loop prominent in many classrooms today (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). While not in all instances, affirming statements during the student dialogue often led to one student or another continuing on with or adding onto an idea, propelling the cumulative nature of the discussion. Figure 6, lists the affirmations found throughout the transcripts.

### **Figure 6**

#### *List of Words of Affirmation*



- that makes sense
- right
- yup
- yep
- mmm-hmm.
- uh-huh
- yeah

- true
- that's what I was thinking
- I agree with that
- I know
- that would make sense
- I definitely agree

The following discussion between Noodle and Ratatouille demonstrates the use of affirmations to propel the conversation forward. They discussed a scene from the novel *Full Cicada Moon* in which the main character, Mimi, was discriminated against while riding on a bus. A fellow passenger did not understand how Mimi's mom could be her mom because they presented as two different races (Mimi is half Black and half Japanese, her mom is Japanese).

NOODLE: I mean it was 1959. I don't really, I mean, I blame her for doing that. But I mean =

RATATOUILLE: I'm sure that they didn't have like, like what—people didn't know that much knowledge on like who's raised with what back then. 'Cause probably, I don't think they had like a lot of people who were mixed or like people from like, a lot of people from different countries. But now that's much different =

NOODLE: **I a-I agree with you** because they =

RATATOUILLE: They act surprised when they see her and like =

NOODLE: **Yeah** and they act surprised when they see her. They don't like trust her 'cause what. She said, no, 'cause she was my mom. She's like, I don't. She's like, I don't believe you.

RATATOUILLE: She's like that's not your mom.

NOODLE: Because like if she doesn't believe Mimi cause she's a kid and she has a different nationality.

RATATOUILLE: **Right** like she's honestly like. She truthfully thinks that, that isn't her mom just because what she looks like and what her mom looks like. And for the other note, oh, I wrote down like she seems happy now, but probably not for long. I was right, so.

NOODLE: **I definitely agree, but I also think** that uh, it will get like, it will be like some obstacles.

(reading event 2, group 3's transcript, 1/6/23)

In this episode, Ratatouille made the claim that the people must not be used to seeing people of mixed races. Noodle offered an affirmation, "I agree with you because" and attempted to add a clarifying piece of evidence to support their thinking. Ratatouille interrupted her line of thinking to continue with her idea, but Noodle offered a second affirmation saying, "Yeah and," and continued on with the evidence she wanted to offer. She confirmed Ratatouille's idea that the passengers were surprised to see Mimi, but expanded on it to add that there was a lack of trust hinted at in the text. After a quick back and forth, Ratatouille said, "Right" and added that this might suggest that even though Mimi was happy right in that moment, her happiness would not last for long. Noodle agreed with this and contributed to the thinking saying that Mimi would face some obstacles. By affirming each other's ideas, Noodle and Ratatouille were able to build

off each other in a cumulative way (Alexander, 2020). This accumulation of ideas led to a deeper understanding of the text as they realized that this one incident may be indicative of what Mimi would face throughout the story.

In this second episode, affirmations functioned more as a green light for students to continue on with a line of thinking. Radish, Jalapeño, and Jello made sense of the beginning pages of *Full Cicada Moon*. In the scene they discussed, Papa chose to drive Mimi to and from school despite the fact there was a school bus that stopped right outside their home.

RADISH: I think the father might be confused about, um like kind of like worried about them being judged =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] **yeah** =

RADISH: [overlapping] because she's if... She's not allowed outside of the property.

JELLO: And also he waited for her and dropped her off instead of letting her ride the bus.

RADISH: **Yeah**, like constantly like making sure, like monitoring.

JELLO: **Yeah**, like monitoring. **Yeah**.

JALAPEÑO: So like trying to like make sure that she's like =

JELLO: [overlapping] she seemed like =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] they like live two miles from town and

[14.0]

JELLO: **Yeah**, um [2.0] I feel like they live in a cold place.

JALAPEÑO: **Yeah, definitely**.

RADISH: They **definitely**, and people def-oh, it says, you remember like when the the woman on the bus said that, like, oh you guys aren't family, she's not your mother.

JELLO and JALAPEÑO: **Yeah.**

RADISH: Maybe like, maybe that's what the father might be afraid of, like that constantly happening without his supervision.

JALAPEÑO: Because maybe she looks, doesn't look like her mother at all. And then she said that, she said that, are you adopted? Because maybe she didn't look like her mother at all.

JELLO: What does she tell her? That her mother is Japanese, and her father is—

RADISH: [overlapping] maybe like African or African American.

JELLO: [overlapping] **yeah** African American.

(reading event 2, group 2's transcript, 1/6/23)

By affirming each other's ideas, the boys in this discussion continued to build on their own and each other's thinking. This resulted in the group having a more whole understanding of the racism the main characters could potentially face throughout the story. They began by speculating that the father was worried about their family being judged, saying that he seemed to be monitoring Mimi by not letting her leave the property and not allowing her to ride the bus. Rather than serving as an evaluative statement of “yeah, you are correct” the simple affirmation of, “yeah” acted as a catalyst for the boys to remain confident in sharing and exploring their ideas. Through this exploration they reached a conclusion that Papa was monitoring Mimi because he was afraid of how she might be treated when he was not around by referencing an early part in the text when a bus rider discriminated against Mimi for looking different from her mom.

Participants affirming each other's ideas played an important role in sensemaking discussions. Through affirmations, students demonstrated their engagement in the conversation

and showed other participants they valued their thinking (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). I interviewed five participants individually, and they each said their ideas held value in this ELA class. When I asked Tomato if he felt his ideas were valued, he replied:

Yep, I feel like they're valued like we're in gr—we're in conversations and then everybody's opinion is valued there. Like if someone says something and then another person has a comment about it, then we take like both, um and then like we have to like figure out like from evidence. Yeah, we have to have evidence for both sides so whatever's reasoning is like is better cited or whatever would be... But not correct but like better. Um. But still, like, both of them are not wrong (Tomato, interview transcript, 1/19/23).

His response was indicative of the other participants I interviewed. Because they felt their ideas held value, participants stated they were more likely to share their ideas. In fact, Radish said:

Yeah, um. It's not like they're gonna say that my thing is wrong. They might try and like hide it, but they don't like deliberately say that my opinion is wrong and theirs is right. They like val—let everyone have like a free, freedom to say whatever they want (Radish, interview transcript, 1/24/23).

This comfort in sharing ideas likely contributed to a second theme that emerged, testing ideas.

### ***Testing Ideas***

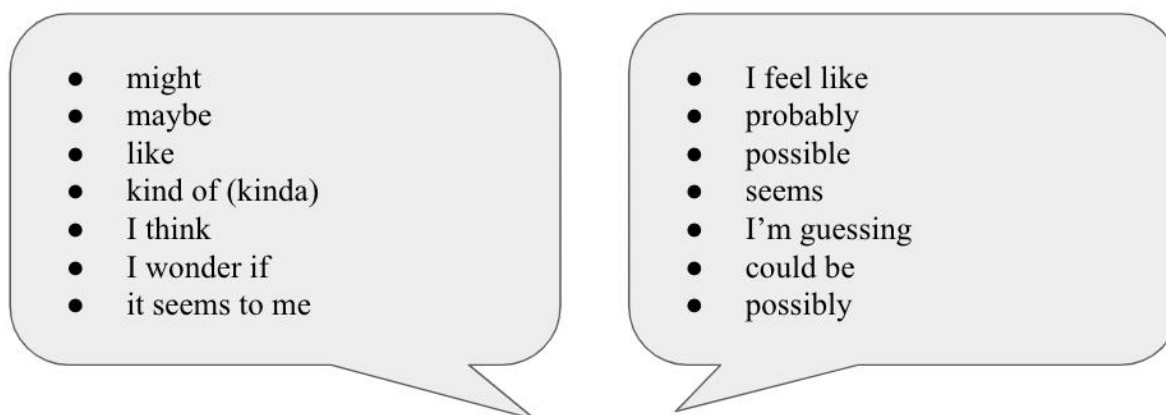
As sensemaking is the “structuring of the unknown,” (Weick, 1993, pp. 4-6) discussions consisted of a lot of uncertainty. As part of the sensemaking process, students tested out ideas in different ways. In the following sections I will share two specific ways that students tested ideas during their collaborative discussions: conjecture and playing it cool.



**Conjecture.** I used conjecture to describe an inference, conclusion, or statement that is offered when there is limited information or no definitive answer. Figure 7 lists ways in which participants signaled conjecture during their dialogue.

### Figure 7

#### *List of Words of Conjecture*



In the following episode, Lasagna and Macaroni discussed the poem “A Room From the Past.” In this poem, the speaker described a seemingly forgotten kitchen, but also referenced the passing of his grandmother. The boys considered the overall meaning of the poem.

LASAGNA: Okay **I think** the kitchen **could** definitely be a **possible** metaphor for the grandmother because **like**=

MACARONI: It **could be** just straightforward.

LASAGNA: Very straightforward. Is it straightforward?

MACARONI: It **might be** about the kitchen but it’s also talking about the grandma in the same way, **like**=

LASAGNA: Yeah, so obviously they’d have to be connected in some way so.

MACARONI: I **think** the grandma and the kitchen are **like** the same, **like** she’s always been neat and like stuff=

LASAGNA: And always stayed in the kitchen, always been in the kitchen. I don't know.

MACARONI: [overlapping] Yeah, **maybe** she liked the kitchen a lot.

LASAGNA: [overlapping] She **like** stayed in the kitchen.

MACARONI: And she always kept it clean.

(reading event 1, group 1's transcript, 12/12/22)

Lasagna tested out the idea that the kitchen was actually a metaphor for the grandma, but also used the word definitely. While Macaroni noticed the connection, he did not recognize it as a metaphor. Macaroni tested out some other ideas saying, "It could be just straightforward" and "I think the grandma and the kitchen are the same". By offering his ideas as conjecture, he had a safe way to present his thinking to Lasagna, who seemed much more confident in his thinking, as was evident in his use of words like "definitely" and "obviously". Lasagna affirmed Macaroni's idea which actually did align with his thinking that the kitchen was a metaphor. Later, Lasagna built on Macaroni's thought that the grandma and the kitchen were the same saying, "And always stayed in the kitchen, always been in the kitchen. I don't know". While this is not specifically conjecture, Lasagna tested out an idea by using the words "I don't know". I will talk more about this type of testing later in "playing it cool." Through their conjecture, Lasagna and Macaroni went beyond the surface level of the poem and considered a potential significance for the poet's focus on the kitchen—the parallel to the relationship with the deceased grandma.

In the next episode, Radish and Jello also tested out ideas through conjecture to make sense of the poem, "A Room in the Past". They, too, focused on how the grandma and the kitchen might be connected. This exchange is lengthy, but the entirety of the dialogue was necessary to their sensemaking and thus I included it here.

RADISH: Okay so **what do you think?**

JELLO: So, **I think** it **kind of** means that, um, [2.0] uh **I don't really know** the meaning but **I feel like** it's **kinda** about how what the room looks like after she's dead? [in a questioning tone] And how **kind of like** it has **like** at the end it **kind of** mentions =

RADISH: [overlapping] Yeah, uh, it **like** mentions how she **like** turned her back **like** pretty much meaning that **like** she **kinda** died. It also says, umm, the bucket of drinking water rippled as if a truck had just gone past, but that truck was 30 years. **I think** that means **like**, it's **like** trying to say **like** this room is very old and **like** the water is **like, like** 30 years old. And **like** so meaning **like** no one had touched this room in a while after her death so.

JELLO: Yeah. **It might** have been **like** the revisiting after a long time. **Like** after 30 years they're **like** going back or **like** xxx xxx. **I don't know**. Something like that **maybe?**

RADISH: Yeah [2.0] Mmm. Just **like** loss of a family member and then **kind of like** the, the title of it's **like** "A Room in the Past". **Like**. This room is **like** from the past and **like** no one goes in it anymore. Some sort =

JELLO: [overlapping] xxx xxx has **like** a. Sorry. It **kind of** has **like** an eerie tone where it's **like**. Umm. **Like** towards the end it **like** has more of **like** an eerie tone **like. Like** "moved through this life like a ghost and when she had finished her years she put them all back in their places" (Kooser, 1985).

RADISH: It really **like** helps you picture **like** with all the **like** tiny details **like** the the rag and **like** the curtains. **Kind of** just makes it feel **like** gloomy and sad when you think about it. **Like** whenever you have **like** you know **like** abandoned houses or something

like **kind of like** that but **like** a li—not as but **like kind of like** left alone and **like** it’s not exactly **like** well taken care of.

JELLO: I mean if **like** everything—it’s **kind of like** this lonely **like**. **It seems to me** that still **kind of like** it’s maybe **kinda** eerie **like I don’t know** [3.0] Hmmm I’m not sure [8.0] Hmmm.

(reading event 1, group 2’s transcript, 12/12/23)

Through their conjecture, Jello and Radish made sense of several ideas about the poem. While they began the conversation saying that they did not know what it meant, they did offer ideas about the grandmother being dead, a connection between the room and the grandma, and the poet’s tone. Although they framed most of their thinking in conjecture, they connected ideas and built toward a deeper understanding of the poem. Radish posed that he thought the grandma was dead and that the room had been left alone for thirty years, by using words such as “like,” “kinda,” and “I think that”. Jello added the phrase, “It might have been like”. Through their conjecture, they pushed past talking about the grandma and the kitchen to thinking about how the poem felt—lonely, sad, eerie. (It is interesting to note the use of like in this transcript. Some instances of dialogue had significant instances of ‘like’ similar to this excerpt. Whether the word was used as a filler, hesitation, or sign of conjecture is not always clear, but it does seem to signify a level of uncertainty.)

In his interview, Radish highlighted this idea of sharing what the text might mean. When I asked specifically about how prior knowledge or experience might factor into understanding a text, he replied,

If you have like prior knowledge to what’s going on in the book, you can kind of piece together things that you don’t know about it...And you can also like with other people, it

kind of like, like you can share your ideas with what the text could [emphasized] mean, if none of you really know (Radish, interview transcript, 1/24/23).

Knowing they do not have all of the answers, or that multiple stances could exist within and around a text, and being comfortable enough to speculate and share ideas, perspectives, and opinions was critical to dialogic sensemaking in this classroom.

In this last episode during reading event two, Ratatouille and Tomato considered ways to characterize Mimi from *Full Cicada Moon*. In the novel, the school asked Mimi to fill out a registration form. One of the questions on the form asked her to identify her ethnicity by choosing one box. Since her parents were of different ethnic backgrounds, she chose to circle more than one answer.

RATATOUILLE: **I feel like** she's also persistent too because.

TOMATO: Yeah—

RATATOUILLE: **Like** with **like** her paper, **like** this was in the beginning it was **like** sign **like** which race you are..and she **like** crossed out a couple, and it only said **like** circle one and she circled two. So, **I feel like** she was—

TOMATO: **Maybe** then daring, not persistent. **I feel like** persistent would be **like** a different thing.

JALAPEÑO: Me and uh Tomato put uh innovative.

RATATOUILLE: Right. Yeah. That would make sense.

(reading event 3, group 1's transcript, 1/10/23)

While this exchange was brief, it demonstrated how conjecture led to modified thinking. Ratatouille offered a character trait of persistent and while Tomato initially agreed with her character trait, after hearing her evidence, he offered an alternative trait, daring. This was an

important distinction that expanded their understanding of Mimi's character. While Mimi was persistent, her circling multiple answers on the registration form was a little different than just being persistent. It showed a certain amount of certainty, or courage, that Tomato identified as daring. *Ratatouille* affirmed this thinking, and the students gained deeper insight into Mimi's character.

In their interviews the participants recognized the importance of these key moments in the dialogic discussions. Macaroni said, "I think when I read it, I understand it, but then I might like hear from a partner and it makes me like understand it more, but like we can connect our ideas" (Macaroni, interview transcript, 1/4/23).

Tomato echoed this thinking, saying:

If someone says like that character is like, has this character trait, then you say that like the character has, is more like this [emphasized], you, it depends on like what experiences like um you like citing the evidence like what really, why [emphasized], you're actually um saying the reason you are (Tomato, interview transcript, 1/19/23).

Tomato's response made a strong case for words of conjecture. By phrasing ideas in language like, "I think" and then justifying thinking with evidence of the text, students can safely share their ideas and leave room for modifying thinking if stronger evidence is provided by another person in the dialogue. The dialogue among *Ratatouille*, Tomato, and Jalapeño exemplifies this point. Each of the interviewees recognized that discussion led to a clearer understanding of the text. By testing ideas through conjecture, the participants felt more comfortable sharing their thinking with the group and considering possible revisions to their own thinking based on the ideas presented by others.

**Playing it Cool.** Middle school students are at a heightened period of self-discovery, making identity and image paramount. In my experiences as a middle school teacher, sometimes students may appear aloof, offer ideas that they pretend have no value, or use sarcasm or jokes as a way to “save face”. Other times, they offer an idea as conjecture, but may tag on a phrase like “I don’t know” to make it clear they are testing an idea and not making a firm statement. Two episodes demonstrated how students may have been “playing it cool,” but they actually contributed to the sensemaking process.

In the following episode, Acorn, Lasagna, and Tomato tried to make sense of Papa’s motives for keeping such close tabs on Mimi in *Full Cicada Moon*.

ACORN: Okay, so another thing that I noticed, the dad said, “Mimi, go play outside,” but he also said, “don’t leave the yard”. =

LASAGNA: Well, he did tell her to go out.

ACORN: **Therefore, she’s being trapped prisoner.** [jokingly]

TOMATO: Yes.

MACARONI: What the heck?

TOMATO: **The dad is secretly a warden of the prison called Cali.**

MACARONI: **Yeah. I know. It’s so annoying. You can’t leave your yard.**

ACORN: Yeah. Okay, but actually, why?

MACARONI: Probably, because like it’s easy to get lost in the neighborhood probably.

ACORN: Yeah, but this book is connected a lot to racism.

LASAGNA: So maybe, it’s because he’s very cautious of those other people. **I, I don’t know.**

(reading event 2, group 1’s transcript, 1/6/23)

In this episode, Acorn offered the initial idea by noting that Papa did not let Mimi leave the yard and almost immediately made a joke about Mimi being held prisoner. While the other boys noticed he was joking and Tomato even built on the joke calling the father a warden, Acorn actually took the opportunity to turn his joke into a real question. Macaroni offered a plausible explanation, that Mimi might get lost (after all they were new to the neighborhood), but Acorn brought the conversation back around to racism. Acorn began the exchange by playing it cool, but used this as an opportunity to broach the topic of racism with the group.

In the next episode, Acorn, Radish, and Jalapeño drew comparisons between Mimi from *Full Cicada Moon* and Luisa from the song “Surface Pressure.” While this excerpt of transcript is lengthier, it is necessary to see how Jalapeño’s claim which he posed as a joke became a key point to their sensemaking.

ACORN: [overlapping] I'm pretty sure I'm worthless if I can't be of service (Miranda et al., 2021) [singsong voice] =

RADISH: [overlapping] If she can't do anything, maybe she, maybe Mimi might feel the same thing. Like she wants to be of service and =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] She wants to have, she wants to have a life. [mumbling] **I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. No um.**

ACORN: She's wondering.

RADISH: She's anxious to be like better.

JALAPEÑO: Yeah.

RADISH: She wants more of like a reason to be there rather than just =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] Yeah, she wants to =

RADISH: [overlapping] be what everyone expects her to be.



JALAPEÑO: Yeah, she wants to. She wants to have a purpose.

ACORN: Whose is this TOMATO?

RADISH: I don't know.

JALAPEÑO: [louder but less serious tone] **Stop talking guys. We gotta focus. [banging on table]**

ACORN: Okay okay okay.

JALAPEÑO: That was really loud. Alright. It says I'm as tough—it says a b--a bunch of stuff about how she's tough and stuff like that so yeah, she's definitely =

ACORN: She's =

JALAPEÑO: The granite. She's the granite, but in *Full Cicada Moon* =

ACORN: Mimi's the =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] drip drip drip =

ACORN: [overlapping] the rain. Drip drip drip til it's ready to blow who-a (Miranda et al., 2021) **[singing] Something like that, right?**

RADISH: Well. What is Mimi trying to even accomplish by making everyone crack?

ACORN: I, cry for what?

RADISH: Crack.

JALAPEÑO: No, her problem is that she's cracking. She's not cracking people, she's cracking problems. [banging noises]

ACORN and RADISH: [overlapping] Ooooh [emphasized].

RADISH: I thought she was trying to make everyone fall under her pressure, so then she can like get what she wished for =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] **harness the power. [giggles]**

RADISH: Yeah. Like she's trying to like—Please, let me do it, on it. Please let me do this until eventually people cave in and let her.

(reading event 4, group 2's transcript, 1/19/23)

This was an interesting discussion, because at moments, the boys did not seem to be engaging in dialogue seriously, but they arrived at some deep conclusions. Jalapeño offered the first 'joke' saying, "She wants to have a life." In the context of the conversation, he meant she wants to live her life. He immediately said, "I'm kidding. I'm just kidding," but this sparked a deeper discussion and as the group started testing ideas, Jalapeño built off his original idea in a more serious way, saying, "She wants to have a purpose." The discussion immediately took a turn off course, but Jalapeño called the group's attention back, again in a joking manner by banging on the desk and speaking in a less serious tone.

Once the discussion got back on track, the boys came to the realization that Mimi and Luisa were both persisting, yet in different ways. One character, Mimi, was cracking away at something, while Luisa was the strong force trying to hold something up. As was evident in the whole group share-out at the end of the reading event, this group developed the strongest insight into the characters. While Jalapeño may have posed his original insight in a joking manner, the group developed that idea through dialogic sensemaking.

This group also demonstrated the ease in which many participants interacted with each other. They readily shared their ideas and posed questions to each other. Several students attributed their ease in testing out ideas to Mrs. Riley setting aside time for frequent discussions and providing them with scaffolds to learn how to talk. Ratatouille explained, "...we've learned a lot about like how to talk about it, how to discuss like specific aspects of like the text, so that

helps” (Ratatouille, interview transcript, 1/17/23). Radish also commented on how frequent discussions put students more at ease because they were doing it every day.

In the beginning of the year, I kind of like felt kind of like I didn't want to like talk with other people about it 'cause I didn't feel like comfortable 'cause I felt like I might say something completely wrong or doesn't even make any sense, and like now I feel like it's more like comfortable or common, because we do this often, so like talking with one another, so it feels more comfortable with talking about what you feel about it (Radish, interview transcript, 1/25/23).

This sentiment also echoed throughout the interviews. And while a few participants said discussion was not necessarily their favorite thing, the way in which discussion was prioritized in the classroom resonated with them and they understood how testing ideas out with each other could uncover deeper meanings of the text.

### ***Teaching Ideas***

Besides testing ideas with each other, participants often took on the role of mentor or teacher to share alternative ways of thinking, confirm ideas through evidence, or share personal knowledge of a topic. Sometimes these moments took the form of disagreement as students worked through their conflicting ideas while other times students used their personal knowledge or an excerpt from the text to fill in a gap in understanding. Ratatouille shared that discussion can play a significant role in expanding your understanding of a text. She stated:

I like it because it's like you can like thoroughly talk it out and like maybe ideas you didn't think of, they've thought of, and things that like you're missing, like some things in you're like what you're talking about and they can like fill that in for you, and it kind of

just becomes like more a like whole thing, instead of like it's like missing some parts to it (Ratatouille, interview transcript, 1/17/23).

This idea of making the text more whole came up time and again during dialogic discussions. Sometimes students cleared up misconceptions or completely filled in a missing chunk of knowledge. I noticed two ways in which students taught each other ideas. Sometimes they referred back to sections of the text and other times they shared extratextual knowledge. I will address each of these in the sections below.

**Drawing on the text.** Participants referred to the text through summarizing or paraphrasing events and ideas, or through rereading selected sections of the text as specific textual references. In either case, participants used the text to bring clarity to a discussion in service of their own or the group's thinking.

In the following episode Radish, Acorn, and Jalapeño compared Mimi and her experiences in *Full Cicada Moon* to the protagonist from the song “Surface Pressure.” “Surface Pressure” is a song from the movie *Encanto* that conveys the struggles of Luisa, the oldest sister in a family who relies on her for her strength of mind and body.

RADISH: Maybe Mimi wants to release the pressure.

ACORN: **Her sister's stronger.**

RADISH: She wants to release the pressure =

ACORN: [overlapping] **Give it to your sister =**

RADISH: [overlapping] and be what she wants to be instead of having the pressure of being what everyone expects her to be.

JALEPEÑO: Yeah.

ACORN: **Give it to your sister =**

JALEPEÑO: [overlapping] a girl who couldn't do woodshop.

ACORN: [overlapping] No **look at the lyrics**. It said "Give it to your sister, and never wonder if the same pressure would've pulled you under" (Miranda, 2021).

RADISH: **It also says near the bottom of the, on the front side**, it says, "I hide my nerves and it worsens. I worry something is gonna hurt us" (Miranda, 2021). Maybe Mimi actually thinks, like, is more of like, the person who's outgoing and explains her reasoning, and tries to get what she wants. Rather than this song, it's um [2.0]

JALEPEÑO: She keeps everything in and her expectations is what shows. She wants to meet expectations. Mimi doesn't. She wants to go above expectations.

ACORN: Above expectations as in being an astronaut.

(reading event 4, group 2's transcript, 1/19/23)

Textual references in this episode were used to reach deeper understandings about the characters. Radish began by making a claim about Mimi. Acorn followed up making the claim that her sister was stronger. He drew the group's attention to the lyrics, specifically the part where Luisa sings, "give it to your sister" (Miranda, 2021). After a few attempts to make his point, he said, "No, look at the lyrics," and shared the specific words from the text. Radish built on this referencing something "on the front" side of the page. He recognized that while the character in the song was afraid to share her true feelings, Mimi was more outgoing in her attempts to get what she wanted. Jalapeño added on by distinguishing between Mimi and Luisa. Finally, Acorn asserted that being an astronaut would be above all expectations. (Note: Since the story is set in 1969, a Black-Japanese American girl would have a lot of challenges to overcome to become an astronaut.) While the beginning part of this discussion was a bit jumbled in terms

of character references (the students mixed up Mimi and Luisa a bit) there was clarity in the end which was evident in each student's conclusion about Mimi.

In the next episode, Tomato and Macaroni, disputed the meaning of a part of the same text, but eventually made sense of the excerpt.

MACARONI: Sorry. **This quote shows** that Miss Oliver is a good person.

TOMATO: Not Miss Oliver Miss Stanton.

MACARONI: **It says** Miss Oliver.

TOMATO: That's Miss Stanton. Miss Oliver is Mimi Oliver.

MACARONI: Oh.

TOMATO: I, ha, Mac! [emphasized]

MACARONI: **It says** Miss Oliver, though.

TOMATO: Ugh. It's Mrs. Stanton talking.

MACARONI: Okay. I think. This quote.

TOMATO: Read the book.

MACARONI: **This quote shows.**

TOMATO: Index card. Index card. **Look for the page with the index card.** It's Miss Stanton talking to Miss Oliver who is [emphasized] Mimi.

MACARONI: Well, that's confusing. Okay. So.

TOMATO: It's a conversation with Mrs. Stan-ton [emphasized].

MACARONI: Okay. Sure.

(reading event 4, group 1's transcript, 1/27/23)

While this was less about making sense of the text as a whole and more about making sense of a small excerpt, the exchange was meaningful. Tomato prompted Macaroni to reread the

section of the text where it referenced Miss Oliver. Macaroni believed the section of the text was about a character named Miss Oliver offering advice. Tomato recognized that the section of text showed the teacher, Miss Stanton, referring to Mimi Oliver, the main character, in a more formal way (Miss Oliver). Through directing him back into the text and even having him reread the part marked with the index card, Tomato helped Macaroni realize that Miss Oliver and Mimi were the same person. This was actually a critical part in the story because Miss Stanton was one of the few allies that Mimi had at this point in her life and by misinterpreting this part of the story, Macaroni may have missed that allyship. His transaction with Tomato cleared up his misconceptions.

By using the text, Tomato reminded Macaroni that Mimi's last name was Oliver. Macaroni had forgotten this critical piece of information. Filling in the gaps (Iser, 1972) or reminding partners of forgotten text was important to dialogic sensemaking and the participants recognized this a well. Radish told me that discussion "helps like bring up stuff that you might have forgot about the text while reading it" (Radish, interview transcript, 1/25/23). However, drawing on the text was not the only way students served as teachers during discussion. At times, their extratextual knowledge served as a powerful teaching tool.

**Extratextual Knowledge.** While the participants relied heavily on the text throughout many of their discussions, there were other points in their dialogue when teaching moments occurred using extratextual knowledge. The experiential or background knowledge that some students contributed to the sensemaking often resulted in moments of clarity for individuals, or the group as a whole.

In the following example, Radish, Jalapeño, and Jello made sense of the setting of the novel, *Full Cicada Moon*. The historical context of the setting played a significant role in the conflicts Mimi faced.

RADISH: Probably society. Probably a bit of both, but mostly society ‘cause like already xxx ‘cause xxx racist xxx.

JALAPEÑO: It says this book takes place in the 1960s.

JELLO: 1969. Wait when does that like the Black period of racism end?

RADISH: **It was sometime in 1960s.**

JELLO: Maybe it was like 1970s?

RADISH: **Well, I mean it’s not just gonna go away like that** [snaps fingers].

JALAPEÑO: I know. It’s probably gonna take like several years ‘cause, it’s not like people are just gonna forget about it.

JELLO: So probably like several generations.

JALAPEÑO: Wait. So **She was definitely African American from the picture** and xx xxx.

JELLO: I think the *Full Cicada Moon*, maybe the moon’s like something she likes [2.0]

RADISH: Yeah.

JALAPEÑO: Like astronauts and stuff like that. Space.

RADISH: But why is it cicadas?

JELLO: **Is it like, it’s the year where the cicadas come out of the ground and storm people?**

JALEPEÑO: Maybe. It was like last year.

RADISH: What?



**JALAPEÑO: Wasn't last year like 13 years for the cicadas coming out of the ground? xxx.**

RADISH: I don't remember that.

JELLO: It was last summer.

(reading event 2, group 1's transcript, 1/6/23)

The boys began the discussion thinking about how society caused a conflict due to the racism in the town. As they tried to better understand the timing of historical events and the setting of the story, Jalapeño asked about the Civil Rights Movement (although he referred to it as the ending of the Black period of racism). Radish suggested that it was sometime in the 1960s. This did not coincide with the setting, so Jalapeño wondered if Radish meant the 1970s. Then the boys conjectured about the time it might take for racist ideas to dissipate following the movement, realizing that while the Civil Rights Movement may have already taken place, the town was still holding onto some of its racist beliefs.

The discussion then veered toward the title to consider if it might hold significance to the setting. Radish asked specifically about the cicadas and Jalapeño and Jello filled in with their prior knowledge (extratextual knowledge). Jello remembered that the cicadas “come out of the ground and storm people.” Jalapeño also contributed prior knowledge that the storming happens every so many years and that he thought it just happened last year. Radish did not remember the cicada event from last summer. While the boys did not make the final leap as to the significance of the title, this was a great start to making sense of why the book is titled *Full Cicada Moon*. If this conversation took place after reading further, it would be interesting to see if they could tie the first part of their conversation about racism to the second part of their conversation about the cicadas storming people. In a way, Mimi was the cicada storm causing people to change.

Teaching ideas was one of the biggest values participants found in dialogic discussion. They all understood that texts hold multiple meanings for different people and that our understanding builds as we share those ideas with each other (Aukerman, 2013; Mercer, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1988). Tomato summarized this idea of teaching ideas well:

Um. I feel like it's like I-I can talk about the text and it's like it's like tend to understand better because some of the people might like understand things differently than you, or like you might not catch anything, so you can like talk about like what that might mean or like... Uh... Li-That's it (Tomato, interview transcript, 1/19/23).

Even with this mindset, however, there were moments in the dialogue, where students had to truly persist for the group to consider their perspective or idea.

### ***Holding onto Ideas***

Not all recorded dialogue could be classified as dialogic sensemaking. Sometimes participants dismissed ideas, veered off topic, or lost focus. Sometimes other participants allowed this to happen and other times, certain participants held on, trying to keep their ideas as a central focus of the discussion. The next two transcripts shed light on this.

In the following transaction, Ratatouille and Noodle discussed conflicts from the exposition of *Full Cicada Moon*.

RATATOUILLE: She probably thinks. Yeah. Her mom doesn't exactly like her because she's mixed. Right? And I feel like it really shows like not many people know what mixed people look like

NOODLE: And it also shows how rude people can be and—**What was it called?**

RATATOUILLE: [overlapping] I think it's called foresh =

NOODLE: [overlapping] **What was the, the aggression thing?**

RATATOUILLE: It's kind of foreshadowing, I think. What's going to happen to her in school because I think she'll get like xxx =

NOODLE: **What was the tiny aggression part?**

RATATOUILLE: Yeah. That was, it was a microaggression.

NOODLE: **Oh, I see. Like that was a microaggression.** What the lady did to her. =

RATATOUILLE: Right. =

NOODLE: 'Cause it was so mean.

RATATOUILLE: 'Cause like she was just asking. She's adopted. Sometimes, usually that's just an aggression, in general, but like she was asking that because she doesn't look like exactly like her mom.

NOODLE: That's a big aggression.

RATATOUILLE: Right.

NOODLE: I mean it was 1959. I don't really, I mean I blame her for doing that, but I mean =

RATATOUILLE: I'm sure that they didn't have like, like. What people didn't know, that much knowledge on like who's raised with what and then 'cause probably I don't think they had like a lot of people who were mixed or like people from like, a lot of people from different countries. But now that's much different =

NOODLE: I a-I agree with you because they act surprised when they see her and like =

RATATOUILLE: Yeah, and they act surprised when they see her. They don't like trust her 'cause what she said. No 'cause she said my mom, she's like, I don't. She's like I don't believe you.

(reading event 2, group 3's transcript, 1/6/23)

Early in the discussion, Ratatouille referenced a part of the text where a woman discriminated against Mimi because she and her mom did not present as the same race. Noodle struggled to find the term for this and asked, “What was it called?” Ratatouille started to talk about foreshadowing, but Noodle cut her off and asked again. Again, Ratatouille tried to discuss how this might foreshadow events at the school, but Noodle held onto her idea, asking more clearly about the “tiny aggression part.” While this might just seem like an attempt to clarify terminology, the exchange about the microaggression, which Noodle eventually labeled a “big aggression” actually led to the girls having a deeper understanding of the people of the community and their lack of experience with and understanding of people of mixed races. Had Noodle not held on to her idea, this transaction and deeper understanding may not have transpired.

In the next example, a group of boys also discussed the beginning of the novel, *Full Cicada Moon*, but chose to focus on a different conflict emerging.

ACORN: One question though. The moment— [banging noise]. Lasagna, you're not talking.

LASAGNA: I know.

ACORN: Alright, so one question. **She saw the dog one time, right?**

TOMATO: Yeah.

ACORN: For like two seconds. The very next day she was like, **hey, I want to go see that dog. Why? Like why? Why?**

TOMATO: Because she's curious.

LASAGNA: She likes dogs. I don't know. Yeah.

MACARONI: 'Cause she doesn't have dogs because she wants a dog. That's why. Is that so hard?

LASAGNA: Inaudible.

ACORN: **I wrote, I wrote. I also made the prediction, the owner of the dog that Mimi loves is going to become friends with Mimi.**

MACARONI: I disagree. I think it's going to be the opposite. I think the person, not the kid, the dad or mom who owns the dog isn't going to let Mimi ever like see it. =

TOMATO: Yeah.

MACARONI: [overlapping] Or like she's purposely trying not because of the color =

ACORN: [overlapping] there's a there's a book on that =

MACARONI: [overlapping] I bet the kid, I bet the kid will, like, will like kinda like, like her as a friend, but the the parents won't let uh let him like like her.

(reading event 2, group 1's transcript, 1/6/23)

This event was interesting because oftentimes, when students changed the subject, tried to dismiss, or played an idea off as strange, participants dropped the idea. In this instance, Acorn posed the idea that the dog must be significant. In short, he said Mimi saw the dog for less than two seconds, but the author still felt the need to tell the reader about the dog, and mentioned the dog a second time. Tomato chalked it up to her being curious. Lasagna conjectured she just liked dogs, and Macaroni suggested it was because she wanted a dog. Acorn brought it back around, saying his prediction was that Mimi and the dog's owner would become friends. He recognized a deeper meaning for the introduction and focus of the dog and wanted to make sure the group talked about it. His recognition of this prompted the other boys to disagree, build off of, and eventually draw conclusions about the significance of the dog.

This theme of holding onto an idea was not always evident in discussions. At times, participants completely dismissed the ideas of others (I briefly discuss this later in the chapter). Whether or not participants felt comfortable holding onto an idea may be attributed to their comfort level in the grouping. Several students mentioned that they felt more comfortable sharing their thinking with small groups, or even more so in partnerships. They felt that Mrs. Riley carefully selected who they would pair with to ensure they would feel comfortable and confident in sharing their ideas. When these instances of holding on emerged, students were in groups or pairings with other participants they had frequent transactions with.

### **Barriers to Dialogic Sensemaking**

The dialogue represented thus far in this chapter were representative of the dialogic sensemaking that took place in Room 411. It is important to note, however, that student discussions were not always focused or indicative of dialogic sensemaking. I noticed three specific barriers that inhibited dialogic sensemaking that I will briefly mention below.

### ***Tangents***

Tangents describe moments in the discussion when students lost focus on the topic of discussion. This took a few different forms in the dialogue. Earlier, I described one way that students tested ideas as playing it cool. While there were periods of students playing it cool that resulted in sensemaking, there were other times where these moments completely interrupted the sensemaking process. Participants making jokes, acting nonchalant, or using sarcasm sometimes hyped students up or made them so silly that they could not refocus on the topic at hand. Other times participants started talking about topics or ideas completely unrelated to the text, such as what the cafeteria was serving for lunch, or whether or not the FBI listens in on their school

issued devices. In the brief example below, a group of boys spend a portion of the discussion time speaking in third person, and just generally acting silly.

TOMATO: Stop talking in third person.

LASAGNA: No. I told him to talk in third person.

JELLO: Jello says that Lasagna's making him and he wonders if he can stop now.

LASAGNA: Yes. Jello can stop speaking in third person.

JELLO: Jello is excited.

LASAGNA: That's still talking in third person.

TOMATO: Seriously, it's really annoying.

JELLO: Jello wants to do this more to annoy Tomato.

LASAGNA: Yes.

TOMATO: I'm gonna, I'm gonna sharpen my pencil. =

JELLO: Jello agrees with that action.

All three boys contributed to the discussion, yet there was no focus on the content of the text. This tangent occurred on and off over the course of the dialogue and impacted the groups' sensemaking endeavors.

In their small group interview, participants mentioned frustration with tangential moments; however, they noted that if the timing was right, tangents could lead the discussion along. Ratatouille and Jalapeno had the following to say about tangents:

RATATOUILLE: Yeah. It kinda helps move on sometimes, like move on topics or..It depends like. If it's a good time. You just have to get your timing right, 'cause if it's in the middle of like a sentence =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] it's annoying.

(small group interview transcript, 2/8/23)

This idea of moving the dialogue along or having the right timing was evident in playing it cool moments. So, participants understood that at times, tangents might be necessary to break the ice or move the discussion along, but that not all tangents contributed to sensemaking.

### *Dismissals*

Besides experiencing tangents, there were moments in the dialogue when participants completely dismissed the ideas of others. While it did not occur often, dismissals sometimes led to a complete change in the conversation, as in the example below.

JALAPEÑO: So. I feel like Mimi might be cur-, might be like con-, or cur—curious or confused about, she doesn't really know what to identify herself as.. 'cause everything she says, it kind of like, everyone else in society goes against it.

NOODLE: Okay, I think Mimi is polite 'cause she is—just polite.

JALAPEÑO: Um. She stuck her st—, she stuck her tongue out at a stranger [giggled through the last word]. I mean.

NOODLE: When they weren't looking. It would have been less polite if she stuck ou-out her xxx.

(reading event 3, group 3's transcript, 1/10/23)

In this episode, Jalapeño and Noodle discussed *Full Cicada Moon*. As they were still fairly early in the novel, they considered potential antagonists that the main character, Mimi, might face. At the very beginning of the discussion, Jalapeño described Mimi as being curious or confused. Noodle dismissed his comment and instead shared her character trait, being polite. The discussion then built into Noodle's idea of being polite, completely disregarding Jalapeño's idea.



Dismissals such as this violated the fourth condition of voice developed by Segal and Lefstein (2016): being heeded. They contended that dismissals were a way of silencing the voice of another. While Jalapeño did not completely fall out of the dialogue, his idea was left behind. In the small group interview, Jalapeño admitted that he likes “to go against people's ideas,” that “it's the fun part about it” (small group interview transcript, 2/8/23). While he was not going against anyone per say at the beginning of this discussion, it is possible that his attitude toward discussion and openness toward differing viewpoints gave him the confidence to stay in the dialogue.

### ***Time/Timing***

Lack of time was sometimes a barrier to collaborative discussions. On more than one occasion, time was a factor specifically in regard to how much time students had for their discussions. The transcripts served as evidence that at times participants reached critical moments in the sensemaking process just as the teacher called for discussions to close. Since the discussions occurred in small groups, the teacher had no way of knowing discussions were at these important moments.

Reading event three was significantly impacted by timing as well. Since the class used in this study took place during the last period of the day, the school made announcements prior to student dismissal. On this particular day, the announcements came on early and the class lost four minutes of discussion time. This was an instance where the teacher had intentions of making time for discussion, but factors out of her control inhibited that from happening. In a school, this could happen in a variety of ways: emergency drills, actual emergencies, announcements, student disruptions, etcetera.

The participants also noted an interesting factor about timing. In the small group interview, I asked Lasagna, Ratatouille, and Jalapeño about a moment in reading event five when the group seemed to lack focus and were off track. I mentioned that they were not the only group and asked if they could offer an explanation as to why they felt this was the case. The following conversation transpired.

ME: You guys were off track. =

JALAPEÑO: Yeah. =

RATATOUILLE: I had a lot of energy that day. =

ME: But you weren't the only group. You weren't the only group, so that's why I'm just curious. So like some things =

RATATOUILLE: [overlapping] Was it Friday?

ME: I [2.0] That's a good question. I'll have to go back and look and see if it was a Friday.

JALAPEÑO: Yeah. =

RATATOUILLE: [overlapping] last period is hard =

ME: [overlapping] last period on a Friday.

JALAPEÑO: Was it a Friday or a Monday, or something?

After the interview, I looked through my records and discovered that reading event five (the event I referred to during the interview) did take place on a Friday. The fact that Jalapeño and Ratatouille immediately offered this as a potential reason for a lack of focus during the discussion indicated that timing, or when teachers ask students to engage in dialogic sensemaking, is a factor worthy of consideration. It is possible that embedding dialogue more

frequently could help ameliorate this factor. Regardless, recognizing when to institute dialogue into the lesson was significant.

One last aspect of time or in this instance timing that participants shared as a barrier to dialogic discussion was finding the in in a discussion. I noticed in several transcripts that sometimes a participant was quiet for an extended period of time. This happened more frequently in small groups than in partnerships, so I asked participants how it felt to try to get into the collaborative discussion.

ME: Okay. Um [2.0] When you guys are having discussions, do you ever feel like it's hard to get like an in, like a way into the conversation?

LASAGNA: [exasperated] Yeah.

ME: [laughs] Okay, what does that feel like?

LASAGNA: I don't know. It just kinda feels like, I don't know.

JALAPEÑO: You don't know when to talk.

LASAGNA: Yeah, I don't know like when to talk, or what to or like, how to enter, so.

ME: Is there anything that teachers could do or that could happen differently that you think would make that better?

LASAGNA: Uh.

RATATOUILLE: Um. I probably talk a lot, so [Me: Laugh].

JALAPEÑO: Uh it's just like you said [looks to Lasagna], it's that you don't know when to enter and you don't know what to talk ab--like.

RATATOUILLE: You talk a lot too. What are you talking about?

JALAPEÑO: Well. Like. I'm trying to s--whatever.

RATATOUILLE: [laughter]

JALAPEÑO: And it might be just awkward or something, but I think that maybe teachers could like put you with people that you know more, but, and it's okay to like not be with people that you know that much, but it's not like you can't just put somebody with... Like =

RATATOUILLE: You're uncomfortable with =

JALAPEÑO: Yeah.

ME: Do you think partnerships help in that, in that instance too, like =

RATATOUILLE: [overlapping] like a group? =

ME: [overlapping] If it's just two people rather than a group? =

JALAPEÑO: I like two people. I like two people because you always know, it's easy when to talk and y-you know what you're talking about, and especially when you know the person, it's really easy to talk.

ME: [overlapping] So like that back and forth rather =

JALAPEÑO: [overlapping] Yeah =

ME: [overlapping] than trying to find the in.

JALAPEÑO and LASAGNA: Yeah.

Timing entrance into a discussion is significant to dialogic sensemaking. The participants shared that partnerships or pairing students with classmates they are comfortable with makes timing easier. Even if teachers heed this suggestion and provide scaffolds for students, this idea of timing may always be a barrier for some students, but it is worthy of noting here. Recognition of these barriers and finding ways to eliminate them in the classroom can enhance dialogic sensemaking.

## Summary

Room 411 gave me a lot to consider. While the literature outlined significant benefits to dialogic sensemaking, the students in this classroom put it into practice. It is one thing for teachers or researchers to note that dialoguing about a text opens perspectives, and increases understanding, but for students to clearly articulate and live these values is a whole other story.

This classroom understands that collaborative discussions are an integral component to a reading event. In the current standards-driven, high-stakes assessment educational system of accountability, teachers can sometimes lose sight of this (Santori, 2011). Oftentimes, teachers feel the pressure to stick to a script, and authentic discussions are pushed to the wayside, in order to make room for more skill-based drill and practice (Barak & Lefstein, 2022). However, teachers need to continue to find ways to prioritize dialogic sensemaking events—this classroom proves it.

## Chapter V: Discussion

In 1957, radio and television personality, Art Linkletter, wrote a book, *Kids Say the Darndest Things* (Linkletter, 1957). He drew on the work from a popular segment of his television show, *House Party* (Linkletter, 1952-1969), that posed simple questions to children and often resulted in interesting or outright comedic responses. “Kids say the darndest things,” is such a powerful phrase that should not be relegated to the world of comedy. Kids do say the darndest things, when we give them the opportunities to share what is on their minds. Kids can think deeply, question, and have entirely unique ways of looking at the world. When teachers make room for students to be the sensemakers, they can share their thinking with others and the classroom transforms into a true community of learners.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of my study, consider my findings through my theoretical framework, offer answers for my two research questions, address limitations to my study, and propose suggestions for future research.

### Summary of Study

This study focused on a single sixth grade English Language Arts classroom situated within a district required to administer standardized assessments and driven by skills-based curriculum. Mrs. Riley, the teacher of record in this classroom, however, remains committed to generating purposeful, authentic learning experiences for her students. Because of its cognitive and social benefits, Mrs. Riley devotes significant class time to teaching students to participate in discussion and allowing opportunities for paired, small group, and whole group collaborative dialogue. The purpose of this particular study was to better understand how students in Mrs. Riley’s sixth grade classroom use dialogic discussions to make sense of texts. In order to do this,

I chose to center the voices of the participants in the discussion as there is a dearth of research that does so.

Using methods informed by linguistic ethnography I sought to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do students in one sixth grade classroom participate in dialogic discussions while making sense of texts?
2. What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community?

Over the course of approximately two months, I observed, and audio recorded five reading events that included small group dialogic sensemaking. In addition to analyzing the dialogue that transpired among participants during these discussions, I also analyzed the responses I gathered during five individual interviews and one small group (three participants) interview. My data triangulation included the field notes I gathered as part of my interactional data. The field notes served as a significant contribution to the culture of the classroom. I used constant comparative analysis to examine all data sets for emerging themes and the data revealed several important findings that I presented in Chapter IV. In short, however, when students in Room 411 made sense of texts they affirmed ideas, tested ideas, taught ideas, and held on to ideas, and they did this open-mindedly, because they understand the value of dialogic discussions.

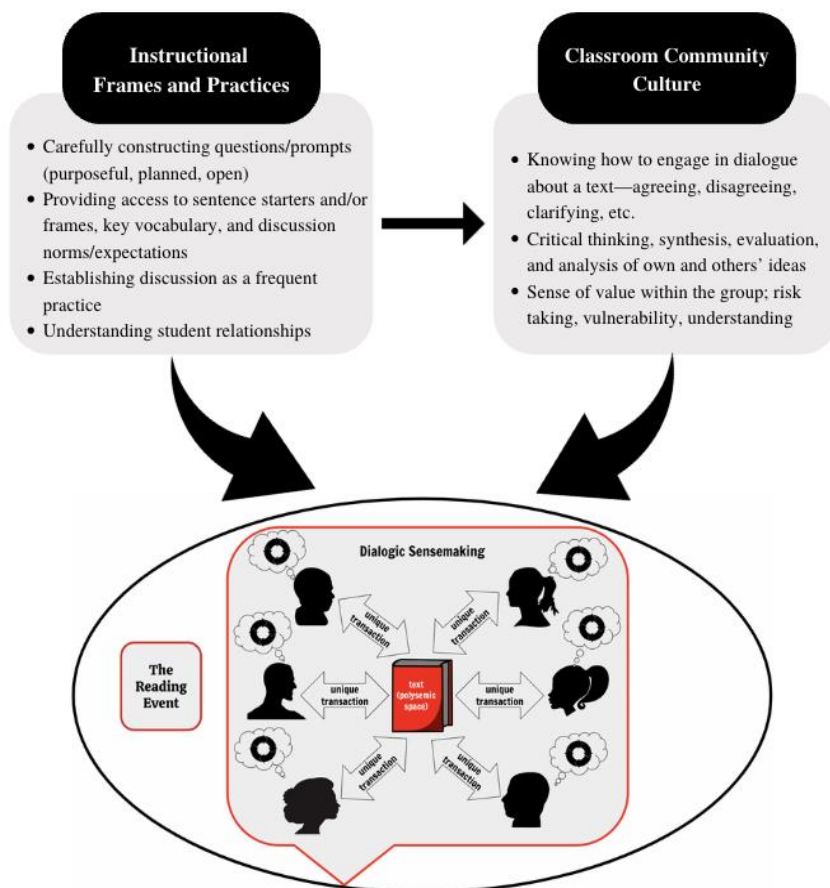
### **Application of Theoretical Framework to Findings**

I introduced the Transactional Theory of Reading and Sociocultural Learning Theory in Chapter II of this study to provide a framework for my analysis and interpretation of the results. I shared Figure 1 to help explain how these two theories work together in a reading event that

honors dialogic sensemaking; however, after conducting this study, I have found that a certain culture must exist within a classroom community in order for dialogic sensemaking to occur. Below (in Figure 8), I have shared a reimaged representation of dialogic sensemaking within a reading event. While my original representation focused solely on the reading event, this new diagram includes the instructional frames necessary to establish a classroom culture that values and prioritizes dialogic sensemaking. Classroom culture (including both epistemological stance and social relations) is important to shaping the environment which dialogue takes place (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). In Room 411, the students attributed much of their comfortability with dialogic sensemaking to the routines and practices embedded in their classroom. These instructional frames and practices are more clearly articulated in the sections that follow.

### Figure 8

#### *Dialogic Sensemaking in Room 411*





### *Classroom Culture*

Dialogic sensemaking does not happen on its own. In order for students to engage in cumulative, collective, reciprocal, supportive, and purposeful dialogue (Alexander, 2020) they must have a sense of value within the classroom community. The classroom culture in Room 411 was one of trust and openness. The students were not afraid to speak what was on their minds and on more than one occasion spoke about the value in making mistakes and not being afraid to be wrong. Students in Room 411 remained open to multiple interpretations of a text, stayed present in the dialogue, and demonstrated respect during their discussions, all key elements of dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1984; Buber, 1958). The students and teacher both alluded to several instructional frames present in the classroom that they felt played critical roles in creating an environment where the students felt comfortable enough to engage in discussions in this open, respectful way. In a recent study, Murphy et al. (2022) referred to the instructional frame as the conditions present (i.e. group size, length of discussion, pre/post discussion activities, etcetera) that ensure their Quality Talk (Murphy & Firetto, 2017) model is implemented well. I am using the same term here as I found similarly that certain classroom conditions were present during dialogic sensemaking.

Teacher epistemology played a significant role in the classroom culture, as Mrs. Riley was responsible for creating the structures and routines. Due to her strong epistemological commitment to dialogue and dialogic sensemaking, the students in Room 411 demonstrated equally strong commitments to the collaborative dialogue. The environment where the dialogue takes place contributes to the way in which students value and engage in the dialogue (Johnston, et al., 2001). As is depicted in Figure 8, Mrs. Riley engaged in purposeful planning around the reading events. She crafted broad questions or asked the students to use open structures such as

notice and wonder to develop their own thinking. She provided opportunities for students to breathe their diverse perspectives into the text and gave them the space to share those perspectives with others (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). Dialogic sensemaking relies on the acceptance of multiple interpretations of the text. Readers view the text as polysemic spaces (Barthes, 1981) with the potential for multiple interpretations (Bakhtin, 1984; Iser, 1972). Mrs. Riley used very open frames for notemaking and discussion to propel the students into discussion. For instance, using a notice and wonder strategy students generated their own questions for discussion (Santori & Belfatti, 2017) and if she did pose a question, she left it very open-ended (Beers & Probst, 2017; Nystrand et al., 1997). Ratatouille noted that Mrs. Riley almost always asked questions with no clear answers:

...whenever she asks a question, it's always more of like, like. It's, it could be like many answers. It's kind of like the vast amount of answers, you can't really answer it with one. [3.0] There's like multiple correct answers. So it's like whenever she asks these questions, they're always centered around something that could be answered differently (Ratatouille, interview transcript, 1/17/23).

Mrs. Riley used texts worthy of discussion, that elicited deep thought and diverse interpretations from readers. Additionally, Mrs. Riley established clearly articulated discussion norms and provided students with sentence starters to use during discussion. While there is some controversy in the field over the use of such norms (Lambirth, 2006), these norms were very open-ended and did not limit participation in terms of raising hands, requiring participation or some of the other discussion guidelines that typically cause debate. The classroom norms are depicted in Figure 9. Having the norms posted for easy reference, supports Mrs. Riley's frequent

use of discussion. She mentioned in her interview that students in her classroom discuss texts every day.

**Figure 9**

*Room 411 Discussion Norms*

**Classroom Discussion Expectations** GVMS

**Teachers will**

- provide opportunities for multiple perspectives in order to facilitate critical thinking.

**Speakers will**

- use supportive and encouraging words & actions ("Let's Talk" sentence starters).
- provide others opportunities to speak, which may include confirming, challenging, or changing one's ideas.
- use reliable and credible evidence to support their points of view.

**Listeners will**

- listen to understand, not to respond.
- use body language (eyes on speaker) that reflects active listening.
- listen with an open mind and respect the opinions of other students.

**LISTEN with EARS EYES & HEART WIDE OPEN**

The poster features illustrations of two yellow stars, a pair of teal sunglasses, and a group of five diverse students sitting in a circle and talking.

All participants noted the importance of the frequency of dialogue. Mrs. Riley mentioned that she tried to incorporate dialogue into her lessons every day and Radish shared, "...it's more like comfortable or common, because we do this often, so like talking with one another, so it feels more comfortable with talking about what you feel about it" (Radish, interview transcript, 1/24/23). Murphy et al. (2022) addressed the significance of time allotted to discussion. They

noted that oftentimes teachers bound to basal programs often forego small-group discussions because time is a “nonrenewable resource” and they are afraid to fall behind (Murphy et al., 2017). Mrs. Riley understood the value of discussion and did not let standardization trump that value. To her credit, the students recognized that the frequent use of dialogue led to their comfortability in participating in discussion and more diverse understandings being shared.

Equally as important as frequency was the number of people engaged in the collaborative dialogue. Mrs. Riley mentioned that she felt more value in intimate discussions rather than the entire group. Intimate discussions allow for all participants to truly have a voice in the discussion. She also mentioned that the small group or partnerships allowed for more authentic and frequent dialogue. Participants felt similarly in that they valued the smaller, more intimate discussions over larger or whole group discussions. They felt they had an in to the discussion, that their voices were valued more, and that they were more willing to share their true thoughts. Macaroni shared specifically that he felt partnerships were most valuable for having your voice heard and ensuring turn taking, saying that with partners “you both talk like equally” (Macaroni, interview transcript, 1/4/23). Room 411 valued all conditions of voice, but their stances toward frequency and turn-taking specifically support Segal and Lefstein’s (2016) condition of voice—opportunity to speak.

Lasagna, Ratatouille, and Jalapeño echoed this sentiment in their small group interview when we discussed partnerships and finding an in. Specifically, Jalapeño shared that it is easier to talk with just two people. He said, “I like two people. I like two people because you always know, it's easy when to talk and y-you know what you're talking about, and especially when you know the person, it's really easy to talk” (small group interview transcript, 2/8/23). According to Wegerif (2019) classrooms have the unique potential to serve as spaces where meaning is

developed and transformed among learners. In order for this to occur, conditions must exist within that classroom that make the learners want to share.

The environment that Mrs. Riley established through instructional frames, routines, and structures, created a culture of classroom community. Shields (2000) called on schools to become places of community by building on the differences present in the classroom rather than working to ensure all students think in the same way. Room 411 is not just a classroom, it is a community where students engage in collaborative discussion (rooted in difference), search for understanding, and feel a sense of belonging. Through collaborative discussion they learn from each other through the act of dialogue (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). They are not embarrassed or afraid to be proven wrong, and they appreciate what they can learn from dialoguing with others. This was evident when students spoke about having differing perspectives from others and whether they felt other students valued their ideas in the discussion.

RATATOUILLE: So, I mean—it's. I don't feel embarrassed when I get proven wrong, because I mean everybody makes mistakes. And it's not necessarily a bad thing (small group interview transcript, 2/8/23).

JALAPENO: It's not always a bad thing to say something, um, to disagree with someone. It's honestly kind of like a good thing because it'll make you think about more ideas and make you think about the other person's perspective.

(small group interview, transcript, 2/8/23).

LASAGNA: I don't really like feel weird when people go against my ideas, I—sometimes it's a good thing 'cause it just gives me a different perspective (small group interview, transcript, 2/8/23).

RADISH: 'Cause I feel like it's better to explain what I'm thinking that to not 'cause it could be right or it could be wrong, since if it could be right then that just helps the other people like understand my point view and if it's wrong, they can just um explain it to me (Radish interview transcript, 1/24/23).

As a community of learners, they have shifted their orientation into an I-Thou relationship recognizing the unique understandings each brings into the dialogue (Buber, 1958). Engaging in genuine dialogue, the students in this class are aware of how their differing interpretations build into a greater whole and how collaborative dialogue leads to true learning experiences. Time and again, the participants shared how open they were to learning with and from each other. They use their dialogue in genuine search for meaning (Buber, 1958) during reading events.

### ***The Reading Events***

A reading event occurs when a reader transacts with a text, bringing their prior knowledge and experience into the reading, and combining it with the language and ideas of the author in an attempt to make meaning (Rosenblatt, 2014). For the purposes of this study, the reading event included the collaborative discussion, as students participated in the act of sensemaking together. Rosenblatt (2014) emphasized the need to consider reading events within the broader individual, social, and cultural contexts. Reading events should include not only what the reader brings into the text and what the text breathes into the reader, but the social transactions and circumstances that mold the event (Rosenblatt, 2014). In some events, a short mini-lesson was also included as part of the event, as the lesson established specific knowledge for the students to take into the reading of the text.

All reading events fall along a continuum from efferent (focusing on the information) to aesthetic (focusing on the experience), based on the purpose of the reading event (Rosenblatt, 2018). Each of the reading events observed in this study relied heavier on an aesthetic stance; however, since participants read the text for an English Language Arts class and were responsible for understanding some of the literary elements in the novel, an efferent stance was also necessary.

Readers in Room 411 engaged in robust dialogue around the texts they read. Through their dialogue, they challenged ideas, revised their thinking, and broadened their perspectives. The very idea that they did not all glean the same understanding after reading the same text demonstrates the Transactional Theory of Reading. Readers enter a reading event with their own schema based on prior knowledge and experiences and this schema inevitably shapes their transaction with a text (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Mrs. Riley recognized this and provided ample opportunities for students to engage in their own sensemaking processes. As she said in her interview, “In my classroom, I try to get the students to have interactions with the text as often as possible” (Mrs. Riley, interview transcript, 11/15/22). And recognizing the need for students to develop their own interpretations, she provided very open frameworks for students to use in their reading experience. Examples of these frameworks include notice and wonder which was used in the first reading event (fieldnotes, 12/12/23) and stop and jot which was used in the second reading event (fieldnotes, 1/6/23).

The use of open frameworks led to students arriving at their own unique interpretations of the texts which in turn resulted in students sharing their perspectives through collaborative dialogue. In fact, Ratatouille made the comment that when you discuss a text with others “they can like fill that in for you, and it kind of just becomes like more a like whole thing, instead of

like it's like missing some parts to it" (Ratatouille, interview transcript, 1/17/23). Tomato also shared that, "people might like understand things differently than you," making discussion important for gaining greater understanding of a text (Tomato, interview transcript, 1/19/23). In a sense, the participants recognized the role discussion plays in filling in gaps that might occur during a reading experience.

Iser (1972) presented his concept of gap filling in which each reading transaction results in a different interpretation of the text based on how prior knowledge or experience fills in the parts that an author leaves unsaid. This was evident in several instances as readers took away different interpretations of the text. On more than one occasion, participants from non-White ethnic backgrounds introduced how a character might be battling larger systemic racist ideas rather than just the typical "new girl" bullying that might take place in a school. What these students brought into the reading experience, influenced how they identified or related to the main character in the story. How readers filled in the gaps individually was significant, however, as stated above, their coming together as a group to make the text more whole was an idea that resonated with several participants.

Filling in the gaps was probably most noticeable when students taught each other ideas during dialogue. Recall in reading event 2 when Radish, Jalapeño, and Jello made sense of the historical context of *Full Cicada Moon*. Drawing on their different background knowledge, they were able to draw conclusions about potential struggles of the time period, and speculate about conflicts the main character might face throughout the novel. Collectively, they all contributed specific knowledge to the reading event. Radish contributed knowledge of the time frame of the Civil Rights Movement, Jalapeño used textual evidence to draw conclusions about the main character, and Jello added knowledge about the emergence of cicadas. While Iser (1972) referred



to gap filling within the reader themselves, the collaborative nature of these reading events resulted in a unique form of gap filling.

Students revised their thinking, or built upon each other's ideas, making their understanding more complex or deeper through the collaborative dialogue. While there were times that the students used similar interpretive strategies (Fish, 2004) to consider the meaning of the text, there were also times that the participants arrived at uniquely different understandings and had to navigate their dialogue to honor each perspective in dialogic discussion.

Participants in Room 411 felt strongly about the benefits of gap filling and intercomprehending to their overall knowledge and understanding of a text. As stated in Chapter II, intercomprehending occurs when readers take their unique transactions with a text and share them with others, revising their own ideas, or building on the ideas of others, through an interanimation of voices (Aukerman et al., 2017). While some students shared that “they don’t love” participating in classroom discussions, they all recognized and appreciated the value in “hearing what other people think” (small group interview transcript, 2/8/23). Like Aukerman (2013) proposed in her comprehension-as-sensemaking theory, participants recognized the significance of learning from others and broadening their unique perspectives through dialogue.

Despite the fact that students have been conditioned to describe the author’s intent, or match the meaning of a test maker, the participants in this study recognized the unique perspectives each reader gains during a reading event and how their individual understandings can be revised or strengthened through discussion with other readers. Macaroni said it well, when he shared, “Well. I think when I read it, I understand it, but then I might like hear from a partner and it makes it me, like understand it more, but like we can connect our ideas” (Macaroni, interview transcript, 1/4/23).

## **Discussion of Results**

In the sections that follow, I will offer answers to my two research questions. In *Making Sense of Texts*, I describe how students in Room 411 made sense of texts together during their dialogic discussions. Then, in *Students' Experiences*, I share the unique perspectives of participants who engaged in the dialogue as well as the classroom culture they felt shaped their experiences.

### ***Making Sense of Texts***

After careful analysis and triangulation of the data, I generated four themes that describe the dialogic sensemaking in Room 411. As I shared in Chapter IV, not all of the recorded dialogue demonstrated dialogic sensemaking, so I generated the themes based on moments where the dialogue was cumulative, collective, reciprocal, supportive, and purposeful (Alexander, 2020). In Room 411, students made sense of texts by affirming ideas, testing ideas, teaching ideas, and holding onto ideas.

**Affirming ideas.** Remembering that this is a middle school classroom, so nothing is true one hundred percent of the time, students remained very supportive of each other and frequently offered affirming statements that often acted as a catalyst for students to continue on with their line of thinking. Even when students shared differing opinions, they still validated the thinking of others. Besides acting as a way to show support, the affirmation of ideas also acted in service of the collective and cumulative nature of the dialogue. The affirmations also demonstrate the culture of the classroom. The posted classroom discussion expectations state that speakers will use “supportive and encouraging words and actions.” This expectation sets the stage for collaborative dialogue and helps cultivate a classroom ethos that encourages affirming language.

In their discussion during reading event two, Ratatouille and Noodle affirmed each other's ideas multiple times. Using language like, "I agree with you," "Yeah," "Right," and "I definitely agree, but I also think" (reading event 2, group 3's transcript, 1/6/23) the girls built off each other in a cumulative, collective, supportive, and reciprocal way (Alexander, 2020). As I have stated, students in Room 411 were very open to the ideas of others and willing to listen and share (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). By offering affirmations, they were actively demonstrating this openness.

**Testing ideas.** Students ease and frequency with testing ideas demonstrates the reciprocal and supportive nature of the dialogue. Students tested ideas through conjecture and through what I referred to as playing it cool. Since the students all anticipated and accepted the likelihood of multiple interpretations of the text, they often phrased their thinking using words of conjecture. Sometimes this indicated they were unsure of their idea, but other times, it was simply a way to share their thinking with the group in a way that demonstrated their understanding was not authoritative. Tomato recognized this when he shared that discussion about a text was important to help you understand better and that it gives people the opportunity to "like talk about like what that [the text] might mean" (Tomato, interview transcript, 1/19/23).

Using language like "I wonder" or "it might" provided the students with room to freely share ideas without fear of embarrassment (Aukerman, 2013; Edwards-Groves et al., 2014). Other times, students tested ideas by posing a question as a joke or making a statement and then saying, "I'm just kidding." A key example of playing it cool was in reading event two when Acorn made a joke to the group saying that the main character from the text, Mimi, was "being trapped prisoner" (reading event 2, group 1's transcript, 1/6/23). He shared this as a way of testing the group's thoughts about why Mimi was not allowed to leave her yard. While Macaroni

offered speculation about her potential for getting lost in a new neighborhood, Acorn actually brought the conversation back around to racial tensions. As a person of color, it is possible that he used this idea of playing it cool as a way to draw the other group member's attention to the topic of racism.

The phrase "I don't know" also came into play when students were testing out ideas. While some might view the phrase as a student displaying a lack of understanding or being unable to recall an idea, there were times it was used as an indicator of social action (Rapley, 2018). For instance, when a group of boys tried to make sense of a scene in *Full Cicada Moon*, Acorn brought the discussion to racism. Lasagna said, "So maybe, it's because he's very cautious of those other people. I, I don't know" (reading event 2, group 1's transcript, 1/6/23). This was a way for him to safely offer his idea to the group, an idea that led the group to thinking more deeply.

By playing it cool with their peers, students participated in the discussion, tested ideas with the group, and broached more challenging topics. To middle school students, reputation, or the way in which others view you, are paramount. In dialogic discussions where there are a multitude of correct answers, but still a possibility of sharing something completely off base, or uncomfortable, testing ideas by playing it cool is sometimes necessary.

**Teaching ideas.** Besides testing ideas, students also taught ideas. Again, this was evident in two different ways: using textual evidence, and sharing extratextual knowledge. The dialogue was often more robust when students taught each other ideas. As stated earlier, all of the participants I interviewed recognized the value in dialogic sensemaking specifically because through discussion with others they could arrive at deeper and more complete understandings of a text (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007). This was most evident in teaching ideas. In order to show

evidence to support their own thinking, or to explain a counterpoint to another group member, students relied on text evidence. At times these teaching moments resulted in revision of ideas or an entirely new understanding for other group members (Wegerif, 2019). For instance, in reading event four, when Radish, Jalapeno, and Acorn compared the text *Full Cicada Moon* to “Surface Pressure,” they relied on textual evidence saying, “look at the lyrics” and “It also says near the bottom of the, on the front side,” to draw comparisons between the two protagonists. The reliance on the text gave them more clarity and a more complete understanding of the two characters.

Likewise, students shared their extratextual knowledge with each other, relying on prior knowledge and experiences to fill in their own gaps and share that understanding with others (Larson, 2009; McGinley et al., 2017; Sinclair, 2018). Similar to the use of text evidence, these teaching moments often resulted in Aha moments for other group members. I shared an example of gap filling earlier in the chapter, but this is a theme that resounded throughout the transcripts and interviews. Ratatouille summed gap filling up nicely when she shared:

It's good hearing everybody else's opinions and like thinking, like what can I change with my own that like—. 'Cause sometimes when I think of things, I don't think of like all the things I could've and somebody else says it, and it kind of just like, kind of fills my like idea in a little more (Ratatouille, small group interview transcript, 2/8/23).

**Holding onto ideas.** The last theme was not as prevalent, but due to its rare occurrence, holds equal significance to the findings. Sometimes, rarely, but sometimes, when a student would share an idea the other members of the group would completely dismiss the idea, as though there was no contribution to the group. When this happened, discussion would typically continue on to a new topic or continue building with a previously shared idea. On a few

occasions, however, the student whose idea was dismissed held onto their thought and persisted in bringing the group back to their idea. Interestingly, both instances of holding onto ideas that I shared in Chapter IV brought the group to deeper topics (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007).

In reading event two, Noodle persisted with an idea during her discussion with *Ratatouille*. In doing so, the discussion switched from talking about literary elements like foreshadowing to more underlying big ideas from the text, like the impact of microaggressions. The second instance occurred during reading event two, with *Acorn, Tomato, Macaroni, and Lasagna*. Acorn asked a question about the main character encountering a dog. The other group members did not take up his idea in a way that seemed meaningful. Acorn held onto his idea, asking again and again about the dog because he recognized the significance of the introduction of the dog to the story. This again brought the conversation to the impact of racist ideas. The boys began speculating about potential relationships or conflicts that might ensue between the main character and the owner of the dog. If Acorn had let his idea drop, this deeper discussion may not have occurred. Holding onto an idea, persisting in the dialogue to keep the focus on something that has been dismissed, is not easy. The students who held onto their ideas relied on the supportive ethos of the classroom culture.

### ***Students' Experiences***

I have mentioned throughout this chapter, the significance of the classroom culture. Students in Room 411 shared positive experiences with dialogic sensemaking. Each of the students I interviewed expressed the value in discussing texts with others. At the same time, interactional data in the form of field notes gathered during observations also supported the idea that students had positive experiences with dialogic sensemaking. During discussions, students remained actively engaged, laughing, smiling, leaning in toward each other. The desks were

grouped in clusters and students often leaned into each other, reached toward each other's texts and papers and showed signs of being very comfortable with each other. (Note: This particular sixth grade class is made up of more than 350 students hailing from two different elementary schools. Some students may have met for the first time in Room 411 while others may have had existing relationships.) At times the dialogue veered off topic and side conversations were indicative of positive student relationships in the classroom.

All of the students attributed their comfort level with dialogue to the classroom environment and the structures and routines put in place by the teacher. In order to make dialogic sensemaking a positive experience for students, the classroom culture must invite open dialogue and align with dialogic principles. The participants appreciated the following aspects of the classroom community.

**Sentence stems and learning how to talk.** In addition to the discussion expectations previously introduced, Mrs. Riley also supplied each student with something she referred to as a "Let's Talk" sheets. This sheet contained sentence stems for students to agree, disagree, clarify, or add on to the ideas of others. Providing students with the language to engage in dialogic sensemaking contributed to the students' sense of comfortability during discussions (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008). In considering how students made sense of texts in this classroom, sentence frames should focus on affirming ideas, testing ideas, teaching ideas, and holding onto ideas. Additionally students appreciated learning how to talk to one another. In her interview, Mrs. Riley shared, "You know we would practice some of the sentence frames and discuss how to encourage all students to participate and even discuss, wait time, and how frequently we should be participating and and just kind of like having some I guess social awareness in those

discussions as well. Like, so that they know, um, you know h-how frequently, just to speak and how to interact with one another” (teacher interview transcript, 11/15/22).

**Frequency and length of discussions.** Mrs. Riley also shared that students talk about the texts they read every day in her class (Alexander, 2020). Students felt that this frequency of discussion led to them being more comfortable and confident in their sharing. Several students mentioned that their participation in discussion increased from the beginning of the year due to the frequency and practice. Finding the time to integrate talk about text into the classroom is critical. Mrs. Riley said that some of these discussions are simple turn and talks, but the fact of the matter is that they are happening and they are happening regularly. Equally important is the length of time devoted to dialogic discussions. While there were times that the dialogue was cut short during the reading events I observed, the teacher did keep the discussions intentionally short (each discussion lasted between four and 11 minutes). By keeping the discussion time limited, Mrs. Riley feels like she can honor the dialogic sensemaking of her students while also maintaining pace with her curriculum. Additionally, the shorter discussions keep students engaged and focused on the text.

**Group size and student relationships.** All of the participants highlighted learning from the perspectives of others, but most also shared that they preferred doing so in either partnerships or smaller groups. Some students just felt more comfortable with only one other person where others mentioned that it is sometimes more difficult to gain an in to the conversation when groups are larger. In partnerships, the turns of talk are more clearcut and students can find their way into the discussion. In Room 411, students also appreciated that Mrs. Riley seemed to know who they felt comfortable with and valued that she paired them with people they could be themselves around. For her part, Mrs. Riley also preferred what she referred to as more intimate



discussions (partnerships or small groups) to get more students active in the dialogue (Alexander, 2020).

By focusing on classroom ethos, teachers can work to create an environment that prioritizes dialogic sensemaking and the positive experiences of learners.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As with all qualitative research there are several limitations to this study which I will describe in the following section. While I address measures taken to increase the trustworthiness of the study, my overall goal for this research was to explore, interpret, and understand this particular classroom as a classroom community that welcomes dialogic discussions (Copeland & Creese, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four aspects to trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Similar to validity, credibility is about establishing truth, while dependability more closely resembles reliability in its search for consistency and replicability. Transferability considers how the study might relate to other contexts while confirmability attempts to address any bias found throughout the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### ***Limitations in Site Selection***

I conducted this study in a predominately White suburban middle school. While the participants who consented to participate represent a diverse population, that population is not indicative of the entire grade, or school community. For the most part, participants shared that they were comfortable contributing their ideas and perspectives during collaborative discussions. It is possible, however, that there were cultural and social forces keeping them from being completely open and honest with me or sharing their true thoughts during discussion.

I conducted the study in an Enrichment level ELA class, with students who typically score higher than their peers on standardized measures for reading and writing. Six of the nine participants identify as gifted learners. It is possible that their contributions to dialogic sensemaking and perspectives toward the discussions are attributed to their academic status. Ideally, I would have liked to conduct the study in a Grade Level course with more academically diverse learners. Considering the make-up of the classes, however, the teacher and I thought we might have more participation from her sixth period class of students, the class I used for the study. Conducting this study with a more academically diverse population of learners would strengthen the transferability and dependability of the findings.

Finally, it is possible that my position as a coach influenced the way the teacher and students interacted with me or with each other while I was in the classroom. In order to mitigate this, I spent several hours in the classroom prior to recording the reading events. Since I am an instructional coach in the building, it is not outside the realm of my duties to spend significant time in a single classroom. By entering the field prior to data collection, I was able to start to form connections with students to put them more at ease and establish rapport. I clearly identified and examined my status within the classroom and school community, (Miles & Huberman, 2020). My potential impact on the participants in the setting can limit the confirmability of the study; however, I hope that my frequent visits to the classroom resulted in students showing their true selves and sharing their authentic voices.

### ***Limitations in Methodology***

It is common for ethnographers to spend extended periods of time in the field. Compared to typical ethnographies, I spent a limited amount of time in the classroom. Some researchers may call into question my use of ethnographic methods. Watson-Gegeo (1997) described

classroom ethnography as the use of ethnographic methods to study classroom behaviors, activities, interactions, or discourse. I have worked with this teacher for more than 20 years, and while only snippets of our time together fell within the parameters of this research study, I have been building relationships with and working with the students in this classroom since the first day of the school year. I used audio recordings, provided descriptions of the environment, and used the authentic voices of the participants to answer my research questions, all of which fall within the realm of ethnographic research.

Throughout the study, I memoed consistently as a way to reflect on my process and show evidence of my thinking (Saldaña, 2021). Such practices that give insight into the “backstage” inner workings of the study can increase the confirmability of the study (Miles & Huberman, 2020). Additionally, I kept careful records and secured all materials to increase the dependability of the study (Miles & Huberman, 2020). Throughout the interview process, I kept detailed notes, retained the original audio recordings after transcription, and kept record of the interview protocols. Detailed records that support the researcher measuring what they say they will measure can help increase dependability (Miles & Huberman, 2020). Member checks, clearly articulated research questions, and interview protocols all add to the dependability of the study as well (Miles & Huberman, 2020).

While I spent time getting to know the class and making my presence not seem like an outsider, it is possible that my presence or the presence of the recording devices did influence participants’ behavior. It is also possible that I did not witness all of the outside forces that influenced students’ participation in the discussion or how the outside forces influenced the classroom. While my focus was on the sensemaking and the experiences of the students, there may have been forces I did not witness influencing the teacher, the learning environment, or the

classroom on any given day. For instance the instance of the early delivery of the afternoon announcements in which the students lost four minutes of conversation time. This played a significant role in the reading event that particular day. Other days or reading events may have had equally significant hidden impacts I was unaware of.

### *Limitations in Analysis*

It is possible my insider status within the school as well as my prior assumptions and positionality about the nature of reading events and dialogue impacted the way I approached the research as well as my interpretation and analysis of the data. As stated above, one way I attempted to maintain confirmability was through memoing (Saldaña, 2021). I also attempted to use thick descriptions of the environment, data triangulation, and presented my data in a way that is linked to existing educational theories in order to strengthen credibility (Miles & Huberman, 2020).

What I have shared in my findings is only snippets of the discussions as they transpired. Focusing on single episodes rather than the discussion in its entirety is a limitation as every episode is part of a longer series of encounters (Rapley, 2018). In qualitative research, it is always possible that another researcher might interpret your results in a different manner. Considering the paradigm and theoretical frameworks I chose for this study, it is even more likely that researchers might search for understandings outside of my results. I welcome all of it. To me, that is the point of dialogic contributions to the field. Our position as researchers and learners should be to engage in the topic, question, and continuously redefine what it means for readers to engage in dialogic sensemaking. If researchers look at this study in the future, through a different paradigm, or considering a different set of theories, they might generate vastly different understandings of the dialogue shared among the students. At the same time, due to the

lived experiences of each individual, researchers adopting my same paradigm and theoretical frameworks may view, value, and interpret the data in vastly different ways.

### ***Transferability***

This study focused on a particular classroom and the community of learners within that classroom. While classrooms are complex, dynamic, and impossible to replicate, it is possible to consider whether or not the structures and routines existing in this classroom might be transferable to others. García-Carrión et al., (2020) argued that even small studies can prove to be helpful in understanding the social impact of dialogic education.

The participants in Room 411 are unique to Room 411, but the instructional frames and practices that the students acknowledged as contributors to the classroom culture and sense of value they experienced in the classroom could be replicated in other settings. Additionally, Mrs. Riley demonstrated that it is possible to include frequent and meaningful dialogic discussions in a classroom bound by standardized curricula. The instructional frames, practices, and aspects of community culture are applicable to other grade levels, subject areas, and student populations (Tracy, 2010) which strengthens the transferability of the findings. Readers and researchers alike should consider these replicable aspects of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

### **Implications of Future Educational Research**

This study sets the stage for several future studies. García-Carrión et al., (2020) shared a need for studies that amplify the voices of the teachers and students (p. 8), in this case, the participants. Future work should focus on the experience of students engaged in dialogic sensemaking. While many studies focus on what teachers should do or what professional learning programs should incorporate to prepare teachers, it is equally as important to learn what students value as integral to sensemaking opportunities. Room 411 understood that each

individual transaction with a text results in unique understandings to be shared with others. In dialogic sensemaking those unique experiences are shared with others and a more comprehensive understanding of a text transpires.

In addition to studying the participants in dialogic sensemaking, it is also important to understand how the epistemological stance of the teacher is adopted by the students in her classroom. Getting students to buy-in to the fact that being wrong is not a bad thing. That multiple interpretations of a text make our understanding more whole and stretch our thinking to accept new ideas. More studies that focus on how this transfer occurs, if students only adopt the stance when they are with that particular teacher or if it transfers across settings and remains with them over years.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, studies that consider alternative methods for measuring achievement in reading are critical at this time. If we continue to hold schools accountable to standardized measures when students are forced to match their text interpretations to that of test makers, teachers will continue to push authentic discussions about text to the wayside, leaving little room for dialogic sensemaking.

## **Summary**

Despite the evidence of its cognitive and social benefits, collaborative discussion continues to lack prominence in most middle school classrooms across the United States. In a world of polarization and divisiveness, it is more important than ever for students to practice and become fluent in dialoguing with others. As public districts and schools continue to rely on funding tied to state-wide assessment accountability measures, teachers, administrators, school boards, and even parents are looking for the best practices to get students to achieve proficiency. Teachers often take the word of textbook makers and test makers as univocal, meaning that the

texts contained therein have a single, unambiguous meaning. This leaves little room for students to bring their lived experiences, social, cultural or historical ideals into the classroom and does not teach students to engage in dynamic discourse (Barak & Lefstein, 2022). Teachers who adopt this mindset place more value on the score, and less value on the critical thinking and processes required by true learning experiences. That said, some teachers continue to find ways to incorporate dialogic discussions into their already cramped curriculums, recognizing the need for students to share reading experiences in their classroom community. Room 411 is one of those classrooms.

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## Appendix A

Dear Mrs. Riley,

I am reaching out to seek your consent to participate in a research study this Fall. I am currently enrolled in West Chester University's doctoral program and am conducting my research as part of the dissertation process. Below you will find detailed information regarding the study.

### **Project Title:**

Making Sense of Texts: A Linguistic Ethnographic Case Study of One Sixth Grade Classroom

### **Investigator:**

Katie Bienkowski

### **Key Details:**

I understand my participation is voluntary and I am under no obligation to participate. The purpose of this research is to understand how students in one English Language Arts class make sense of texts through discussion. The time expected for my participation falls within the regularly scheduled school day and over approximately three months in the fall. The researcher is asking observe my class during in class discussions, have these discussions audio recorded , and for me to participate in an interview. The potential risks associated with this study are discomfort or anxiety during observation or during the interview. The potential benefits of the study are contributing to a greater understanding of the role of discussion in understanding a text as well as potential academic and social gains for my students. The only alternative to this study is not to participate.

---

Your consent is being sought for a research study being conducted by Katie Bienkowski as part of her dissertation. Her project seeks to understand how students in one English Language Arts class make sense of texts through discussion. If you agree to participate, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Katie Bienkowski any questions to help you understand this study. You are not obligated to be a part of this study, and you have the right to change your mind and cease participation at any time. Additional information about this study is provided in the text below.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
  - The purpose of this research is to understand how students in one English Language Arts class make sense of texts through discussion.
2. **If you choose to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**
  - open your classroom to observation of class discussions about a text
  - facilitate small group or whole group discussions where students make sense of a text



- participate in an interview to learn more about your particular classroom and the environment in which sensemaking takes place
- 3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
  - No
- 4. **Are there any risks involved?**
  - Since the researcher will be observing several classroom episodes, it is possible that you may feel anxious or uncomfortable.
  - You may also feel uncomfortable during the one on one interview.
  - You may lose prep time or personal time to participate in the interview.
  - If at any point you become concerned and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with Katie Bienkowski.
  - If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time.
- 5. **Is there any benefit to participating?**
  - There are no direct benefits guaranteed, however, your students will be accessing grade-level content through the curriculum and participating in academic dialogue with their peers which have the potential for academic and social gains.
- 6. **How will you protect my privacy?**
  - Your name will **not** be used in any part of the study. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym of your choosing.
  - Audio recordings of group discussions and interviews will be transcribed verbatim by the researcher and stored on a password protected computer.
  - All information used throughout the study will be stored:
    - in a locked cabinet in Garnet Valley Middle School, Library Office.
    - on a password protected computer
  - All information will remain private. Only the researcher, Katie Bienkowski, and her faculty advisor from West Chester University, Dr. David Backer, will have access to the files.
  - All records will be destroyed three years after study completion
- 7. **Will I be paid to take part in this study?**
  - No
- 8. **Who do I contact in case of discomfort, injury, or questions?**
  - For any questions with this study, contact:
    - **Primary Investigator:** Katie Bienkowski at 610.579.5164 or bienkok@garnetvalley.org
    - **Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. David Backer at DBacker@wcupa.edu
- 9. **What will you do with my identifiable information?**
  - Other than your consent form, no identifiable information will be collected during this study.
  - No information will be used or distributed for future research studies.

Should you agree to participation in this study, please sign and return the form below.

Sincerely,

Katie Bienkowski

610.579.5164

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop my participation at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

\_\_\_\_\_

Subject/Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Appendix B

Dear Caregiver(s),

I am reaching out to seek your consent for your child to participate in a research study that will take place during their English Language Arts class this Fall. I have worked at [REDACTED] for 22 years, and I am currently enrolled in West Chester University's doctoral program, conducting research as part of the dissertation process. Below you will find detailed information regarding the study, as well as a link to attend a Zoom meeting (should you wish to attend) where I will be happy to provide you with further details and/or answer any questions you may have.

### **Project Title:**

Making Sense of Texts: A Linguistic Ethnographic Case Study of One Sixth Grade Classroom

### **Investigator:**

Katie Bienkowski

### **Key Details:**

I understand my child's participation is voluntary and my child is under no obligation to participate. The purpose of this research is to understand how students in one English Language Arts class make sense of texts through discussion. The time expected for my child's participation falls within the regularly scheduled school day and over approximately three months in the fall. The researcher is asking my child to be observed during in class discussions, have these discussions audio recorded, and potentially participate in an interview. The potential risks associated with this study are discomfort or anxiety during observation or during a potential interview. The potential benefits of the study are contributing to a greater understanding of the role of discussion in understanding a text as well as potential academic and social gains. The only alternative to this study is not to participate.

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Your consent is being sought for a research study being conducted by Katie Bienkowski as part of her dissertation. Her project seeks to understand how students in one English Language Arts class make sense of texts through discussion. If you agree to your child taking part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this **consent form** (found on **page four**).

You may return the consent form in one of the following ways:

1. upload an image of the signed consent form and email it to me directly.
2. return the form to school in a sealed envelope with my name on it. Students can deliver the form directly to me in my Library Office.

You may ask Katie Bienkowski any questions to help you understand this study. If you do not want your child to be a part of this study, it won't affect your child's learning opportunities in

any way. If you do choose for your child to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and cease participation at any time. Additional information about this study is provided in the text below.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
  - The purpose of this research is to understand how students in one English Language Arts class make sense of texts through discussion.
2. **If your child decides to be a part of this study, they will be asked to do the following:**
  - participate in whole group or small group discussions about a text they've read—these discussions will be audio recorded and observed. (These discussions will take place during the regularly scheduled ELA class as part of the ELA curriculum.)
  - potentially participate in an interview to learn more about how they feel about classroom discussions—this may be a one on one or small group interview.
3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
  - No
4. **Are there any risks involved?**
  - Since the researcher will record certain aspects of classroom discussion and interview several students there is a potential for students to feel anxious or ill at ease with the process.
  - Students who agree to participate in the study will miss one G.O.A.L. period to attend an information session and sign their assent forms.
  - Students who participate in the individual interviews will miss a second G.O.A.L. period for the interview.
  - Students who participate in the small group interview will miss a small part of ELA class, during which time other students in the class will be filling out a reflection sheet that asks similar questions about the activity. These written responses will not be included in the study.
  - If at any point you become concerned and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with Katie Bienkowski (Contact: [REDACTED]).
  - If you or your child experiences discomfort, you have the right to withdraw your child's participation at any time.
5. **Is there any benefit to my child?**
  - There are no direct benefits guaranteed, however, students will be accessing grade-level content through the curriculum and participating in academic dialogue with their peers which have the potential for academic and social gains.
6. **How will you protect my student's privacy?**
  - Your child's name will **not** be used in any part of the study. Student names will be replaced with pseudonyms.
  - Audio recordings of group discussions and interviews will be transcribed verbatim by the researcher and stored on a password protected computer.
  - All information used throughout the study will be stored:
    - in a locked cabinet in [REDACTED], Library Office.
    - on a password protected computer

- All information will remain private. Only the researcher, Katie Bienkowski, and her faculty advisor from West Chester University, Dr. David Backer, will have access to the files.
  - All records will be destroyed three years after the study completion (expected date of completion—April, 2023).
7. **Will my child be paid to take part in this study?**
- No
8. **Who do I contact in case of discomfort, injury, or questions?**
- For any questions with this study, contact:
    - **Primary Investigator:** Katie Bienkowski at [REDACTED]
    - **Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. David Backer at DBacker@wcupa.edu
9. **What will you do with my child's identifiable information?**
- Other than your child's consent and assent forms, no identifiable information will be collected during this study.
  - No information will be used or distributed for future research studies.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

### **Optional Zoom Invitation**

**In order to respect the privacy of all participants, attendees will be automatically sent to a waiting room. I will admit caregivers one at a time to answer any questions. Please be patient. I will make sure to meet with anyone that attends.**

**Topic:** Research Study Information Meeting

**Time:** Oct 3, 2022 04:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

### **Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://garnetvalley-org.zoom.us/j/9315957623>

**Meeting ID:** 931 595 7623

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,9315957623# US (Chicago)

+16469313860,,9315957623# US

**Consent form found on the next page. →**

### Caregiver Consent

**Project Title:** Making Sense of Texts: A Linguistic Ethnographic Case Study of One Sixth Grade Classroom

**Investigator:** Katie Bienkowski

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop my child's participation at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject/Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Assent Document for Research Involving Minors

**1. What is the project about?**

- The researcher wants to see what it's like in your classroom when you talk about a text after reading it. She wants to know how you participate in the discussion and what it is like for you as a learner. The name of the study is Making Sense of Texts: A Linguistic Ethnographic Case Study of One Sixth Grade Classroom.

**2. What do I need to do?**

- You will participate in whole group or small group discussions about a text you've read—these discussions will be audio recorded and observed.
- You will potentially participate in a small group interview to learn more about how you feel when you participate (or don't participate) in classroom discussions.
- You will potentially participate in an individual interview about participation in classroom discussions.
- There is a chance you will not participate in an interview. That is okay too! Very few students will be interviewed. If you don't want to do this part but want to be a part of the discussion groups, you can just say no to interviewing!

**3. Is there anything I should be worried about?**

- You may feel a little uncomfortable with the researcher in the room listening to and audio recording your discussions.
- If you are chosen to be interviewed, you may feel a little uncomfortable if you do not know the researcher well.
- You will miss one G.O.A.L. period to attend an information session.
- If you participate in the interview you will miss a second G.O.A.L. period for the interview.
- If you participate in the small group interview, the other students in the class will be completing a reflection. You will not be required to complete this reflection as the questions will be similar to the questions you are answering.
- If at any point you are worried or uncomfortable, or if you just have a question, you can talk to Mrs. Bienkowski.
- You can stop participating in the study at any time without being worried that you are doing something wrong.

**4. Do I gain anything by participating?**

- It will be your ELA class!! You get to read and talk with your peers about what you read. This can lead to great learning opportunities!

**5. Will people know it's me in the study?**

- Your name will **not** be used in any part of the study. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym (a made up name).
- All information will remain private. Only the researcher, Katie Bienkowski, and her faculty advisor from West Chester University, Dr. David Backer, will be able to see the files.

**6. What if I have questions?**

- If you have any other questions, you can ask Mrs. Bienkowski directly.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that my caregiver(s) have said it's okay for me to take part in a project about classroom discussions about text interpretations. This is being studied by Mrs. Katie Bienkowski, an Instructional Coach at \_\_\_\_\_ I am participating because I want to. I have been told that I can stop at any time if I want to and that nothing will happen to me if I want to stop participating.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness



## Appendix D

### Teacher Interview Protocol

#### Research Topic:

**Research Question:** How do students in one sixth grade classroom participate in dialogic discussions while making sense of texts?

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today; I'm looking forward to our conversation. Just a reminder, the focus of our conversation today will be to get a general sense of you as an educator, the class we will be focusing on for the research project, and your experience facilitating student dialogue while students make sense of texts. This interview is part of a study seeking to answer the question: How do students make sense of texts while participating in dialogic discussions in one suburban sixth grade classroom? Do you feel ready to begin?

#### Background Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about your previous teaching experience as well as your current teaching assignment?
2. Can you tell me a little about the class of students we will be working with for this research project?

#### Topic Questions

1. How do students make sense of texts in your classroom?
2. How often do you provide students with opportunities to discuss a text they've read?
3. How do students make sense of a text?
4. What role do you play in these discussions?
5. How do you prepare students for these discussions?
6. What role do you see discussion playing in the reading experience?
7. How do you balance the demands of your curriculum and standards with providing students opportunities to be the sensemakers?
8. In your experience, have you found any factors that enhance or inhibit students' ability to participate in these discussions?
9. How do you think students feel about these discussions?
10. What challenges do you encounter when facilitating dialogic discussions?

#### Wrap up

Thank you again for your participation today. I appreciate your perspectives on dialogic discussions. Remember, I will be sending you a copy of the transcript from this interview in order for you to check the accuracy of my recording of our discussion.  
Thank you.

## Appendix E

### Small Group Student Interview Protocol

#### Research Topic:

**Research Question:** What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community?

Thank you for staying to talk with me today. I know that you don't always have opportunities to discuss what you've read, so I'd love to hear your thoughts about your experience with today's discussion. This interview is part of the study we've talked about that is seeking to answer the question: What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community? Do you all feel ready to begin?

#### Background Question

1. In general, how do you feel about participating in a class discussion?

#### Topic Questions

1. So why do you think Mrs. Riley, or the sixth grade teachers in general, chose the book *Full Cicada Moon* and created multiple opportunities for discussion with the text?
2. During your discussions, do you think Mrs. Riley had specific answers she wanted you to come up with? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel like your discussions added to your understanding of *Full Cicada Moon*? Why or why not?
4. The discussion we are looking at, was there anything that seemed different to you?
5. Besides learning more about the text, what other types of learning do you think developed during today's discussion?
6. Do you feel like it's hard sometimes to get an "in" during the discussion? What's that like? What can you do?
7. When someone pushes back on one of your ideas, how do you persist or let go?
8. If someone is silly or off topic, how does that help or hurt the conversation? How does it feel to you personally?

#### Wrap up

Thank you again for your participation today. I appreciate you taking the time to recap and talk a little further about your experience with today's discussion. Remember, I will be sharing a copy of the transcript from this small group interview with each of you in order for you to check to see if I accurately captured your thoughts.

Thank you.

## Appendix F

### Student Interview Protocol

#### Research Topic:

**Research Question:** What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community?

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today; I'm looking forward to our conversation. Just a reminder, the focus of our conversation today will be participating in discussion after reading a text. This interview is part of a study seeking to answer the question: What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community? Do you feel ready to begin?

#### Background Question

1. Can you tell me a little about you as a learner?
2. What do you like or dislike about ELA class?

#### Topic Questions

1. How does your personal experience or prior knowledge factor into your understanding of a text?
2. When Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ lets you talk about a text after reading, how do you feel about that?
3. Has your participation in these discussions changed at all since the beginning of the year? If so, how?
4. Prior to this year, have you had opportunities to think about the meaning of a text on your own and with peers without the teacher guiding you to a "right answer"?
5. Do you feel comfortable sharing your ideas even when they are different from others? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel like your perspectives are valued in ELA class? Why do you feel this way?
7. How is your experience with understanding a text in this ELA class similar to or different from your experiences in other classes (or ELA classes in the past)?

#### Wrap up

Thank you again for your participation today. I appreciate your perspectives on discussions about texts. Remember, I will be sharing a copy of the transcript from this interview with you in order for you to check to see if I accurately captured your thoughts. Thank you.

## Appendix G

### Member Check Confirmation

**Research Topic:**

**Research Question:** What are students' experiences with dialogic discussions in this classroom community?

I read over the transcript from my interview, and say that the contents are accurate. I am okay with parts of the interview transcript being used in the Mrs. Bienkowski's research study.

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Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

## Appendix H

### Let's Talk

#### When you agree

- I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- I like what \_\_\_\_\_ said because \_\_\_\_\_.
- My idea is like \_\_\_\_\_'s, I think \_\_\_\_\_.
- Great idea, I think so too and \_\_\_\_\_.
- To add to what \_\_\_\_\_ said about \_\_\_\_\_, I \_\_\_\_\_.
- I agree, but I also think \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd like to add on to what \_\_\_\_\_ said....\_\_\_\_\_.
- Building upon what \_\_\_\_\_ said, \_\_\_\_\_.

#### When you disagree

- I see your side, but I think \_\_\_\_\_.
- I see it another way, let me explain, \_\_\_\_\_.
- While I can see why you believe this, I see this differently. In my opinion \_\_\_\_\_.
- I understand where you are coming from, but I see it differently. From my perspective, \_\_\_\_\_.
- That's a valid point, but I feel \_\_\_\_\_.
- On the other hand, \_\_\_\_\_.
- I do agree with the part about \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_.

#### When you need help or more information

- I'm confused about \_\_\_\_\_. Could you say it in a different way?

- What evidence do you have to support that?
- Would you repeat that?
- Can you explain \_\_\_\_\_?
- How did you get \_\_\_\_\_?
- Where did you find \_\_\_\_\_?
- In other words, are you saying \_\_\_\_\_?
- Can you give evidence about the text \_\_\_\_\_?

### **When you cite evidence**

- When the author said \_\_\_\_\_ he/she meant \_\_\_\_\_.
- For example, \_\_\_\_\_.
- Since the text said \_\_\_\_\_, I know \_\_\_\_\_.
- On page \_\_\_\_\_, I read \_\_\_\_\_.
- I can prove \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- In the text, it said \_\_\_\_\_. This shows \_\_\_\_\_.

### **When you make a connection**

- I can relate to this because \_\_\_\_\_.
- This was interesting because \_\_\_\_\_.
- This is different than \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- I agree with \_\_\_\_\_. Also, \_\_\_\_\_.
- My idea builds on \_\_\_\_\_'s idea. I \_\_\_\_\_.