

**NEGOTIATION IN CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS:  
AN EXAMINATION OF TEACHER AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

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By

Kristina Doot Whatley

Dissertation Committee:

Margaret J. Maaka, Chairperson

Patricia E. Halagao

K. Laiana Wong

Amber S. Makaiau

Todd H. Sammons, University representative

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To Ben, who made sure I didn't give up when I was tired, and to Gavin and Ada, who are the reasons why I want the world to be better.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Educators are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity for providing students opportunities to engage in content-area dialogic talk, even when the conversation runs the risk of being emotionally uncomfortable. Students need the mindsets and skills to be able to enter into respectful dialogues with individuals from diverse backgrounds in order to find common ground where it exists, and to disagree civilly and productively where common ground is absent. For teachers to effectively facilitate these dialogues, they must make decisions in creating and designing spaces for talk to occur, effectively navigating challenges that arise during classroom talk. The literature suggests that teachers negotiate tensions in four key areas: (1) diminishing their experiences to honor students' experiences, (2) developing a classroom culture and expectations conducive to dialogic inquiry, (3) balancing the linguistic and cognitive demands of rationality and argumentation with storytelling and humor, and (4) intervening effectively during talk time to provide support for students. Many teachers who are experienced facilitators can navigate these tensions in order to encourage productive student-centered conversations. However, the current body of literature lacks a framework to guide teachers in making these decisions. This dissertation explored the decision-making processes of five experienced teachers in secondary-level content areas in Hawai'i to develop a model of decision making for inexperienced teachers interested in learning how to similarly facilitate dialogic talk in their classrooms. Data were collected from audio recordings of intensive interviews to elicit a rich description of their teaching philosophies and experiences, their language use, and their relationships with their students. From these sources, the data were analyzed using qualitative methods blending tools to capture common themes. The analysis of interview data details the

factors that enable these teachers to persevere in opening dialogic spaces despite the challenges, strategies they use to create conditions for productive talk, and ways in which they view the nature of teacher intervention during dialogues. The study concludes by generating a framework for decision making in which teachers use their knowledge of their students to flexibly set short-term cognitive, linguistic, and social emotional goals for student talk, moving students through successive stages of a spectrum ranging from teacher-controlled talk to student-led talk.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Classroom talk is an integral part of school. Whether a lecture introducing new material, classmates socializing during a break, a dialogue prompted by an interesting question, or reviewing directions on an assignment, talk is woven through virtually all classroom activities. Cazden (1988), a sociolinguist well-known for documenting patterns in classroom talk, writes in her seminal work on classroom discourse that speech functions at the intersection between cognitive and social practices, making the reflective processes through which students relate new knowledge available for teachers to respond to. As such, classroom talk affects both the cognitive and social development of students. Cazden continues to outline three primary ways in which talk is central and unique to the educational process: 1) spoken language is a medium through which students both learn and express their understanding; 2) classrooms are crowded human environments and the teacher uses talk to control the class; and 3) spoken language is an integral piece of students' social and cultural identities, and therefore a bridge between what happens in the classroom and what happens outside of it (p. 2). Furthermore, classroom talk also acts as a pedagogical tool for instruction and assessment of content in that it can communicate disciplinary ideas, convey student thinking, and serve as a process to test the validity of those ideas (Wegerif, Mercer, & Dawes, 1999).

Many studies demonstrate that well-structured classroom talks are effective in developing the kinds of thinkers who can solve problems by asking the right questions, collecting and drawing conclusions from information, making connections, and developing and testing solutions (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Murphy, et al., 2018; Reznitskaya et al., 2009; Webb et al,

2009). High quality talk is significantly related to successful school performance regardless of grade level, content area, student demographics, or perceived ability levels.

Classroom talk lies on a continuum regarding how time, control, and power are shared. On one end, there exists a monologic style of direct instruction, in which teachers use talk to transmit ideas, monopolizing and tightly controlling the flow of information. At the other end, teachers and students dialogically share the floor through conversation and dialogue, with the power diffused through all participants to shape and control the flow of ideas. This is the space where deep learning is more likely to occur. Research shows that students learn most effectively during dialogic learning, in which participants actively co-construct meaning around issues of personal significance (Wells & Arauz, 2006). By allowing more participatory approaches to classroom talk, teachers increase student engagement with learning targets and open opportunities for students to refine both the process and product of their learning. Quality classroom talk allows students the chance to both internalize new learning and appropriate the language of disciplinary literacies.

However, the simple presence of classroom talk is not enough for student learning to occur. Student learning outcomes depend on the types of language that teachers use to instruct, how the classroom environment is structured, and teacher questioning techniques (Edwards-Groves et al., 2014; Kyriacou & Issitt, 2008; Wolf, Crosson, & Resnick, 2006). These interactions are strengthened through teacher choices in designing open-ended tasks, prompting and pressing students' reasoning (Michaels & O'Connor, 2015), and connecting students' responses to one another and prior class content (Osborne et al., 2019). Because teacher moves during dialogic talk affect student talk, and because high quality student talk leads to higher student achievement, then teachers have a professional responsibility to develop strong talk

facilitation skills if they are to increase student learning. To this end, dozens of pedagogical approaches that center classroom dialogues have emerged in the last few decades to help teachers develop strategies for increasing the amount and quality of student talk (Al-Adeimi & O'Connor, 2022). Nevertheless, meaningful quality talk rooted in inquiry, reasoning, evidence is still not occurring in classrooms (Michaels & O'Connor, 2015), despite increased recognition of its importance and a wide arrange of professional development programs for teachers.

Researchers offer several explanations as to why teachers are resistant to using classroom conversations as a regular pedagogical practice (Michaels & O'Connor, 2015; Murphy et al., 2018). Challenges include time pressures, an overemphasis on tested skills like reading and writing, fears that the chosen content will be uninteresting or irrelevant, a fear of the perceived loss of classroom control (which might undermine teacher authority), a lack of understanding of facilitation moves, and fears over the potentially negative interactions between students (Costello, 2016). Classroom conversations are also more likely to break down around issues of potential emotional stress and conflict, indicating that any teacher toolbox regarding classroom conversations needs to attend to student's social and emotional needs in addition to their academic, cognitive, and linguistic needs. Without these tools, teachers cite concern that divisive issues will erode class cohesion, and that they are not comfortable with the emotional stresses of group conflict (Michaels & O'Connor, 2015). Further increasing teacher hesitancy towards creating opportunities for conversations that may risk class cohesion, as of June 2021, 44 states have introduced legislation that would penalize teachers from providing opportunities for students to engage with topics that might cause student discomfort (Schwartz, 2021).

All of this is to say that dialogic learning is complex, contextual, and for many teachers viewed as a risky endeavor. Teachers need to make an immeasurable number of decisions

regarding planning for and facilitating classroom talk if it is to be productive. They need to overcome personal discomfort, logistical problems, and sometimes institutional barriers to even open a space for quality talk to occur. It is crucial for teachers to be aware of how their own approaches are affecting their students' opportunities for talk, and therefore their students' learning. Khong et al. (2019) call for "investigations into such teachers' beliefs or identities in relation to introducing talk pedagogies" (p. 341), noting that most of the studies of quality classroom talk focus on either discourse analysis or the impact of a particular pedagogical practice. By making teacher orientations and decision making around classroom talk explicit, this study aims to illustrate how a small group of schoolteachers in Hawai'i are navigating decisions made around classroom talk.

### **The Nature of Classroom Talk**

Theories of classroom talk are positioned within a variety of disciplines and strands, and from those disciplines arise some significant differences in focus. Nevertheless, there are some shared themes. Classroom talk can be primarily defined as an interaction between two or more members in a shared space and time, although the rise of digital learning spaces has called even this definition into question. Classroom talk could include presenting new material, discussing and understanding new concepts by members of the classroom, asking questions to gather more information, communicating and policing rules and expectations, or socializing and building relationships. These interactions range on a continuum from monologic to dialogic. Monologic talk is one-sided and presentational in that it involves sharing information with little to no opportunity for receptive input and is meant to display knowledge or learning like in a teacher lecture or an oral assessment of student knowledge. Contrasting this, dialogic talk is discursive, in that it requires multiple speakers to be simultaneously and deliberately engaged, with all



speech acts occurring with the possibility of being built on or resisted to. It necessitates participants asking questions, making predictions, or drawing inferences about the learning material. While the delineation between monologic and dialogic can be useful for categorizing different types of speech acts in the classroom, most communication events will include elements of both kinds of talk. However, as well-structured dialogic talk has been found to be more conducive to student learning (Howe, 2019; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Murphy, et al., 2018; Reznitskaya et al., 2009; Webb et al, 2009), teachers should plan for and prioritize opening spaces for dialogic talk to occur.

Dialogic talk is defined not only through its form—it looks and sounds like participants contributing equally, building upon, and resisting other’s ideas—but also through the meanings made through the discussion, and the changes that occur during the dialogue itself (Wegerif, 2020). Essentially, classroom dialogues are a way to both make meaning and a way of being. Kershner et al. (2020) continue that for the classroom talk to be considered dialogic, it needs to combine “first, a dialogic form, second, opening a shared dialogic space and third, the aim of teaching for better quality dialogue” (p. 13). This highlights that teachers who wish to move their classroom talk from monologic to dialogic need to therefore consider more than just the talk itself. They need to consider ways to open the shared dialogic space, creating an environment in which all participants feel comfortable enough to share their ideas and consider alternative perspectives. They additionally need to build in mechanisms to improve the quality of the discussion if they are to address the ontological nature of dialogue—that it is “not just a means or tool to be used to help construct content knowledge, but more than that [...] a way to change ourselves and to change our reality” (Kershner et al., 2020, p. 11).

The definitions of classroom talk, both monologic and dialogic, are relatively complex and changing. When many schools were forced to move to digital instruction in 2020 by protocols to limit the spread of COVID-19, teachers were asked to move much of what is considered classroom talk digitally, oftentimes relying on tools to facilitate asynchronous conversations or presentations. The rise of virtual and digital methods of teaching and learning have expanded traditional forms of classroom talk into shared digital spaces through chats, message boards, and forums. The distinction between monologic and dialogic classroom talk becomes blurred in digital spaces where the definition of spontaneous comes into question: does spontaneous mean the speech acts are occurring synchronously? Is it considered spontaneous if a student logs into a forum several hours later and responds to another student's post, but it's the first time the student has engaged with the idea? If teachers are to strengthen their skills in facilitating classroom talk, any programs meant to strengthen those skills must simultaneously be clear in its definition of what classroom talk is.

Regardless of where and when it is occurring, Cazden (2001) notes three linguistic features prominent in all classroom talk:

- The language of curriculum. This comprises all the language that is centered around the learning target, subject area content, and allowed course materials. This might be an overview of the vocabulary necessary to understand the content, readings, teacher lectures to relay new material, questions to deeper understanding, student recitation, or explanations of reasoning.
- The language of control. This consists of the language of most of the classroom task-keeping, like establishing or enforcing norms, giving activity directions, or providing feedback on student behavior.

- The language of personal and social identity. This category of talk encompasses the types of language, dialects, or registers used and privileged in class (its implication being that some social and cultural identities connected to that talk are elevated in status), and social classroom interactions that may not be considered academic, like telling stories, gossiping, or self-expression unrelated to the object of learning.

Cazden elaborates that these features are interactive, and serve to communicate information, establish and maintain social relationships, and express the speaker's identity and attitudes. As in the distinctions between monologic and dialogic classroom talk, while these categories are useful in categorizing different functions of classroom talk, most speech acts within the classroom will incorporate elements of all three. Additionally, issues concerning the language of personal and social identity have not been given as much attention as the language of curriculum and control within pedagogical approaches for developing teacher skills in facilitating dialogue (Cazden, 2001). Teachers wishing to improve the quality of talk within their classrooms should necessarily pay attention to how they invite the language of personal and social identity into their spaces, as this type of language has the power to shape relationships and engagement during discussions.

### ***Talk and Curriculum***

Cazden's (2011) first category of classroom talk includes the features of content-area teaching and learning. As previously stated, one of the primary functions of talk in the classroom is to drive student academic success and content-specific knowledge acquisition. This is the talk of lessons and learning and is what typically comes to mind when educators hear the term classroom talk. Barnes (2010), in his call for educators to recognize the importance of talk, offers an overview of a "natural sequence in lessons" (p. 7) that may occur during a learning cycle:

1. A teacher elicits from a class what they already know about the learning content.

2. The teacher either explicitly presents information about the content, or presents a text to be discussed, whether it's a reading in an English Language Arts class, a phenomena or demonstration in a Physics class, or a political cartoon in a Social Studies class, to provide a few examples.
3. The teacher may facilitate some sort of exploration, whether through talk or writing, where students connect the new material to what they previously knew or thought. This often takes time, as according to Barnes it may "involve a major change of understanding, perhaps even a profound revision of how we see the world" (p. 8)
4. The teacher reviews, synthesizes, or summarizes the learning.

In each of these stages, talk plays a crucial role in developing student understanding, whether through the presentation of new material, questioning strategies used by the teacher to elicit prior knowledge or misconceptions, or students fumbling through half-formed thoughts on their way to clarifying their knowledge of the material.

In the early grades, students acquire basic language and literacy through talking about their daily experiences: the weather, colors, numbers, their observations, their families, or a shared experience like having a book read to them. At this stage, students talk in school almost the same as they talk at home. However, as students progress through the stages of developmental literacy - phonemic awareness, phonics, print awareness - there is a shift from using talk to develop *basic* literacy skills to using talk to develop content-specific or disciplinary literacy skills. McConachie and Petrosky (2010) define disciplinary literacy as "[involving] the use of reading, reasoning, investigating, speaking, and writing required to learn and form complex content knowledge appropriate to a particular discipline" (p. 16). This is to say that as

children progress through their schooling, tools to develop students' social talk may not be sufficient to develop the skills and knowledge appropriate to say, calculus or psychology.

As teachers help students through the transition from basic to discipline-specific literacy, they must create opportunities to both use talk to develop discipline-specific content knowledge and apprentice students into the kinds of talk that occur within the discipline. For example, a student studying microbiology must understand the principles of the discipline. To be successful, they must also be an effective practitioner of microbiology, which may require different types of talk. In one scenario, they may need to collaborate with colleagues in a lab about experimental protocols. This would require an understanding of highly technical language and clear, concise, unambiguous directions about sequences and processes. In another scenario, they may need to present their findings at a conference. In academic scientific presentations, the syntax is often complicated and full of jargon, which may be appropriate because their audience would have the same disciplinary understanding. However, in a third scenario, that same microbiologist may need to secure funding from an audience without a scientific background and must be able to translate or interpret that jargon for individuals without their degree of discipline-specific literacy. The question begs, how are teachers creating opportunities for students to develop this skill? Outside of English Language Arts classes, few teachers ask students to pay attention to rhetorical strategies for addressing specific audiences, and yet this is an important skill for student learning.

### ***Talk and Control***

Cazden's (2011) second category of classroom talk includes features that allow members (usually the teacher) to control the behaviors of students. If student talk is to move from teacher-centered to student-centered, then there must be a process for students to internalize the often-

implicit rules of civil discourse, especially in circles of diverse participants. The teacher needs to make those conversational norms clear, while simultaneously encouraging students to adopt a stance of both self- and peer-control. In effect, teachers are apprenticing students into adopting the teacher's role. In this regard, Stubbs (1983) identifies eight types of classroom talk meant to monitor and control the classroom communication system, ranging from where participants should place their attention, to duration and focus of the speech. Stubbs continues that this kind of teacher talk is asymmetrical in that it is exclusively used by teachers, and yet at least some of these patterns will need to be adopted by students if they are to participate in productive classroom discussions without teacher intervention and control. How can teachers apprentice students into these practices? How can the language of control be organized and planned for in the shift from teacher to student-controlled discourse?

### ***Talk and Identity***

Cazden's (2011) third category of classroom talk includes the features which express and reflect on a sense of self in relation to different communities of belonging. Talk and identity are closely related, in that the ways in which people talk about themselves and their experiences shape both the way they see themselves and how they are perceived by others. The language that individuals use helps define their cultural backgrounds, social group memberships, and personal identities (Blair et al., 2011). It additionally signals their membership to linguistic, regional, ethnic, or national groups. Individuals often have multiple intersecting linguistic identities, depending on the situational contexts including where, when, and to whom they are speaking (Ben-Rafael, 2006). Cazden (2011) notes that "variation in ways of speaking is a universal fact of social life [...] Differences in how something is said, and even when, can be matters of only temporary adjustment, or they can seriously impair effective teaching and accurate evaluation"

(p.3). Drawing attention to the complexity and variety of language variation in the classroom, she implies that teachers should deeply question the implicit assumptions they are making about student capabilities based on the way they talk. As teachers have the power to privilege or silence certain kinds of speech, to shape the talk in their class is to shape the student identities and social dynamics of the class as well.

Teachers should therefore strive to be aware of the values and judgments that are communicated throughout competing discourses, languages, dialects, and registers. While each of these distinctions are hierarchically related, they are discrete linguistic concepts and should be considered separately. The discussion of discourse in the current study uses Schiffrin's (2001) definition of discourse being the meaning that exists "beyond the sentence" (p. 1). Discourse not only considers the meaning of the words and phrases used, but also the grammar, context, purpose, speaker, situation, power dynamics, nonverbal cues, subtext, and the process by which meaning is made through language. It is the broadest linguistic concept discussed in this paper. The next broadest categories are language and dialect. Both are generally defined as the rules for the structure of words, phrases, sentences, and systems of meaning within a given place. Languages are generally considered to have multiple regional dialects. However, the almost arbitrary distinction between the two is well documented in the linguistic community (Haugen, 1966; Wong, 1999), in so far as the question of what is considered a language and what is considered a dialect is a relative distinction based on whose dialect is considered the linguistic norm. This has implications for Hawai'i, the only state with two official languages (English and 'Ōlelo Hawai'i), and a considerable number of speakers of Hawaiian Creole English (HCE or Hawaiian Pidgin), a language variation viewed as either "a tremendous handicap [to learning]"

by its detractors or a language in its own right by its supporters (Drager, 2012; Wong, 1999).

Wong (1999) in supporting the use of HCE in Hawaiian schools, says:

[...]the fact that the detractors of Pidgin do not feel compelled to provide linguistic evidence that might support the inherent superiority of [Standard English] over HCE, reflects the position of relative power enjoyed by English in the community. The burden of making compelling arguments falls on the shoulders of those who support the appreciation of Pidgin” (p. 208).

So which languages should teachers in Hawai‘i use for students to be successful? Which identities do they privilege and value? Is there a role for all three — ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, Standard English and HCE? If a student speaks one of the 130 other languages spoken at home in the state, how much of that language is supported and honored in classroom discussions?

The narrowest linguistic concept discussed in this paper is that of *register*. Register is generally defined as a specific variety of language that’s used in specific contexts, and usually attends to issues of formality or appropriateness in particular situations. For example, the way that one might speak to a boss is very different from how they may speak to a friend. Register also includes disciplinary specific languages and jargon, like that used in a medical or legal field. The ability to successfully navigate these registers, dialects, or languages within a single conversation or discourse is referred to as code-switching. Additionally, the concept of an academic register, or academic language, is a well-documented set of linguistic conventions used in academic settings, but not necessarily social or professional circles (Goldenberg, 2013). Academic language is distinguished by specialized and abstract vocabulary, sometimes convoluted sentence structures, a formal tone and absence of an authorial voice. But, as discussed previously, there also exists discipline-specific communication expectations that fall



under the larger umbrella of academic language. Teachers create unnecessary barriers for their students' learning when they conflate academic language use or a student's proficiency in Standard English with their cognitive ability.

### ***The Institutionalization of Talk***

The degree to which teachers have interpreted the relative worth of different types of talk has affected their assessment of students' literacies. These hierarchies then become institutionalized as schools make decisions regarding student placement, access to opportunities, and allocations of resources based on perceptions of students' literacy skills. Cummins (2008) proposed distinctive situational literacies within social and cognitive realms. Working within the field of second language learning, he developed a framework to draw a distinction between *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (BICS) and *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). Cummins defines BICS as conversational fluency, and CALP as the "students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school." (2008, p. 2). Noticing that many English as Another Language (EAL) learners struggle in mainstream classes after being designated fluent English speakers, Cummins surmised that teachers were removing the linguistic support necessary for EAL students to access the content. By conflating students' conversational fluency with their academic language proficiency, teachers were doing a disservice to their students in not distinguishing students' linguistic needs from their cognitive ones. Despite originating in different communities, Cummins' and Cazden's taxonomies of language function have substantial overlap, in that Cummins' description of BICS aligns with Cazden's description of talk as identity, and his description of CALP aligns with Cazden's descriptions of the talk of curriculum and control. Supporters of Cummins' framework argue that the BICS-CALP distinction is helpful in ensuring

that EALs are receiving proper support (Flores & Rosa, 2022), but its usefulness as a factor in educational decision making has faced criticism in recent years.

Critics of the BICS-CALP distinction argue that approaching oral literacy acquisition from a lens of academic language proficiency is a kind of deficit-based thinking that in practice *maintains* the structures that limit EAL student success (Flores & Rosa, 2022; Macswan, 2000; Petrovic, 2013; Valdés, 2004). As Flores and Rosa (2022) explain:

The framing of racialized bi/multilingual students' language practices as unacademic, deficient, and in need of perpetual remediation is rooted not in empirical linguistic differences but rather in broader colonial logics that have historically co-constructed language and race as part of the domination of racialized communities (p. 5).

This is to say that the lack of success that many racialized students find in school was never due to their language proficiency, but rather in the teachers' unexamined views of what is or isn't literacy from a critical lens.

This de facto segregation similarly played out in Hawai'i, where oral proficiency in Standard English was used as an exclusionary factor to segregate students based on race, while simultaneously posturing to represent perceived American values of merit-based inclusion. Young (2002), in his discussion of the history and legacy of the Standard English schools, illuminates the perceived literacy deficit of non-White students who use the social register. These schools were created to serve White middle-class families in O'ahu from 1924 to 1948. A Survey of Education in Hawai'i by the United States Board of Education (Dept. of the Interior, 1920) led to a shift in academic programming of public schools with a non-White majority from classical and academic courses to vocational courses focusing on agriculture, domestic training, and

physical and manual development. Following recommendations from the same survey, parents of the growing White middle class of Honolulu requested the establishment of a public school exclusively for those who spoke Standard English, and thus the English Standard school system was born (Young, 2002). Marie Hara (1994) in her short story "Fourth Grade Ukus" shares the desire that many families felt to send their kids to the Standard Schools, with their newer facilities, newest books, and where "none of the students there had to do any manual labor" (p. 47). And yet, when the narrator uses HCE in her school interview to communicate an accurate understanding of scientific concepts, she is denied entry. This story reveals the subjectivity of using Standard English as a criterion for academic success, in that "Standard English seemingly is equated with a cognitive ability to formulate a clear and understandable narrative that indicates intelligence [...] What is never questioned is the logic of this test and its far-reaching conclusions and consequences" (Young, 2002, p. 418).

In designing experiences for all students to be engaged in classroom talk, teachers must therefore be intentionally aware of the kinds of languages, registers, and literacies they invite and privilege in the classroom, as well as any perceived biases that arise from students' use. Researchers have proposed that viewing literacy in the classroom through a lens of *translanguaging* can be a useful way to ensure that language-minority students, and arguably students who primarily use social registers, have access to and are engaged in classroom content (Flores & Rosa, 2022; García & Li Wei, 2014; Seltzer, 2019). According to García and Li Wei (2014), translanguaging is defined as "the dynamic and flexible multilingual language practices of multilingual speakers, who draw on the full range of their linguistic resources, both oral and written, to communicate in varied language contexts" (p. 6). The idea of translanguaging expands the more familiar concept of code switching, defined by Grosjean (1982) as the practice

of navigating between different languages or registers within a single conversation. While the concept of translanguaging includes the inclusion of words and phrases from multiple languages like code switching does, it also expands its scope to draw attention to ways that participants combine elements of these languages and literacies in novel ways. Because classroom talk is so complex, contextual, and varied in its purpose and scope, students who are allowed and encouraged to draw on their full range of linguistic tools are therefore able to engage more effectively with the content. For teachers to consciously include and invite all students' language practices within their design of instructional experience is to potentially transform the ways in which educational institutions have historically used those same practices as an exclusionary barrier.

### **Finding the Space of Dialogic Talk**

Because dialogic classroom talk is so multifaceted and complex, creating the space for it to occur will not happen accidentally. Students need support with the cognitive, linguistic, and social demands required to effectively participate, and yet many teachers do not have or are not provided the tools to make this happen. Teachers often struggle to get students to participate, students might drift too far off topic, or the conversation may be dominated by a student or two. They will then often decide it is not worth the time and choose other more predictable and controllable strategies for meeting students' learning needs. They decide that either they—or their students—do not have what it takes for conversations to work in class.

We need to deconstruct the narrative that “great teachers are born with *immeasurable, unteachable* stuff[...]We are either cool enough to hold great conversations or we aren't, and no amount of professional development can stretch the limits of our intuition” (Kay, 2018, p. 11). Such a narrative ignores teachers' “hours spent picking the best texts, designing the best

prompts, researching the best structures, practicing the best activities, reflecting and building up both victories and failures” (Kay, 2018, p. 12). Because of its complexity, dialogic talk will inevitably fail to accomplish its desired learning outcome at some point, but much of the learning happens in the activities designed around the conversation: practicing pieces of it like questioning and elaborating, or reflecting on the conversation’s success after the fact. Teachers must trust that the invested time and potential discomfort is worth it, and then be prepared and supported to manage and facilitate those conversations. For those teachers who are not finding success in creating spaces for dialogic learning, an overview of the research suggests that the breakdown occurs in three key areas: they lack (or feel like they lack) the logistical space, their students are not in an appropriate social-emotional space, or there’s too much ambiguity in the legal space for teachers to risk drawing negative attention towards their classroom. Finally, if teachers can overcome these three barriers, they must then use high-impact teacher talk moves for productive student dialogues to occur.

### ***Creating the Logistical Space for Dialogic Talk***

The first barrier to the facilitation of high-quality student-centered dialogic talk is a lack of time and space. As previously mentioned, students not only need time in class to be able to talk to one another, but time is also needed for preparation and reflection to increase the probability that the conversation will be productive. Darling-Hammond (2017) found that many teachers feel pressured to cover a large amount of material, stay on plan with district or school-mandated pacing plans, or have class periods that are too short to sustain dialogic inquiry. Additionally, apart from tests designed to assess EAL students like the WIDA MODEL (World Class Instructional Design and Assessment Measure of Developing English Language), very few high stakes tests integrate speaking and listening skills, despite their inclusion in most state

standards. With the pressure for teachers to increase test scores, to spend the amount of time needed to facilitate productive conversations may not be worth the potential pushback from administrators.

Teachers may also be limited by high numbers of students or the inability to create a physical arrangement that best facilitates productive talk. With the expectation that good conversations involve equitable participation of those involved, more students in class means less time for each individual student to share and contribute. Larger class sizes will also affect the logistics of the classroom layout. The classroom layout will affect participation, with the best layout being one where all participants can see each other to uptake nonverbal communication. If you have 30 students in a small classroom, for example, a classroom layout with desks in a circle may not be possible. There are ways to address both the layout and the equitable talking time like using a fishbowl strategy, where one group talks and another listens, but if the goal is a class where all students are actively listening and participating, then realistically only half of the students can possibly participate at one time. Without the support and tools to address the current time and space constraints that exist in many classrooms, facilitating quality dialogic talk will continue to be a challenge.

### ***Attending to the Social Space: “The Trump Effect” and Rhetorical Antagonism***

A second barrier to the facilitation of high-quality classroom dialogues is when teachers have not created a classroom culture conducive to dialogic talk. This may occur either because there is little social cohesion among students, or because students behave in ways that shut down the conversation. Teachers must know which conversation topics might trigger antagonism, disengagement, or classroom disruptions, and have a plan for what to do when it occurs (McAvoy & Ho, 2020). Insofar as the classroom acts as a microcosm of global discourse trends

without teacher intervention, the disturbing rise of inflammatory and juvenile rhetoric within the political sphere has correlated with a rise in teacher reported racialized and combative speech in class. Harmful rhetoric has been directed particularly towards linguistic and cultural minority students (Costello, 2017). Costello dubs this phenomenon “The Trump Effect,” in that teachers report a rise in school-based antagonism seemed to be a direct result of the 2016 presidential election. A survey randomly sent to teachers in the U.S. shortly after the election found that 1000 of 5000 responses linked verbal aggression to Trump’s rhetoric specifically, despite the survey asking for no input regarding any candidate.

The possibility for class discussions leading to a divisive or polarizing classroom culture was a concern well before the 2016 election. Researchers have documented that when appropriate attention is not paid to classroom social dynamics, students become entrenched in their opinions, and less willing to consider alternate perspectives or engage with their classmates (Hess, 2004; Niemi & Weldon, 2002). Additionally, polarized conversations can have a dampening effect on students willing to push back and propose alternative trains of thought, which defeats the purpose of using conversation as a vehicle for deepening critical thinking (Felder & Brent, 2016). Media coverage of politics and the rise of social media as a platform for civic discourse has illuminated a growing presence of incivility and toxic behavior, both offline and online (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2018). The potential breakdown of class cohesion or individual harm is not just a danger when talking about politics or contested and controversial issues. Teachers cannot always anticipate which topics will be a trigger for incivility, or how an innocuous comment towards one student can be emotionally triggering for another. Without tools to address this incivility, teachers may either avoid conversations in which it can occur, or

risk damaging the sense of classroom cohesion that growing research is finding is a precursor to learning.

### ***Navigating the Legal Space: Legislation and Controversial Issues***

The third barrier to creating the space for dialogic talk is the potential legal or professional repercussions of introducing content that may be considered controversial. As of June 2021, 44 states have introduced legislation that would penalize teachers from providing opportunities for students to engage with topics that might cause student discomfort (Schwartz, 2021). Topics covered under proposed bans include race, gender identity and sexual orientation, politics, and certain aspects of history such as the teaching of slavery, the Jim Crow era, or the Holocaust. The bans are a backlash in conservative circles to the perceived threat of leftist indoctrination through Critical Race Theory<sup>1</sup> or other “anti-American ideologies” (Gross, 2022).

Some laws take it even further, such as South Carolina’s proposed House Bill 4605, which would ban school activities where “an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of his or her race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, heritage, culture, religion, or political belief” (H.B. 4605, 2022). This not only assumes that discomfort is something to be avoided, but also puts the onus on the teacher to anticipate which topics will be distressing.

Regarding teaching content that could be potentially divisive, Hawai‘i Board of Education policy (Hawai‘i Department of Education, 2016) states:

Student discussion of issues which generate opposing points of view shall be considered a normal part of the learning process in every area of the school

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<sup>1</sup> Critical Race Theory, a framework for legal scholars to examine the ways that race has structured with legal, financial, and social systems, is feared because its opponents believe it will erode positive civic sentiments.



program. The depth of the discussion shall be determined by the maturity of the students. Teachers shall refer students to resources reflecting multiple and diverse points of view. Discussions, including contributions made by the teacher or resource person, shall be maintained on an objective, factual basis. Stress shall be placed on learning how to make judgements based on facts.

This policy has profound implications for how teachers are to integrate potentially controversial talk into the classroom. First, they must know the maturity level of the student with regards to the appropriateness of the topic of conversation. In a dialogic setting, this can be especially hard to navigate as sometimes seemingly benign or non-controversial content can quickly veer into that territory. For example, the Common Core State Standards' Reading Literature Standard 4.4 asks fourth grade students to "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean)" (National Governor's Association, 2010, n.d.). This implies that students in fourth grade should be exposed to Greek mythology. While there are sanitized versions of the labors of Hercules, the character specifically mentioned in the standard, some lines of inquiry into the myth may expose students to his acts of violence, including the murder of his wife and children while under the influence of the goddess Hera. To expose students to stories about Hercules is also to potentially expose them to narratives of domestic abuse, murder, mental illness, abduction, and sexual assault. And as anyone who has worked with young children will tell you, these questions will come up along with dozens of follow up questions. Teachers must know their students well to be able to gauge the depth of their discussion.

Anecdotally, my fourth-grade son was listening to a podcast about the Greek hero Perseus, who famously killed the monster Medusa (Weiser, 2017). The podcast is promoted as

appropriate for upper elementary students in both content and language. While the podcast itself did not go into depth about the how and why of Medusa's situation, my son's questions did:

Son: Was Medusa born a monster or did she get turned into one?

Me: She was turned into a monster.

Son: Who turned her into a monster?

Me: Athena

Son: Why did Athena turn her into a monster?

Me: Athena thought she was being disrespectful while she was in her temple.

Son: What did she do that was so bad?

At this point I had to decide about my son's maturity level. In one version of the myth, Medusa was raped by Zeus, who Athena thought was tempted by Medusa's pride and beauty. For this crime, she was punished by having her hair turned into snakes. In the end, I decided he was not mature enough for this answer, so instead we talked about how she was in the wrong place at the wrong time. We agreed that what happened to her was unfair. During this one conversation with one child whom I know very well, I needed to make almost instantaneous decisions carefully and consciously about which parts to share and which were not developmentally appropriate. As a teacher, I do not think I could navigate that conversation with twenty-five nine-year-olds of different maturity levels, different cultural backgrounds, and the possibility of being held legally responsible for the wrong decision. It would be easier to limit questioning all together, and with it the opportunity for dialogue.

The second implication of the Hawai'i Board of Education policy (2016) is that teacher materials should direct students to "all points of view" of controversial issues and to stress "judgments based on facts." The reality is that there are now topics of consideration where even

the facts themselves are in contention. Take, for example, a social studies teacher trying to navigate the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. On that day, former President Donald Trump claimed that the election had been “stolen” from him – despite there being no factual evidence to the case (Eggers, Garro & Grimmer, 2021). Trump urged followers to “walk down to the Capitol” to where Congress was allegedly in session to block his win. Because of the actions that unfolded after this event, as of December 2022, more than 600 attendees have since been charged with crimes associated with the ensuing riot. And yet, many Republicans still believe that the election was stolen from them due to voter fraud (Zilinsky, Nagler & Tucker, 2021). The issue of whether the 2020 Election was fair and valid is clearly a contentious issue, and Policy 101.13 would dictate that teachers would need to present “all points of view” — including those not based in facts.

The logical implications of these kinds of directives to make sure that “all points of view” are included, regardless of their merit, create situations similar to what arose in a curriculum meeting in Southlake, TX, in October of 2021. The Carroll Independent School District had recently enacted House Bill 3979, which contains language about teaching controversial topics similar to Hawai‘i’s in that:

Teachers who choose to discuss current events or widely debated and currently controversial issues of public policy or social affairs shall, to the best of their ability, strive to explore such issues from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective (H.B. 3979, 2021, p. 2).

In the meeting, the district director of curriculum and instruction was heard explaining about stocking books for classroom libraries, to “make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust, that you have one that has an opposing, that has other perspectives” (Associated Press, 2021).

Assuming that these classroom library books about the Holocaust are accounts of Jewish genocide begs the question: What is the other side? What is the other perspective – Holocaust denial? Are we to then ask students to engage with perspectives justifying or defending other genocides?

It is an optimistic view that these laws and policies are designed with the intention of asking students to think critically about what they are learning, and to understand that their classroom conversations connect to larger conversations happening outside of the school. However, when policies are codified with the absolutist language that *all* points of view are considered, teachers must then weigh the benefit of discussing that current event or controversial issue against the potential harm to their students that some narratives may wreak. Teachers know that these conversations are a crucial piece of student engagement, in that students need a space to process how discourse outside of school connects to what is happening in the classrooms. And yet, with the weight of legal or institutional consequences, many teachers decide it is not worth the risk. Teachers need strategies for navigating the murky waters of these policies gracefully, in a way that limits harm to both their students and them.

### ***The Rhetorical Space: High-Quality Teacher Talk***

The previous three sections of this chapter sought to clarify why teachers default to monologic talk: logistical, social, and legal considerations make dialogic talk more difficult to facilitate than traditional monologic instruction. However, even when teachers are providing opportunities for classroom dialogue, research indicates that the discourse lacks the depth needed to sustain truly dialogic learning (Cazden, 2001). What many teachers are calling discussions are still following traditional patterns of teacher initiation, student recall, and teacher evaluation and correction — typically referred to as I-R-E, or initiation-response-evaluation (Cazden, 2001).

This type of talk lacks the deep thinking that sustains good conversations as it presupposes that there are “correct” answers to questions. Moreover, research indicates that the type of talk commonly seen in classrooms pays little attention to the building of student capacity to “narrate, explain, instruct, question, respond, build upon responses, analyze, speculate, explore, evaluate, discuss, argue, reason, justify and negotiate, and to judge when each form of talk is most appropriate” (Wolfe & Alexander, 2008, p. 117). Therefore, to create the space for quality dialogues, teachers need to prepare students for both the cognitive and linguistic demands of entering conversations with diverse groups.

Classroom talk that optimizes student learning also requires attention to the types of prompts used to generate that talk. When teachers initiate student talk, they should be asking open questions instead of closed for dialogic learning to occur (Alexander, 2008; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Nystrand et al, 2003; O’Connor, Michaels, & Chapin, 2015; Wells & Arauz, 2006). Open questions allow for multiple answers, ideally ones that need to elaborate or build on previous students’ contributions, and then allow for differences of opinion to be negotiated. Conversely, closed questions typically only have one correct answer, and so will not generate enough reasoning for quality dialogues to occur. Teachers must therefore be aware of both the effectiveness of their questions to promote dialogue as well as their patterns of interaction to drive student success.

### **Negotiating Dialogic Talk: The Domains of Teacher Decision Making**

As teachers create spaces for student-centered dialogic talk, they will need to make frequent and sometimes spontaneous decisions and adjustments to best meet the cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional needs of their students. To do this, teachers often need to find a middle ground between conflicting discourses. For example, they might need to balance content

that is relevant to students' lives with content that exposes them to new perspectives, find common ground between students while honoring and celebrating their differences, or nurture students to adopt new linguistic registers and rhetorical spaces while allowing and validating more familiar ones. This engagement is an act of negotiation. The word *negotiation* has two Latin roots: *neg* which means *not* or *to deny*, and *otium* which means *ease* or *leisure*. To negotiate is to literally deny leisure, and to deliberately struggle to maintain this balance. For effective discussion facilitation, educators must consciously work towards getting to know their students, challenging preconceptions, deliberately creating spaces for discussions to occur, and explicitly considering the nature of their talk in relation to their students'. The word *negotiation* also has a secondary literal definition of navigating through a difficult path or around an obstacle, as in "negotiate a turn" or "negotiate the choppy waves." Facilitating discussion means being able to navigate heated disagreements, disengaged silence, or harmful language.

Finally, *negotiation* has a connotation of discussions pertaining to business. While I am hesitant to suggest an overlap in the language of education and the language of commerce, *negotiation* connotes a discussion that allows all parties to come to a mutually beneficial understanding. Where this usage is limited is that in a business agreement, parties can walk away if there is no mutually beneficial agreement and sever the relationship. In a classroom, students are unable to walk away without jeopardizing their learning. Walking away from business agreements is acceptable, but educators must create spaces where students maintain relationships in the face of disagreement. Despite this limitation, for the purpose of this paper, *negotiation* may more accurately capture the work the facilitators must do in creating spaces for productive talk than other words commonly found in the literature (e.g., *deliberation*—"to weigh," or *mediation*—"to split through the middle"). The word *negotiation* captures the active, thoughtful

engagement in instructional decisions and language use that is necessary for productive conversations to occur.

Currently, the body of literature related to dialogic talk lacks a theoretical framework to guide teacher decision making when designing and facilitating talk. Summarizing literature from various schools of thought about language, literacy, and learning, four domains for teacher decision making emerge: 1) teachers need to diminish their own experiences in order to elevate their students', 2) teachers need to establish a culture conducive to dialogic talk and have clear task expectations, 3) teachers need to help students navigate different rhetorical modes, and 4) teachers need to know to how often and when to intervene during student talk to provide student support.

### ***Negotiating Teacher and Student Identities***

The first domain of teacher decision making regards how teachers understand who their students are and how to design instruction based on that understanding. As stated previously, teachers have immense power to shape the talk that occurs in their classrooms, even in situations where they are trying to create more opportunities for students to share that power. Oftentimes the power differential between teacher and student during those exchanges often remains unexamined. For effective classroom dialogues, teachers must negotiate their own experiences, backgrounds, and values in relation to those of their students to ensure they are minimizing their own perspectives to create space for their students' perspectives.

Teachers are often from communities that are different from the communities in which they teach. The teaching force is increasingly dominated by White women, while student populations are becoming more diverse (US Department of Education, 2016). Even when teachers are ethnically similar, there may still be vast differences in other cultural markers such

as their use of language, their values, or their access to different socioeconomic opportunities. Teachers need to understand their students' experiences, worldviews, and interests to validate student viewpoints while exposing them to ones they have not experienced. While dialogues can be spaces where teachers learn from their students, teachers must also have provided engaging content that is relevant to their lives to garner participation from their students. When teachers are unable to relate to their students' experiences, they have a responsibility to listen empathetically and bear witness. An important consideration in facilitating dialogue is in choosing content that allows students to leverage their knowledge and experiences to connect to more complicated or abstract concepts.

Teachers from privileged backgrounds, especially, need to be wary of reproducing narrow and essentialist views of students' cultures (Watkins & Noble, 2016), in which identity and culture is viewed as fixed instead of complex and shifting. An important tool in this consideration is teachers' reflection of their own identities in relation to their students by staying "focused on discomforting taken for granted beliefs and dispositions through challenge and inquiry" (Boylan & Woolsey, 2015, p. 63). Indeed, decentering their own positions of authority and privilege seem to be as important a reflexive practice for teachers considering issues of social justice as respect, care, and compassion (Zembylas, 2017). Without this complex understanding of identities, teachers run the risk of reducing students to a single, fixed aspect of their identity like their sexual orientation, religion, or race. This can be harmful because it disregards the deep complexity of the sum of an individual's experiences that do not fall neatly into a category or are the interplay of multiple identities. Furthermore, without a deep understanding of student experiences, teachers run the additional risk of placing the burden on



individuals to speak for their community. This is unfair to students as it negates the intersectional and unique lived experiences of individuals.

### ***Negotiating Common Ground and Task Expectations***

The second domain of teacher decision making encompasses the choices teachers make to develop common ground and task expectations within the classroom community. Teachers must establish a culture where productive dialogues can occur. This means establishing enough trust and care within the classroom for students to practice intellectual safety and to take risks (Jackson, 2001). One way to do this is through the development of common ground and culture within the class. Teachers should promote a vision of classroom culture that allows for the teacher's and students' experiences to be valued and respected (Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012). Additionally, they should work to cultivate a common culture within the classroom where students share common values, behavioral norms, and communal respect for the classroom as both a community and an environment. However, to allow for productive disagreement, this common ground must also be one where differences and uniqueness is celebrated, not where common culture dictates that everyone thinks and sounds the same. Effective facilitators prime their classrooms by creating spaces for building relationships among the students before the conversations occur. These relationships develop when students share experiences and build in opportunities to work collaboratively towards a common goal.

Additionally, because classroom conversations require intellectual risk, a set of clear task expectations and norms must be established to build student confidence (Burbules, 1992). This may include establishing routines for turn-taking or using sentence starters to provide examples of the kinds of productive talk that occur during conversations. However, providing too many rules constrains the conversation. The balance between structure and flexibility requires a

delicate negotiation act: too much structure can impinge the natural flow of conversation, but too little allows for the possibility that the conversation could break down.

### ***Negotiating Rhetorical Spaces***

The third teacher negotiation during classroom dialogues occurs around the encouragement and production of different rhetorical spaces, such as argumentation, narration, reflection, and even non-verbal cues like facial expression and body language. The ways that teachers privilege different rhetorical spaces can influence the learning outcomes of the conversations. Dialogic inquiry is usually positioned from a space of reasoned argumentation (Reznitskaya et al, 2008), where participants take a position, present evidence or reasoning to support their position, and address counterarguments. The subjective nature of personal experience or a speaker's emotions towards the topic are de-emphasized. Because argumentative writing is the major focus of many state standards, as well as college and career preparation, many of the pedagogical approaches that prioritize dialogue-based talk have been positioned to improve argumentation skills. Argumentation has more cognitive and linguistic demands than other rhetorical spaces (Nippold, Ward-Lonergan, & Fanning, 2005; Salahu-Din et al., 2008), and so necessitates using more classroom time and resources than other rhetorical spaces.

Recent studies have found that while argumentation is a key component of content acquisition, making the purpose of the discussion explicit is critical to student success: students who were taught and given the space to deliberate with their peers retained content gains while those who disputed with their peers did not (Asterhan & Schwartz, 2016). When the learning activity was rooted in debate, it was disruptive to the social fabric that is a precondition for effective classroom communication. However, when the learning activities were instead approached as an opportunity to deliberate, as in finding a solution to a problem or coming to a

common understanding of a topic, social cohesion remained intact without sacrificing cognitive gains. Reasoning and argumentation are crucial for the application of logic for the common good, but they should not threaten or undermine classroom relationships.

Additionally, if one of the aims of dialogic talk is to increase content knowledge acquisition, a discussion limited to facts and reasoning may not be enough to change someone's mind if cognitive or social transformation is a goal. From the rise of fake news in the media, to COVID-19 and vaccine deniers, to the legitimacy of the 2020 US federal election, there are social and emotional truths that preclude cognitive ones. About this phenomenon, writer James Clear (2017) explains, "we don't always believe things because they are correct. Sometimes we believe things because they make us look good to the people we care about" (p. 9). This is to say that there are social mechanisms which override our rational brain. It confirms that the development of a common ground, as discussed previously, is a precursor for learning the argumentative register to occur. Teachers must not only create spaces for students to feel like they belong, but within the discussions themselves must create space for more social forms of language to increase belonging. Pedagogical approaches to dialogue must have room for social forms of language like narration, emotional expression, humor, and nonverbal communication to increase the likelihood of cognitive transformation.

Specifically, using storytelling in conjunction with argumentation within classroom conversations may be necessary to maintain a common ground and the ability to accept another's perspective. Zembylas (2017) notes that students were able to engage in critical inquiry of unspoken codes and power dynamics through "disruptive moments of sharing and listening [to]" (p. 8) stories of their lived experiences. Similarly, other forms of less objective talk, such as

joking, socializing, and expressing feelings, may also be necessary components of talk to develop common ground.

Few theoretical frameworks for the study of dialogic inquiry integrate argumentation, narration, and expressive talk together. While there are studies in isolation of each of these devices (Dutro, 2009, 2011; Reznitskaya, 2013), there is little understanding of how they function together, and how teachers employ different strategies to move students into different rhetorical spaces.

### ***Negotiating Roles: Distributing Power During Dialogic Talk***

The final domain of teacher decision making during student-centered dialogic talk encompasses choices made in real time regarding the teacher's role as both a facilitator and a participant. The tension lies in how much or how little teachers ought to participate during conversations. At one end of the spectrum lies teacher-dominated conversations, similar to the monologic IRE patterns discussed in an earlier section. At the other end lies student-led dialogues. However, there exists a need for a transitional space in which teachers support students in maintaining conversational focus and scaffolding the discussion (Kathard, Pillay & Pillay, 2015; Reynolds, 2018; Reznitskaya, 2012). There has been little written on how and when teachers should effectively pivot between these poles. In addition to providing scaffolding for the cognitive and linguistic demands of the conversation, effective facilitators must also intervene when students do not challenge or question each other when echoing harmful ideologies. In these cases, teachers must step in to help students uncover and deconstruct harmful discourse. They should participate to be not only a model for their students, but also because in a truly emancipatory classroom we should not ask our students to do anything we are not willing to do ourselves.

## Research Design and Questions

This project was designed to understand how experienced educators are making decisions about how to best create the space for dialogic talk within their classrooms. By making the thought processes of these teachers explicit, less experienced teachers can better prepare themselves and their students for productive classroom conversations. My analysis examines facilitator thought processes and actions before, during, and after classroom dialogues, and seeks to describe how these decisions affect the quality and flow of the talk.

The research was guided by one central research question: How are teachers creating the space for dialogic talk in their classroom, and how do teachers negotiate their own talk within that space? Classroom discourse is complex and shifting, as the participants' knowledge, languages, identities, experiences, and perceptions shape what gets said and who says it. From this overarching question, subtopics aligned to the four thematic domains of teacher decision making were developed:

- How are teachers negotiating their own experiences with the experiences of their students in designing opportunities for dialogic talk? Effective whole-class conversations are predicated by an orientation towards a democratic space, in which teacher experiences are diminished and students' experiences and backgrounds are honored.
- How are teachers building classroom culture and an understanding of task expectations for students? Classroom discourse is by nature flexible and changing, with students expected to understand the rules of the "language game" (Wittgenstein, 1953), and develop proficiency in the different rhetorical modes necessary for quality talk.
- How are teachers negotiating the tension between academic rationality and other less validated modes like storytelling and social talk; What is the role of culturally specific

communicative language? These are not integrated into many models of classroom dialogues, and yet seem to be an integral part of building community and negotiating tension in emotionally loaded dialogues.

- How are teachers negotiating their role during the conversations? The role of the teacher during conversation is contested, as too much control could impede the democratic foundation of the conversation, and too little control could derail it.

These questions guided a series of interviews with teachers in Hawai‘i who value and prioritize student talk. All are experienced facilitators, self-reflective, and have created enough opportunities for their students to dialogue to be able to see patterns in the ways in which their decisions affect the quality of their students’ talk. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in order to draw conclusions about the range of teacher decision making around considerations of classroom talk. The findings provide guidance for teachers wishing to strengthen their classroom practices, school leaders wishing to encourage more student talk, and teacher developers wishing to improve professional development of content relating to classroom talk.

## **Organization of Study**

Chapter Two provides a literature review of the nature of dialogue-based talk and best practices for its facilitation. It begins by looking at its theoretical origins, rooted in Bakhtin’s notion of dialogic discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984), social-constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978), Dewey’s conceptualization of student-centered learning (Dewey, 1913, 1938), and critical ethics of care (Freire, 1970; Noddings, 1984, 2015). It then examines literature pertaining to the four domains of teacher negotiation listed above, seeking to outline a list of teacher orientations towards their students and their content, advised patterns of language use, or instructional

strategies. It will then use that checklist to examine existing pedagogical approaches that prioritize dialogue-based talk, like accountable talk (Michaels et al., 2008), collaborative reasoning (Reznitskaya et al., 2009; Waggoner et al., 1995), Quality Talk (Murphy et al., 2018), dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2006; Reznitskaya, 2012), and Philosophy for Children (P4C and p4c) (Jackson, 2001; Makaiau, 2016; Makaiau & Miller, 2012; Reznitskaya, 2005).

Chapter Three shares my own cultural upbringing to shed light on my positionality as a teacher and researcher. It describes my own professional experiences with these negotiations of classroom dialogues, first as a student, then as a teacher, and now as a teacher developer.

Chapter Four describes the methodological foundation of the study. It begins with an overview of the philosophical assumptions and interpretive framework underlying the choice of using qualitative constructivist methods. It then describes the research strategy and approach, including the criteria and recruitment protocols for interview participants. Finally, an overview of the data collection methods, and coding structure used to analyze the data for salient themes is provided.

Chapter Five provides an analysis of the collected data, illuminating eleven themes that arose from continuous qualitative analysis of the participant interviews.

Chapter Six outlines the development of a proposed framework for teacher decision making supported by the findings from the data analysis. I then provide an example of how it could be used as a decision-making tool, using my own classroom practice as an example. Finally, I review the implications of the findings for school design, professional development, and possibilities for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

To create a dialogic space in learning, teachers must develop an orientation toward respecting student voices, establish and enforce a culture for dialogue, develop the skill to balance different rhetorical modes, and cultivate an awareness of their own identities and power in privileging or silencing student voices during conversations. In this study, I seek to understand how teachers negotiate and navigate these complexities during quality classroom talk because this approach to teaching and learning has the power to increase student engagement, deepen content learning, and shape the thinking and action necessary for sustaining civic practices. For the purposes of this study, the term classroom talk references both monologic and dialogic discourse, whereas classroom dialogues and classroom conversations interchangeably refer to in-the-moment spoken co-negotiations.

Building off perspectives from Bakhtin (1981, 1984), Bakhtin et al., (1978), Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and other sociocultural theorists (e.g., Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970, 1986; Noddings, 1984, 2015), I use the literature on classroom conversations to situate dialogue as a linguistic, cognitive, social, and critical practice. These theories provide the foundation for an examination of what the literature says about the four dimensions of teacher negotiation and decision-making around classroom talk practices:

- Dialogic discourse is predicated by an orientation toward democratic spaces, in which teacher experiences are diminished and students' experiences and backgrounds are honored. Teachers should understand who they are in relation to their students and then



use that knowledge to make decisions to design curriculum and opportunities for dialogue.

- Classroom discourse is by nature flexible and changing, with students expected to understand the rules of the language game (Wittgenstein, 1953) and develop proficiency in different rhetorical modes. Teachers should attend to their classroom culture and provide clarity about task expectations for quality discussion to occur.
- During classroom dialogue, participants navigate different rhetorical modes and communication styles, such as argumentation, storytelling and social talk, and nonverbal communication. Teacher development and encouragement of these modes help shape student outcomes.
- The role of the teacher during classroom conversations is contested—too much control can impede the democratic foundation of the conversation, moving the conversation back toward monologic patterns, but too little control can derail it or undermine dialogue goals. Teachers must be conscious about when and how they are intervening.

In this chapter, I thus review the common curricular approaches to help facilitate classroom dialogue, with a lens toward ascertaining how they explicitly advise teachers to negotiate these four dimensions. In this study, I do not seek to endorse any one approach, but the teachers interviewed in the study may be aware of, influenced by, or directly trained in some of the approaches. I then synthesize the literature and summarize it to develop a possible framework of best practices for teacher orientations, patterns of language use, or types of instruction to facilitating productive talk.

## **Theoretical Foundations of Classroom-Based Dialogues**

Classroom talk in general is complex, shifting, and contextual. As a practice, dialogue specifically has greater potential to shape learners' linguistic, cognitive, social, and civic practices. Grounded in theories of language, cognition, and social organization, this review of the literature includes an overview of Bakhtinian ideas of dialogic discourse and ideological becoming; social constructivism theories and inquiry-based approaches; learner-centered orientations; and the theories around developing a critical ethos of care in the classroom.

### ***Bakhtin: Dialogue as Language***

Freedman and Ball (2004) write that much of the literacy and learning research has focused on “the nature of the divides that separate us and the clashes that occur when disparate people come together, often in our schools” (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 2). Instead of focusing on what divides us, they advocate for research that focuses on how teachers can communicate across those divides. Increasingly, diverse populations will need to learn to exist and interact side-by-side if current demographic changes continue. With the aim of bridging communicative divides, Freedman and Ball find promise in Russian linguist and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogic discourse and ideological becoming.

Bakhtin views language as essentially dialogical. Burbules (1992) states that Bakhtin's concept of human communication is “less like a precise laser beam of reference, and more like a knitted catchall in which we try to contain meaning, with mismatched yarns and numerous dangling threads” (p. 11). In this way, language is dialogical in that an utterance is not just what the speaker intends it to mean but also contains multiple layers of meaning embedded in the way the utterance is produced and how it has been used historically. Bakhtin notes these dialogical relations cannot be reduced to the “purely logical . . . nor to the purely linguistic,” but only as

“complete utterances of various speaking subjects . . . [They] presuppose a language, but they do not reside within the system of language” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 117). This is to say that language cannot be stripped from who is saying it, the context and relationships in which the language is embedded, and the explicit and implicit meanings of the words. For example, the word freedom has a literal denotation of being free from restraints or a liberty from confinement or slavery. However, freedom to a civil rights activist might imply an ability to equally participate in the public space, without fear of repercussions, whereas freedom to a political conservative might mean the ability to make decisions without government interference. The word freedom may connote images of songbirds being released from cages, or chains breaking, or bald eagles. For Bakhtin, these concepts exist simultaneously and as complexly layered meaning to be negotiated both by and between individuals. Language, particularly discussion, is how those associations are created, surfaced, and clarified. It is polyphonic and heteroglossic in that words as signs are always loaded with multiple meanings and references.

In addition to viewing language as the product of these dialogic discourses, Bakhtin also views language as the process through which individuals develop identities, which he refers to as ideologically becoming. Bakhtin’s construct of ideological becoming refers to both the idea of the individual’s system of ideas and how they develop their way of seeing the world. According to Bakhtin et al. (1978), “human consciousness does not come into contact with existence directly, but through the medium of the surrounding ideological world” (p. 14). The ideological world—the ideas and values of the surrounding communities, whether it is the classroom, family, or other gathering place—mediates student learning. Deeper learning occurs when children can successfully navigate or resolve competing tensions within these ideological communities. Bakhtin (1981) writes, “the importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in

the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous" (p. 348). Freedman and Ball (2015) argue it is essential to look beyond the inevitable conflicts and miscommunications that will arise out of this struggle for learning to occur. Bakhtin (1981) also contends that, in this navigation of competing discourses, students must learn to internally incorporate two distinct ideological categories: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse is "so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342–343). When learners experience this knowledge, they must also struggle with their own relationships with that authority, in whether "what one voices as authoritative really functions authoritatively for an individual" (Freedman & Ball, 2015, p. 12), or, in other words, what is internally persuasive based on their own experiences of the world. Learning is not separate from student identity, nor is it separate from the relationship between the learner and the authority figure, whether that is the teacher or the text with which the learner is interacting.

### ***Vygotsky: Dialogue as Thought***

Bakhtin defines dialogism as a polyphonic internal process. However, social-constructivist theorists posit that, although individuals are still active participants in the creation of their own knowledge (Schreiber & Valle, 2013), learning and human development generates in and through social and cultural settings. Vygotsky (1978) stresses that social interaction is the foundation of cognition, and all meaning-making is mitigated through the community in which it occurs:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people

(interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). . . . All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

If cognition is generated externally, then, to tend to student learning, teachers must necessarily tend to the social environment in which students learn. Lee and Smagorinsky (2000) delineate several more Vygotskian principles pertinent to a discussion of classroom talk: (a) learning often involves a mutually constructive process with a more knowledgeable other through scaffolding<sup>2</sup>, and (b) language-mediated learning takes place in a zone of proximal development<sup>3</sup> that pushes a student “beyond what he or she can do without assistance, but not beyond the links to what the student already knows” (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000, p. 2). For teachers seeking to strengthen their quality of classroom talk, these two ideas provide guidance for where to allocate time and resources. Teachers must develop a positive classroom culture and tend to the relationships in their classrooms, they must develop activities where students learn together, and finally they must support the linguistic needs of their students. Critics argue Vygotsky’s emphasis on verbal mediation as evidence of higher mental functioning is not a universal value because it devalues nonmajority language practices (Cazden, 2001; Wertsch, 1985). However, researchers within social constructivist schools of thought have responded that language should be viewed as a part of a goal-directed toolkit that includes nonverbal communication like art, music, or computers and language varieties like African American English Vernacular (AAEV) or Pidgin, non-

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<sup>2</sup> *Scaffolding* was first introduced by Bruner (1966), a social-constructivist, building off Vygotsky’s principles, as the structured supports that teachers provide for students to use new knowledge or skills independently.

<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky defined the *zone of proximal development* as the difference between what a student can do independently, and their potential development if they were supported through adult guidance or more capable peers.

English primary or heritage languages, or regional dialects like Appalachian English or Chicano English (Cazden, 2001; Smagorinsky, 1995; Wertsch, 1981).

From a sociocultural perspective, Wells (2000) notes classroom dialogues are as follows:

. . . an occasion of transformation: transformation of the individual participants and of their potential for future participation; of the tools and practices or of the ways in which they are deployed; and of the situation itself, opening up possibilities for certain kinds of further action and closing down others. (p. 56)

The joint activity of the conversation becomes a site of *praxis* (Freire, 1970) in which those involved reflect and act on the world to change it. Wells argues this joint activity is transformational for teachers as well: they learn from both new situations and develop a changing responsibility toward the community as tensions arise during the joint activity. Teachers should provide topics for investigation that are sufficiently open-ended, arousing “students’ interest, engaging their feelings and values as well as their cognition” (Wells, 2000, p. 63). Teachers should ask questions that students care about and be “involved as a co-inquirer with students in topics that they care about” (Wells, 2000, p. 65) and ensure time and resources are used productively. When these elements are present in the classroom dialogue, learning and change occur.

However, without attention to the social condition, the transformative potential of classroom dialogues may not always be positive. Wells (2000) finds that, when participation in learning activities is no longer viewed as a “mutually constitutive relationship between individuals and society” (p. 56), individuals may withdraw and resist the assistance of others. Wells may specifically be addressing negative student experiences with discussions, but the phenomenon also applies to teachers as participants in those discussions. If we are to view

teachers as members of a community of inquiry about their practice, then they need to be provided with the time to reflect on, resolve, and act on the conflicts that arise in their classroom, be provided tools to help mediate their learning, and have access to mentors or other teachers engaged in similar co-inquiry. Schools often impede this kind of learning, with a tendency to “cultivate conforming, risk-avoiding identities in those who are successful in fighting the rules and expectations of the activity system while simultaneously cultivating alienated and either self-doubting or rebellious identities in those who are unsuccessful” (Wells, 2000, p. 59). For transformational learning to occur, schools must become safe places for both students and teachers to take risks without penalty.

### ***Dewey: Dialogue as Social Organization***

The ideas of Bakhtin and Vygotsky that have most resonated with educators—the importance of the social context of learning, and the integration of students’ lived experiences with the formal curriculum—also echo the educational writings of John Dewey. Dewey champions the learner-centered approach to education, which emphasizes the importance of participatory learning experiences in which students are actively involved in the process of constructing meaning. For Dewey, education and experience are inseparable, in that “amid all uncertainties” is “one permanent frame of reference; namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 25). He believes that, when students are encouraged to ask questions, explore, and experiment, they will better understand and retain new information. Moreover, most importantly for this project, he argued that what sustains democracy is not just the process by which a society diffuses its power but also the way it organizes itself over issues of common good, both within and across communities. Burbules (1992) states that, for Dewey, “discussions make possible the establishment of relations of

negotiation, cooperation, mutual tolerance, the pursuit of common interests (where they exist), and the nonviolent resolution of conflicts” (p. 13). Classrooms are not just where students learn to talk and think, but also where they learn to participate in civic practices.

However, a primary difference between the various schools of thought is the degree to which the teacher is involved in the activity of learning (Glassman, 2001). Whereas Vygotsky views the teacher as the facilitator of learning, Dewey sees the teacher as an active participant in the learning process itself. Dewey (1916) writes that growth requires “directness, open-mindedness, single-mindedness (or whole-heartedness), and responsibility” (p. 173). With these orientations, growth occurs with a “constant expansion of horizons and consequent formation of new purposes and new responses . . . Open-mindedness means retention of the child-like attitude; closed-mindedness means premature intellectual old age” (Dewey, 1916, p. 175). For Dewey, when educators try to impart a fixed knowledge base, they stagnate. To be effective teachers, they must approach the object of inquiry as a learner themselves. He continues that a “teacher who does not permit and encourage diversity of operation in dealing with questions is imposing intellectual blinders upon pupils – restricting their vision to the one path the teacher’s mind happens to approve” (Dewey, 1916, p. 175). For true educational growth, teachers take a position of inquiry in which they are active participants with their students. They additionally must resist a “devotion to rigidity of [mechanical] methods” (Dewey, 1916, p. 175) of teaching because this can lead to the same kind of intellectual blindness he described earlier. Classroom dialogues can resist both this oversimplification of learning and rigidity of methods.

### ***Freire and Noddings: Dialogue as Critical Care***

Despite Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and Dewey rooting their work in different disciplines, “they share essential understandings of the contours of the relationship between teacher and learner”



(Goldstein, 1999, p. 648). The works of Noddings and Freire also provide language to understand how these transformations in positionality between the student and teacher can similarly transform communities if rooted in an ethic of care and conscientization. Noddings (1998) affirms Dewey's assertions that teachers should "guide students in a well-informed exploration of areas meaningful to them" but qualifies that "there is, however, more than intellectual growth at stake in the teaching enterprise" (p. 221). Using a feminist lens, she continues to advocate for a pedagogy in which teachers are not only in need of "intellectual capabilities" but also "a fund of knowledge about the particular persons with whom they are working," or an ethic of care.

For successful learning to occur, teachers must adopt this orientation toward caring and become adept at communicating that caring with their students. Noddings (2015) describes care as an intentionally relational bond between the carer and the cared-for. Further, she defined caring-for as actions of receptive presence to the subjective reality of another being, and this stands in contrast to caring-about. Caring-about simply means that one is directing their attention toward someone; it does not require direct action or a recognition of subjective experience. The relationship is considered intentional in that, if students deny they are cared for, the caring relationship between the teacher and student cannot exist. It stands to reason the first step to a student acknowledging a teacher is caring-for them is for the teacher to intentionally communicate that care, whether through their feedback, their attention, or caring acts of nonverbal communication (e.g., eye contact or a hand on the shoulder).

For learning to occur, teachers must care-for their students, a task Noddings (2015) notes is hard in more traditional, teacher-centered schooling models. She suggested a fundamental "deprofessionalism" of the vocation: "an attempt to eliminate the special language that separates

us from other educators in the community” and “a reduction in the narrow specialization that carries with it reduced contact with individual children” (Noddings, 2015, p. 197). In this way, language not only delimits the space of learning in the classroom but also the teacher’s conceptualization of their positioning in relation to students and the community. Talbert and Moore (2015) further document the ways the language and discourses of accountability and reform limit beginning teacher’s abilities to form a pedagogy of care and critique.

In this, Noddings (1988) argues that resisting this tendency toward isolation will only happen “through modeling, dialogue, and practice” (p. 223). Just as she advocates approaching education through an ethic of care, Freire (1970) advocates approaching education through an ethic of emancipatory love, saying that love in education is an “act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to other men . . . It must generate other acts of freedom, otherwise it is not love” (p. 148). Freire (1970) views monologic teaching as a tool of oppression, in which a teacher’s task is to fill a passive learner. He seeks to reform education as a liberative tool. For this, he views dialogue as the means by which participants reach *conscientization*—or a critical awareness of reality and recognition of the power structures that maintain the oppressed and their oppressors. Freire (1970) upholds dialogue as the central method to resist what he termed the “banking model” of education, which he defines as the idea that teachers “deposit” unquestionable truths into passive students. Through this banking model, the traditional status quo is never questioned, and disenfranchised communities stay disenfranchised. For Freire, “the goal of dialogic teaching and learning is the mutual development of understanding through a process of shared inquiry, not the transmission of truths from a knowledgeable expert to a passive recipient” (Burbules, 1992, p. 6). Freire (1970) further writes that dialogue is an act of knowing, and that,

speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at the same time associated with the right of self-expression and world expression, or creating and recreating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately of participating in society's historical process. (p. 212)

The word is the act of naming the world: identifying the myths that dehumanize us and deconstructing the ideologies that perpetuate oppression. Dialogic talk is a mechanism for participants to uncover and collectively resist these harmful narratives.

### **Negotiating the Four Domains of Classroom Dialogues: A Framework for Decision-Making**

Theorists have suggested classroom dialogues are a linguistic, cognitive, social, and critical practice that therefore necessitate linguistic, cognitive, social, and critical considerations to facilitate effectively. The literature review that follows provides an overview of the research related to those considerations. It is organized by the four domains of teacher negotiation and decision-making, as proposed in Chapter One: (a) the connections between how teachers view themselves, their students, and design curriculum from that knowledge; (b) the ways teachers establish a culture and mechanisms to control conversations; (c) the different rhetorical modes available during conversations and their functions; and (d) the roles teachers take in real time to intervene in classroom conversations. Where applicable, gaps in the literature will be revealed.

#### ***Negotiating Teacher and Student Experiences***

Effective dialogic teaching is predicated by an orientation toward a democratic space in which teacher experiences are diminished and students' experiences and backgrounds are honored. Many have noted the necessity of having a complex understanding of identity and culture as dynamic, contextual, and intersecting: that an individual is more than a static conception of their race, ethnicity, gender, or religion (Berchini, 2017; Boylan & Woolsey,

2015). Delpit (2006) writes that teachers must understand their students to know which perspectives will differ most from their students. She claims that true dialogue can only occur “by understanding one’s own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen, no, to *hear* what they say” (p. 47). A question I seek to understand through this study is how the teachers interviewed in the project conceptualize who they are, how they elicit an understanding of who their students are, and how they use that knowledge to design educational experiences. To effectively develop conversational spaces, teachers should consider their students’ interests, experiences, attitudes, and skills when designing educational activities. This means teachers need to know their students and have a critical awareness of how their own identities intersect with those of their students, a practice that is integral to the development of responsive and sustaining pedagogies.

Teacher beliefs about their students, especially historically disenfranchised ones, can exacerbate existing educational inequalities (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), both through lowered expectations for students they deem less capable (Allen et al., 2013; Howard & Milner, 2014) and through a lack of authentic and caring relationships (Brooms, 2017; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Milner, 2007). Delpit (2006) writes that true educational reform must begin with “basic understandings of who we are and how we are connected and disconnected from one another” (p. xv). She continues by reflecting on her own experiences and roles and how those have shaped her instructional practices. She also speaks of the necessity of engaging with these experiences and identities in saying,

We all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different. We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we

don't even know they exist? Indeed, many of us don't even realize that our own worlds exist only in our heads and in the cultural institutions we have built to support them. (p. xxiv)

Her discussion of internal "worlds" speaks to the inherent disconnect between the lived experiences of teachers and their students, particularly in cases where there is a cultural mismatch. She notes this mismatch is not limited to White teachers of students of color but also teachers with similar racial or ethnic backgrounds as their students but different socioeconomic or geographic backgrounds.

Patricia Grace (1996), a Maori writer, further illustrates the need for teachers to critically know their students through a short story in which a young girl tries to do well in school. She came home and recounted to her grandparents her experience sharing a story with her teacher about killing butterflies:

"And your teacher like your story, did she?"

"I don't know."

"What your teacher say?"

"She said butterflies are beautiful creatures. They hatch out and fly in the sun. The butterflies visit all the pretty flowers, she said. They lay their eggs and then they die. You don't kill butterflies, that's what she said."

The grandmother and the grandfather were quiet for a long time, and their granddaughter, holding the book, stood quite still in the warm garden.

"Because you see," the grandfather said, "your teacher, she buy all her cabbages from the supermarket and that's why." (p. 17–22)

This excerpt illustrates the complexities around the differing experiences and perspectives within the school system. In the teacher's experience, butterflies are something beautiful to be protected, whereas, for a family relying on agriculture, butterflies are a threat. In the brief interaction between the teacher and the girl, the teacher did not question the lived experience of her student, and there seemed to be very little, if any, negotiation between their differing perspectives on butterflies. So, instead, the negotiation must be left up to the young girl: family and food, or schooling? In not knowing her student, even through a well-intentioned guise of "educating" a student in science and ecology, the teacher has created an environment in which the girl's lived experience is silenced.

Although Grace's story is fictional, it illustrates the essential disconnect that exists when teachers are not able to bridge the gap between their own and their students' lived experiences. Rogers and Brooms (2019) document a similar disconnect in their examination of two White male teachers at an all-Black charter school. They describe one teacher who "explicitly avoids talking about race," even when the object of study warrants a dialogue. During an interview, the teacher recounted a lesson on the American dream (of meritocracy), saying,

ever since [reading] *Gatsby* . . . it's been an interesting debate because some were saying it's different depending on who you are. Some are saying it's the same . . . so those have been interesting conversations just in terms of expectations of success. (p. 450)

During this dialogue, his students were explicitly trying to bridge their understanding of F. Scott Fitzgerald's, *the Great Gatsby* with their own racialized existences—that the American dream espoused in the novel did not exist for them. This could have been a rich opportunity for the teacher to connect the relevancy of the book of study to his students' lives, therefore providing

his students an opportunity to practice the complex analyses found in literary criticism. In their analysis, Rogers and Brooms tie the teacher's inability to speak to the realities of the history of systemic racism in the United States (e.g., redlining, health care disparities, exclusionary admission practices, deliberate underfunding of non-White schools) to his practice of locating problems "*within* Black boys, their families, and communities of 'negative influence'" (p. 450). The teacher is "unable to imagine the lives and experiences of his students" and "candid about his uncertainty to find commonality and connection with his students because they are Black males and live in a different reality than his own" (p. 454). He explicitly espouses the view that Black culture leaves Black boys "'emotionally stunted' to the point they *cannot* learn" (p. 444). This deficit view toward Black culture not only created a barrier to building an authentic caring relationship with his students but also belied a perception that learning was not possible. If he believes students cannot learn, why would he tend to his instructional practices in any good-faith effort? Rogers and Brooms (2019) conclude that how the teachers in their study conceptualized their own identities—as White, male, and middle class—creates a "perceived relational distance" in which they "downplay or dismiss" (p. 463) the lived racial realities of their students. In doing this, they absolved themselves of their professional responsibilities toward their students and denied the relationships that enable student learning.

The two stories above illustrate the need for teachers to consider three dimensions of negotiating their own experiences in relation to their students: First, how are teachers creating the space to reflect on their own experiences and identities, dismantling harmful ideologies? Second, how are teachers finding or creating spaces to learn about and from their students? Third, how are they using that information to design educational activities? Many researchers have noted the necessity and the encouragement of narrative testimony and critical witnessing as

tools to connect and build understandings of other people (Dutro, 2009, 2011; Watkins & Noble, 2016; Zembylas, 2017). Moreover, when students experience conflict with teacher understandings and worldviews, as in the stories illustrated above, how are teachers discomforting their understandings of who their students are? How are they resisting essentialism: the limiting of an understanding of a student or culture to a superficial, fixed definition of who they are? And how are they ensuring their own identities and experiences do not supersede those of their students? The review of the literature suggests a three-stage process in which teachers continuously reflect on their own identities (both professional and personal), how their experiences connect with what they know about their students, and whether their designed curriculum is appropriate and effective, based on those understandings.

### ***Starting with the Self***

Quality dialogues depend on power being diffused throughout the classroom and a lowering of the power differential between teacher and student. Yet, even in these scenarios, teachers and teacher talk moves matter. Kay (2018) writes that dialogic teachers need to honestly appraise their strengths and weaknesses as both facilitator and teacher. He finds the difficulty of this practice in saying, “many of us went into teaching with a hardened image of ourselves as deft discussion leaders,” picturing ourselves “smiling” while leading conversations “with such facility that the quiet students always find their voices” (p. 40). He further argues this self-concept is powerful in so far as it allows teachers to think of themselves as “essentially interesting, compassionate, and *necessary*,” but that teachers need to “graduate from this comforting vision and commit to more honest, grounded self-assessment.” In other words, although teachers need to view themselves as capable actors and understand their power in shaping their students’ educational experiences, they also need to commit to an honest



assessment of their limitations. Khong et al. (2019) argue that, to come to this honest assessment, “teachers need to undergo a fundamental change: to let go of their identity as knowledge providers and truth holders and to transfer part of their power to learners” (p. 335). This is to say, even when teachers have idealized self-concepts of being skilled discussion facilitators, many are still reverting to Freire’s banking model and Cazden’s speech patterns of I-R-E. Danielson (2007) recommends teachers develop self-awareness in their professional practices through journaling, discussions with colleagues or administrators, or seeking input from students. Ubiquitous as an evaluation tool in current public schools (including Hawai‘i), her *Framework for Teaching* provides tools to help teachers become better aware of their professional practices. In her rubric, she finds highly effective teachers create well-structured opportunities for student-centered learning, whereas effective teachers still often use monologic approaches.

In addition to being self-reflective about teaching practices and skills, teachers must also be self-reflective about who they are as cultural beings in relation to their students. Singleton (2014) establishes that the first condition of facilitating and participating in conversations with culturally diverse speakers is an awareness of “our own racialized existence” as “personal, local, and immediate” (p. 88). This practice of drawing awareness to our racialized selves is particularly hard for White teachers (Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 1992), who often unconsciously assume Whiteness to be ideal and normal (Masta, 2018). Many White teachers will center their own experiences (Crowley, 2016; Jupp et al., 2016; Picower, 2009) and adopt a perspective of color-blindness “as a way to avoid appearing racist” (Bell, 2002). To deny, ignore, or deliberately misinterpret the realities of students’ racial and cultural lives is to limit the ways in which they can participate in learning. To create unnecessary barriers for student participation in learning is to perpetuate or deepen existing inequalities. Even if teachers do have an awareness

and appreciation of student diversity, this knowledge still must be coupled with self-examination. For example, extensive research has documented the differences in discourse patterns between White and non-White teachers, a phenomenon Singleton (2015) labels *white talk* and *color commentary*. He further notes, in situations where teachers were unaware of potential cross-cultural miscommunications, they often used their students' and families' lack of understanding to justify a deficit lens toward their students. Similarly, the misunderstandings among teachers, students, and families deepened an already existing mistrust of teachers and schools in historically marginalized communities.

The potential harm of a lack of cultural self-reflection was not just present in communication but also in curriculum design itself. Kay (2018) writes that, as some teachers become aware of a particular social injustice, they immediately launch into curriculum planning to learn and talk about the issue, making "our students feel like repositories for their teachers' pain, confusion, or guilt" (p. 117). He continues, "it's important to acknowledge the baggage we teachers bring to discussions. . . . We can never be too aware of the things we carry, and we can never be too curious about our students' cargo." So, the question begs, how can teachers develop the necessary cultural self-awareness? If the first element in becoming a more effective facilitator is to know who we are, then the second element is to know our students' cargo and our role in lightening their load.

### ***Knowing Students***

When teachers are aware of their own cultures and identities as being complex, intersectional, and overlapping, it becomes much easier to conceive of their students as similar. Emdin (2016) argues teacher effectiveness "can be traced directly back to what that teacher thinks of the student" (p. 207). Much of the literature into the necessity and (dis)orientation of

teacher conceptions of who their students are comes from research in teaching Black students, as in the case of the examination of the White teachers in an all-Black charter school discussed in the previous section (Rogers & Broom, 2019). Milner (2007) states that, empowering our students is to disrupt the harmful constructions of who they are—and that, if teachers even unconsciously believe harmful stereotypes about their students, “their pedagogies will be saturated with low expectations” (p. 244). He continues that, without this first step, educators will “assess the racial experiences of others through their own distorted lens,” a sentiment echoed in the work of Bartolomé and Balderrama (2001) in Latino communities.

Although genuine care for other people’s children must start with self-examination (Delpit, 2006), teachers must also become students of their students (Ayers, 2004). Dutro (2011) argues a powerful tool for this kind of work is in critical witnessing, which she defines as “a self-conscious attention to both connection and difference between one’s own and others’ testimonies” (p. 199). In other words, teachers must have created spaces for students to share their testimonies, their stories of their lived experiences, to even begin the work of understanding who they are in relation to their students. Baskerville (2011) confirms as such in her action research, where she reflects on the ways sharing her own story encouraged more students to share theirs, which led to a change in the teacher, student, and classroom environment. Any framework for facilitating effective dialogue must therefore emphasize opportunities for students to share their personal experiences.

Regarding the necessity for allowing students to provide narrative testimony in educational settings, hooks (1994) writes,

Hearing each other’s voices, individual thoughts, and sometimes associating these voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other. That

moment of collective participation and dialogue means that students and professor respect—and here I invoke the root meaning of the word, “to look at”—each other, engage in acts of recognition with one another, and do not just talk to the professor. (p. 148)

In this quotation, hooks notes our term *respect* at its core means to “engage in recognition with each other.” To recognize each other, we must attempt to know each other’s stories. To accomplish this, teachers must emphasize critical witness in response to testimony. Dutro (2011) builds on work in trauma and Holocaust studies, particularly the ideas of witnessing and testimony, noting that difficult experiences—and the productive sharing of such—can serve to build the relationships and orientations necessary to “challenge entrenched inequities and assumptions about Others’ lives” (p. 194). She further continues that, even though sometimes hard to bear, these stories “are part and parcel of classroom life—whether or not those experiences are invited in or acknowledged, met with caring or disinterest, they are always present” (p. 194). To acknowledge and respect the whole student means those narratives are deliberately invited into the classroom, to serve as the basis of community and respect. Additionally, teachers must be aware of how their students’ narratives are historically situated, especially when those narratives are “threatening to the established ways of knowing” (Delpit, 2006, p. 196). She notes this is especially difficult for teachers who have not worked to unsettle their proximity to Whiteness.

### ***Designing Instruction***

When teachers have a critical awareness of who they are in relation to their students, they can then use that knowledge to design quality learning experiences. This will involve choices about which topics and texts to teach, as well as how to structure learning activities to best meet

their students' needs and goals. Much has been written about the importance of designing curricula from a lens of culturally responsive or culturally sustaining pedagogies (Banks, 2015; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Nieto, 1995). In doing so, teachers can disrupt a mainstream-centered curriculum that not only marginalizes the experiences of students of color but also reinforces in mainstream White students "a false sense of superiority. . . . And denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups" (Banks, 2015, p. 242–243). A planned curriculum, as well as the texts embedded in it, should provide opportunities for students to have their own complex cultural identities accurately reflected back to them, as well as expose students to new perspectives and cultures. In this way, education and curriculum can serve as both a *mirror* for student self-affirmation and a *window* for understanding "the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans" (Bishop, 1990, p. ix). Banks (2015) offers four states of curriculum transformation to move from monocultural to multicultural: at the most basic level, teachers will focus on cultural contributions like heroes, holidays, or food and dance. At the next level, teachers may include content themes or perspectives from a nondominant culture without decentering mainstream White culture. The third level involves a transformation of the curriculum for students to be able to view the learning target from the perspective of multiple cultural groups. The fourth level asks students to make decisions about and act on important social issues. Quality dialogic learning will likely occur at the third and fourth levels, with the difference being the degree of activism supported and spurred by classroom dialogues. Teachers should take care in balancing topics and texts that are personally relevant to students' lives and identities with texts that will provide alternate

perspectives. Because students' identities are complex and shifting, students are more likely to learn when they can access the learning through multiple viewpoints.

Kay (2018) remarks, that for a teacher, especially when they are from different cultures than their students, “what is academic to me may be visceral to [my students]” (p. 27). When it comes to discussing issues of identity, privilege, power, or trauma, certain concepts are lived experiences for some, and for others simply academic exercises. When the situation is the latter, teachers must take extra care. He recounts his anxiety at the beginning of the 2014–2015 school year teaching in St. Louis after the shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager: “I know that many of my returning students would be coming into school hurt and confused . . . our routinized Getting-to-Know-You / How-Was-Your-Summer conversations were about to get trickier” (Kay, 2018, p. 113). Asking students to share facts about themselves or write about what they did over their summer breaks is a ubiquitous strategy at the beginning of the year to learn about who students are and what they value, as well as begin to foster peer connections. Yet, because Kay knew his community, he knew he could not approach that strategy that year in the same way. As previously mentioned, the focus of this project is not solely focused on facilitating conversations about controversial issues because we cannot always anticipate what will be controversial. However, when conversations veer in that direction, teachers should take care to not unwittingly open their students to more harm, and the open-ended nature of conversation means that, even in seemingly innocuous scenarios, teachers need a set of tools for when the conversation becomes emotionally heavy. Because Kay knew his students and knew who he was in relation to his students, he was better able to anticipate that conversation. He challenged teachers to be prepared in that moment to be clear of the *purpose* of that classroom dialogue so they can better shape the conversation toward that aim.

To that end, Kay (2018) proposes three clear directions for when the conversation shifts toward controversial or difficult issues:

*Proposition 1:* If the conversation is about a hard problem, provide space and time for students to (a) locate their sphere of influence, and (b) explore personal pathways to solutions.

*Proposition 2:* Design conversations that encourage students to follow *new* lines of inquiry.

*Proposition 3:* Students should be encouraged to “publish” whenever they feel ready. This opportunity must be built into the culture of the classroom. (p. 120–121)

To use Kay’s previous example of a student who uses the “what happened over the summer” conversation to talk about their city’s unrest, teachers might prepare to steer that conversation in one of three directions to honor that student’s testimony and provide critical witness. First, they might use that conversation to establish a common understanding of the local history of community policing, as well as the purpose and aim of the protests. They might then direct the conversation toward identifying people who are in positions to be able to shape policies that could have either prevented the shooting or provided justice afterwards. They might then have asked students “to imagine conversation with whichever figure they’d like to engage” (p. 125) while speaking as themselves to understand which actionable steps require a longer view: “Teens can volunteer, but they must wait to vote. Teens can protest, but they might need to wait to invest significant money in causes,” but eventually they will be in positions to enact solutions. A second approach may be to launch the conversation toward new inquiries: How is the media portraying those protests? What are some of the solutions proposed? What should be the role of

community policing, and is it fair and equitable for everyone? Has it always been like this? Finally, a third approach may be to use the conversation to provide students with different formats through which to “publish” their ideas when read. Kay suggested that, where students used to “merely read and discuss a newspaper article, they now are invited to write letters to the editor in response . . . We invite students to blog . . . We invite our students to curate a collection of journals or essays” (p. 139–140).

Kay (2018) states the most dangerous situation is the “pop-up” or unplanned conversation about a visceral topic, whether it is because the topic was not necessarily connected to the curricular unit of study or because the teacher was unprepared for a student to raise the issue, because,

Haphazard conversations can careen into unsafe conversations . . . We must patiently apply our professional planning talents as often as possible. If we take our time, we might remember a useful tidbit about our students (e.g., *Isn’t one of Emma’s parents a police officer? Or Didn’t Mateen spend time in a refugee camp?*). (p. 141)

He urges that it is better for teachers to wait until they can “incorporate the conversation into a planned thread, a focused line of inquiry.” However, if in the teachers’ professional judgment, the conversation still needs to occur in the moment, Kay offers guidelines to ensure purpose, which ideally have been internalized through practice during planned inquiries: (a) personal sharing should not occur without clear discussion protocols; (b) teachers must explicitly own that the conversation is off-script, unplanned and be clear about why they are still facilitating it; (c) students need enough time to come to conclusions to not designate these conversations as “pointless distractions” (p. 142); and (d) teachers need to deliberately check in with students both



during and after the conversation to ensure the class culture or relationships have not been compromised.

### ***Negotiating Common Understandings***

As mentioned previously, students learn best when teachers provide opportunities for them to dialogue about issues of personal significance. However, as the United States has become more ethnically and culturally diverse, the personal significance of issues is more divisive than in previous generations, where cultural homogeneity was more pronounced. Social psychologists Haidt and Iyer (2016) write, “civility doesn’t require consensus or the suspension of criticism. It is simply the ability to disagree productively with others while respecting their sincerity and decency” (p. 1). Their stance raises two important questions:

- What does productive disagreement look and sound like?
- How do we nurture a respect for sincerity and decency, even in the face of criticism?

Haidt and Iyer (2016) mark a growing level of disgust toward the opposing side in discourse around civil issues, and they found a demonstrated display of the erosion of respect for “sincerity and decency.” It is important to note they are not advocating for agreement or consensus on divisive issues. Instead, they are advocating for productive disagreement, and, perhaps, the ability to develop a common ground when possible. It can be argued, then, that teachers can and should be preparing students to enter these productive disagreements. To do this, the literature suggests, teachers need to attend to their classroom culture, nurture relationships and connections between students, and explicitly help students develop an awareness of task expectations for dialogue.

## ***Building Classroom Culture***

A precursor to effective classroom dialogues is building classroom community and a culture for dialogue. In addition to teachers knowing their students, as noted in the previous section, teachers must also provide experiences for students to learn about and from each other. Productive dialogue is situated within established, or at least perceived, relationships. When dialogues become difficult, frustrating, or contentious, it is sometimes only the care for the others involved that allows individuals to persist and avoid conversational breakdown (Asterhan & Schwartz, 2016). Several factors are critical to the classroom communities in which productive conversations can take place: the development of concern, trust, appreciation, affection, and hope. Fraser et al. (1986) find these qualities are built through seven dimensions of classroom culture:

- *Personalization*, in that the teacher values interactions with their students and expresses concern for student welfare
- *Involvement*, where teachers actively encourage student participation in class
- *Student cohesiveness*, where students are given opportunities to learn from each other and have a shared understanding of respect
- *Satisfaction*, in which students enjoy class
- *Task orientation*, where class activities are clear and well organized
- *Innovation*, in which teachers are providing students opportunities to engage with novel activities, assignments, or methods
- *Individualization*, in which students are allowed choice based on ability and interests

Each of these elements are within the locus of control for teachers, unlike things like the physical setting of the classroom, school schedules, or students' backgrounds (Barr, 2016). The

development of these dimensions is rooted in the rapport between teachers and students, as well as student to student (Freeman et al., 2007; Frisby & Martin, 2010). Teachers might build rapport through humor (Frymier et al., 2008; Wanzer et al., 2010), appropriate self-disclosure (Brookfield, 2006; Hosek & Thompson, 2009), and by taking care to not engage in “disconfirming behaviors” (Barr, 2016), such as forgetting student names, being inconsistent in policy and practice, engaging in verbal aggression, or ignoring students’ questions (Myers & Rocca, 2001; Webb & Barrett, 2014). Teachers can additionally explicitly teach and encourage positive student-to-student rapport by attending to prosocial behaviors such as smiling, sharing praise, and storytelling (Sidelinger et al., 2012). Sequencing and structuring activities to build classroom culture is key: students should participate in a wide range of interactions, from one-on-one conversations to small-group interactions and whole-class involvement, starting the year with activities with a low affective and cognitive load (Fassinger, 1997; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). When students engage in one-on-one or small group conversations, they build confidence and relationships with their peers. However, that type of interaction allows less oversight for teachers to curb antisocial behaviors like verbal aggression, derisiveness, or apathy (Sidelinger et al., 2012), which is why it must also be balanced with whole group conversations to model and practice prosocial behaviors while curtailing negative ones.

Teachers additionally need to create classroom cultures in which teachers regularly ask students to elaborate on their thinking and problem-solving strategies for student-led dialogue to occur. Webb et al., (2008) find that, in classrooms where teachers accepted students’ first explanations as sufficient or in which teachers lead students through teacher-conceived problem-solving strategies, students not only gave fewer explanations during student-led talk but also less frequently gave correct responses. Webb et al. (2006) deem this paradigm as a “low press”

classroom in which the teachers are responsible for procedural knowledge. In their study of math classrooms, when students in low press classrooms were then asked to demonstrate procedural knowledge in small groups, they were not able to do so. This phenomenon was similarly documented in a study of literature teachers by Smagorinsky and Fly (1993), who find student discussions of a text did not involve deep reasoning because the teacher had previously assumed responsibility for textual interpretations. Teachers who adopt high-press stances toward providing feedback met three of the dimensions of positive classroom culture: personalization, involvement, and task orientation.

The development of student cohesiveness may be especially difficult to naturally develop in culturally diverse classrooms without careful teacher care. Social psychologists have noted we are much more likely to trust and have concern for people we are similar to. However, even in the case of randomized grouping, a shared in-the-moment experience can override perceived lack of in-group members (Long et al., 2016). Thus, teachers must create shared experiences within the classroom that simultaneously develop a sense of classroom solidarity and involve a celebration of difference for productive conversations to occur. Because classroom dialogues can be linguistically and cognitively difficult for some students, their presence as the only joint activity in designed instruction may not be enough to create that sense of solidarity. Larrivee (2000) suggests teachers infuse classroom methods, structures, and content learning with as much community building as possible, whether through games, partner or small group work, or weekly rituals and routines. Table 1 below illustrates a few strategies and activities mentioned in the literature to specifically create social cohesion:

**Table 1***Examples of Strategies to Encourage Social Cohesion*

Strategy	Description	Frequency and Time Allocation
Burn Five Minutes (Kay, 2018)	Spend 5 min at the beginning of class for engaging students in talk about noncontent related material: sports, TV, recess, etc.	-Every day -5 min
Community Ball (Jackson, 2001)	Sitting in a circle, students share information about themselves while wrapping yarn around a tube. The teacher then turns the yarn into a community ball, which becomes a metaphor for class community and a talking piece to practice turn-taking in discussion.	-Once, at the beginning of the year -30–45 min
Good News (Kay, 2018)	Students share good things that are going on in their lives. The teacher uses this as an opportunity to practice three discussion norms (listen patiently, listen actively, police your voices).	-Frequently -5 min
High-Grade Compliments (Kay 2018)	Students give each other high-grade compliments, focusing on who they are as a person. Teacher models by complimenting a student, and students draft and then share compliments about each other. Teacher coaches students on how to accept compliments.	-Every few months or before big holiday breaks -20 min

Another element of social cohesion is the concept of the safe space (Jackson, 2001; Kay, 2018), which explicitly delineates the classroom as different from the less safe outside world. However, the concept of the safe space is complicated, as definitions of safety can vary. Kay (2018) notes some teachers define safety literally, as in no one will come to physical harm within the classroom. Some define safety as a sense of order where students are compliant and focusing on their work. Some teachers, counterproductively to dialogic learning, refer to ideological

safety. Unless teachers are clear in defining what a safe space is within their class, then students are left to unfairly, and possibly inaccurately, decipher teachers' intentions about what is or is not acceptable. Jackson (2001) proposes focusing on intellectual safety, where "there are no put-downs and no comments intended to belittle, undermine, negate, devalue or ridicule . . . The group accepts virtually any question or comment, so long as it is respectful of the other members of the circle" (p. 460). Jackson continues that intellectual safety cannot be built through one lesson or activity but rather needs to develop through a series of classroom interactions that emphasize "listening, thoughtfulness, silence, and care and respect for the thoughts of others," where the teacher provides opportunities for students to "express and clarify what they mean, to understand, to respond to what others have said, and to delve further into what other students intended" (p. 459).

Teachers must develop safe intellectual spaces for productive dialogue to occur. They must also understand some topics will require more safety than others and must be attended to as such. Kay (2018) notes that "daily cultural exchange with students from different races has duped many teachers into assuming an intimacy that does not exist," noting that "there has always been a difference between collegial banter and house talk, between the water cooler and the dining-room table" (p. 28). He continues it is dangerous to assume that, because students are social and willing to share "water cooler" talk, they are also ready and willing to share stories and thoughts about their lived cultural experiences, which may have either been dismissed or created conflict in previous school settings. Kay continues, "we must, through earnest humility, earn our seats. Just as we cannot conjure *safe spaces* from midair, we should not expect the familial intimacy, vulnerability, and forgiveness needed for meaningful conversations to emerge from traditional classroom relationships" (p. 29). This sentiment is echoed in Singleton's (2014)

work on facilitating conversations about race, where he explicitly maintains that discomfort is something that will and should be present in potentially transformative conversations. Teachers should find a way to increase students' tolerance for such discomfort without putting the burden on the students to tend to their peers' feelings. This idea will be explored more in the section on the role of the facilitator in the dialogical moment.

### ***Clarifying Task Expectations***

Fraser et al. (1986) explain that classroom culture is also built through explicit task orientation, where expectations are clear, and activities are well organized. In collaborative dialogues, attention to task expectation is especially important because the conversations are so contextualized within the time, space, and participants involved. Gee (2010) notes that expectations for dialoguing can become contentious in educational settings, stating,

What made someone a “good student” in the seventeenth century in the United States— how “good students” talked and behaved—is different than what makes someone a “good student” today. However, in each case there are conventions (rules) about how “good students” talk and behave. (p. 6)

Teachers have unconscious expectations for what good students in the classroom behave like, act like, and sound like during classroom conversations. Gee's use of quotes around “good” denotes a tongue-in-cheek response to the idea that good is usually defined by teachers and school personnel, a vision not necessarily shared by students. Yet, in collaborative conversations, the power of teachers is reduced. Is it possible that what a “good” speaker looks and sounds like differs between teachers and students? And differs between groups? In fact, Cazden (2001) notes eloquence in public speaking is almost always judged against White, middle-class cultural norms.

Teachers who effectively facilitate classroom conversations are explicit in their norms and expectations for both behavior and language use, and they intentionally provide opportunities for students to internalize and practice these norms (Michaels & O'Connor, 2015). Teachers generally establish task expectations for four aspects of dialoguing, with newer learners needing more explicit structure and support in each: expectations for turn-taking, for participation and commitment, and for reciprocity (Burbules, 1992).

Teachers should establish expectations for who should talk, for how long, and when during conversations. These conventions are usually culturally specific, and so students may need explicit instruction to access those norms. In English, the expectation is that people talk one at a time, with “minimal-gap minimal-overlap” (Stivers et al., 2009, p. 10,587) and allow access points for a speaker-change (Weimann & Knapp, 1975), but there is a wide range of tolerance or preference for turn-taking in different cultures. For example, Au and Kawakami (1985) note that many students in Hawai‘i use talk-story, a collaborative story-telling style in situations where teachers relax control of classroom talk. During talk-story, speakers will often overlap as they contribute, and it involves very few instances “when just one child monopolizes the right to speak” (p. 409). While dialoguing the “regimentation of tempo within a culture is tight” with speakers “hypersensitive to perturbations in timing of responses” (Stivers et al., 2009, p. 10,591), and so teachers in multicultural classrooms should prepare for student discomfort as common task expectations are established. Bids for a speaker-change in natural conversation are usually nonverbal and culturally specific (e.g., nodding, facial expression, or eye contact), but as kids learn to attune to the bids, teachers can establish routines around tools and symbols (e.g., hand-raising or a talking piece) to reduce ambiguity (Weimann & Knapp, 1975).



The second and third aspects of dialogue norms include providing clarity about the amount of participation expected and a commitment to staying engaged in the task, respectively. Burbules (1992) writes that engagement in dialogue needs to be voluntary, open to all participants, and no participants' moves can be such that others are "peremptorily excluded or discouraged" (p. 80). He continues that, in practice, this means any participant should be able to pose questions, challenge points of view, or make any other move that defines dialogic participation without dominating the conversation. Kay (2018) terms this ability to self-censor as policing your voice, or being "humbly aware of how much space you are taking up at any given moment" (p. 23), which requires knowing when students are violating the norm, and when they may need support with social anxiety or a speaking disability. With regard to engagement, Burbules writes that "some degree of understanding of one another's views, and the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that underlie them, is usually *not* too much to hope for" (p. 80). It requires an explicit orientation toward openness, vulnerability, and disclosure, which for many students can be threatening. It also requires an expectation that participants actively and patiently listen, and that teachers are explicit about what that looks and sounds like in their classroom. The teacher's job is therefore to model, nurture, and encourage instances that demonstrate these norms: of participation, and of both active and receptive commitment. Finally, teachers need to establish norms that allow for dialogue to be "undertaken in a spirit of mutual respect and concern and must not take for granted roles of privilege or expertise" (Burbules, 1992, p. 82). Burbules explains this as a rule for reciprocity, in that the expectation is that antisocial behaviors such as eye rolling, name calling, or verbal aggression will not be tolerated from any participant.

Teachers generally establish "rules" for dialogues in how much and what participants should share: that the quantity was sufficient (not dominating the conversation, or not elaborating

enough to be understood); that the communicative act was high quality, related to the topic at hand; and that it was shared in a manner that respects the other participants. After all, as Delpit (2006) notes, the dialogic experience “must be orchestrated so that you don’t get bogged down with people who just like to hear themselves talk, or with people who are unable to relate experience to the academic subject matter” (p. 151). By front-loading instruction on task expectations and norms, the conversation is less likely to break down.

### ***The “Language Game”***

As summarized in the previous section, clarity in task expectations can better establish conditions for students to be successful in achieving the interaction’s aims. Students should also have clarity in the types of language moves they have available to them during the interaction. Burbules (1992), building off works by Wittgenstein and Gadamer, posits an analogy of dialogue as a kind of game: it has rules, it has moves, a “to-and-fro motion that relates the partners in play,” (p. 59), as well as continuity of intent like how “a game may go through different phases, yet still be the same game” (p. 60). He continues that “viewed as a game, dialogue can ebb and flow; it can have reversals, peaks and valleys of activity, shifting roles, varied paces and so on” (p. 60). Although some may argue viewing dialogue as a game implies a sense of levity that might not exist in emotionally fraught conversations, Burbules acknowledges that, even when dealing with serious or unhappy subjects, “we are drawn to the process of dialogue itself because it constitutes an arena in which we are bound to others in a relation of mutual appreciation, challenge and simulation” (p. 65). For the purposes of this project, the metaphor is an apt one. Imagining dialogue as a game provides clarity on the nature of the teacher’s role as a coach in creating conditions for quality dialogues. Teachers can design drills to strengthen student skills, step on the field to model a skill, fill in for a missing player, provide feedback and motivation,

push their players when appropriate, and intervene when injury seems most imminent. Most importantly, though, although they can prepare their players, they cannot do the work of the players themselves. They can only create conditions for the players to be successful. Where the metaphor is limited is the conceptualization of winners and losers in classroom dialogues; research suggests this kind of competitive approach is counterproductive to the aims of most classroom dialogues.

To summarize, dialogue can be viewed as a game in which there are rules, as described above, and moves. There are many frameworks that offer typologies for the dialogue moves (Al-Adeimi & O'Connor, 2021; Baines et al., 2008; Burbules, 1992; Dillon, 1983; Reznitskaya et al., 2008), but most speech acts fall into four main categories, defined by their function: questions, responses, and bids for clarification, building statements, and regulatory statements. Questions are broadly characterized as open-ended invitations for others' opinions and responses, clarifications are statements that seek to make a speaker's thinking clear, building statements connect ideas within a dialogue, and regulatory statements are speech acts that govern the flow of and participation in the dialogue. Each of these moves will be examined in detail in the following sections, but it is important to understand that there may be overlap between the discourse function and the formal definition. Questions especially may fall into different categories, depending on what kind of response is expected (or not expected). For example, during a conversation, someone might say "I'm not sure what you meant by that" as easily as asking "What did you mean by that?" For this project, both are considered bids for clarification, even though in the second situation the speaker uses a question to perform that function. Similarly, during a conversation, a teacher might ask "why are you interrupting her?" or say, "Please remember to speak one at a time." Both would be considered regulatory talk, despite the

first being a question. The teacher is not genuinely expecting an answer, but instead uses a question to indirectly curb the undesired behavior. In short, these four categories are useful for delineation and have implications for how teachers can help strengthen student moves in these four areas—but will have considerable overlap.

**Invitations.** For dialogues, questions are best viewed as invitations for opinions, beliefs, interpretations, elaborations, or challenges (Burbules, 1992). They can be probing or diagnostic or pose a challenge or criticism to something previously said. Kershner et al. (2020) explicate three opportunities to use questioning to invite new knowledge: to build on ideas, like in the case of “can you rephrase that” or “do you agree?”; invitations to explain or justify their reasons like “can you explain that further?”; or to invite new ideas like “what do you think about?” However, asking questions in a dialogue should be built on the presumption that “a questioner can be questioned in turn” and *should* be questioned to “maintain a dialogical relation of mutual respect and trust” (Burbules, 1992). Burbules continues that:

there is something paternalistic and potentially manipulative in asking questions solely to lead a partner down a path whose course and destination one has in mind but does not disclose . . . these [types of] questions cannot support an ongoing and sustainable dialogical relation. (p. 89)

Viewing questions as invitations into the dialogue provides resistance to the “paternalistic and potentially manipulative” questioning that falsely poses as dialogism.

**Responding and Clarifying Moves.** Responses are moves made immediately in response to a question. Kershner et al. (2020) explain that these might include expressions of ideas to initiate or further a dialogue and may include phrases like “I believe,” “my opinion is . . .”, or an answer to the original invitation. Frequently, idea expression will be paired with explaining or justifying their thinking by making reasoning explicit, like providing positives, negatives, or counterexamples or developing possible hypothetical situations to test their reasoning.

**Building Moves.** Building moves never occur at the beginning of a discussion. Instead, they occur in relation to responses that have already been shared. They will either carry the discussion along a line of inquiry, connecting, challenging, or refining participants’ ideas; introduce a new topic; or possibly lead the discussion in a different direction. Kershner et al. (2020) remark that, in coding building statements, one might hear “that makes me think” or “I think she meant.” Building moves may also include challenges like “I disagree” or “I have a different idea,” or coordinating statements like “to summarize” or “it sounds like we all agree.” Finally, building moves may include explicit connections to prior learning or personal experiences. Building statements serve to establish cohesion and relationships among the participants.

**Regulatory Moves.** Regulatory statements do not contribute to the content of the discussion but rather to the process or reflection of the act of communication. Burbules (1992) writes that “the conditions of trust, cooperation, and mutuality essential for dialogue need to be monitored and consciously encouraged” (p. 93). Regulatory moves are those statements and questions that serve to monitor and ensure norms and expectations are adhered to. For example, participants might say “we should probably focus on . . .” or “make sure you wait your turn!”

They may include statements of agreement, praise, or reassurance, emotional assessment, humorous asides, redirections, or challenges to comments or behaviors antithetical to the aim of the conversation. Kershner et al. (2020) also include reflective language like “I changed my mind” or “This conversation is making me question . . .” as regulatory moves.

### **Negotiating Communicative Spaces**

Teachers should not only attend to student development of the language moves useful for dialogues but must also attend to language use and rhetorical modes for effective facilitation. To summarize the previous section, Burbules (1992) explains that dialogues consist of a series of communicative moves: responses, building or redirecting statements, regulatory statements, further clarifications, and, most importantly, questions. Additionally, the type of language moves that were most connected to educational outcomes include the following: selecting positive, negative, or counter examples; generating hypothetical cases; forming hypotheses; considering alternative predictions; or questioning authority. However, these rhetorical moves are predicated on an assumption that effective dialogues are situated in the rhetoric of inquiry, reasoning, and argumentation. Many have pointed out the limitations of such an approach (Arendt, 1972; Braidotti, 2013; Fisher, 1985; Wegerif, 2020), as it does not effectively grapple with the issues of the perceived universalism of Western thought, nor tend in much depth to the affective and social dimensions of conversation. Additionally, the literature on classroom conversations contains little information as to how teachers care for issues of nonverbal communication. Language use in so far as it is meant to prepare students for productive conversations needs to accomplish several things: deepen students’ thinking and understanding (for as Vygotsky explains, speaking is externalized thought), honor students’ lived experiences and literacies, and provide access to conventional modes of civic consensus building, which are often predicated on White middle-

class values and norms. Teachers must therefore consider the ways in which they are inviting students to access these rhetorical spaces, and the ways in which they move students between them.

### ***Inquiry and Argumentation***

In most of the dialogic teaching models (Alexander, 2008; Reznitskaya, 2013), conversations are framed through the process of inquiry, which leads to more proficient and advanced schemas of rationality and argumentation. This leads to deeper, more complex disciplinary expertise, depending on the context in which students are engaged. In this, student proficiency is cyclical: as students internalize concepts and subject-matter expertise, they are better able to communicate those understandings to their peers. As their communication and rhetorical skills become more advanced, they can internalize more nuanced understandings of content. More skilled rhetoric leads to better content understanding, and better content understanding leads to more skilled rhetoric.

As mentioned in the previous section, dialogues allow students the opportunity to try out different rhetorical moves in real time and in response to building ideas. When approaching dialogues from an argumentative perspective, a speaker's moves might include "taking a position on the issue, supporting it with reasons and evidence, challenging the positions of others, and responding to counter arguments" (Reznitskaya et al., 2009, p. 32); this is termed an *argument schema*. She continues that a well-developed argument schema is developed from "an epistemological commitment to use reasoned discourse for exploring complex issues and forming conclusions" (p. 32) which implies students must have enough exposure to discourse opportunities that they can infer well-reasoned conclusions from weakly reasoned ones.

Students will likely need support for developing skills in this linguistic mode. Common supports include references that will strengthen students' abilities to ask the kinds of questions that further along a conversation. One example of this is the good thinker's toolkit (Jackson, 2001), in which students are given question stems and claim starters to practice different questioning moves like clarifying information or examining underlying assumptions. Another example is the Question Formulation Technique (Rothstein & Santana, 2011), in which students generate a list of 20–30 questions and then analyze them to determine which would be most conducive to inquiry. Teachers may also provide students with tools like sentence frames or sentence starters to help them develop linguistic patterns of inquiry and argumentation and encourage students to adopt them and code switch by asking them to repeat their ideas using one of the starters or frames. As explained earlier, students will likely need opportunities to practice the linguistic frames one on one, in small groups, or with teacher support before finding success within a larger group with less teacher intervention.

### ***Storytelling, Social, and Playful Talk***

As a companion to argumentation and reason, classroom dialogues must also include opportunities to develop and incorporate skill in storytelling and social talk. Storytelling, particularly as sharing testimony and critical witnessing, were explained in an earlier section of this chapter as key to creating class cohesion and a positive classroom culture for dialogue. Storytelling additionally can function within dialogues to unearth assumptions or provide evidence to support ideas. However, most curricular approaches for developing classroom dialogues neglect this rhetorical space. Furthermore, there is some content that, if included in the curriculum, may produce such strong emotional reactions that inquiry-driven rationality is



impossible or undesirable. Holocaust survivor and political researcher Hannah Arendt (1972) writes,

Factual truths are never compellingly true. The historian knows how vulnerable is the whole texture of facts in which we spend our daily life. It is always in danger of being perforated by single lies, or torn to shreds. Facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy in the domain of human affairs. From this it follows that no factual statement can ever be beyond doubt. (p. 6)

If educational dialogues are always framed through rationality, Arendt challenges that the facts alone are not enough for content to be remembered and trusted. Learning goals must be connected through lived experiences, which in the classroom manifest as narrative testimony. As mentioned previously, storytelling binds communities together and allows us to understand one another better.

However, this is not to say that storytelling replaces rationality: Fisher (1984) explains that narration contains an internal logic that allows us to evaluate the consistency of character and consistency of action. That is, for us to accept a narrative as valid and reasonable, its characters and actions need to be understandable as realistic within our cultural worldviews. If the characters or actions are unrealistic or unrecognizable, then, through a dialogic process, we either reject the validity of that narration or shift our worldview to accommodate and adapt to the new narrative. This is like Bakhtin's (1984) discussion on internal persuasiveness. Fisher posited that educational material becomes more internally persuasive when it is framed through storytelling.

The pedagogical implications of recentering the rational worldview to include the narrative are subtle but involve a reframing of the way we teach our students to speak and listen.

Within traditional rationality, we teach our students the linguistic and rhetorical moves to convince the other side. In listening, we teach our students to critique and test others' views. In this, even in open-ended inquiry, we toe the line with teaching debate over dialogue. However, from a narrative paradigm, we instead teach students to provide testimony: they elaborate the details that will allow for interpretation of a consistency of character and action and acting from an empathetic enough understanding of one's audience to include the emotional details that will "make sense."

Fisher (1985) states that all discourse not only says something about the world but also the self-concept of those who are participating. He cautions that "if a story denies a person's self-conception, it doesn't matter what it says about the world . . . The only way to bridge the gap, if it can be bridged through discourse, is by telling stories that do not negate the self-conceptions that people hold of themselves" (p. 75). Narration and storytelling provide a counterpart to the emotionally distanced reasoning of conversations framed through argumentation. Indeed, Stains (2012) notes that promising pedagogical structures for facilitating difficult conversations have arisen out of a need to ground difficult conversations in the lived experiences of the participants. One such program, the Public Conversations Project (PCP), begins with the participants sharing their lived experiences on an issue, as well as a call to explore doubts and uncertainties to try and produce a nonpolarized reaction. Only after this has occurred do participants begin to interact. A study of this panel found participants were able to change their positioning to what the researchers called "gray areas" and recognize the dangers of both religious and militant discourse in dehumanizing those involved (Apostolo et al., 2017). This reinforces the research above that effective dialogues have a deliberate, planned structure and need an element of storytelling to be internally persuasive.

Playful and creative talk is also mentioned in the literature as a component—but frequently overlooked—aspect of classroom discourse (Wegerif, 2020). Wegerif gives an example of students riffing off a discussion about his car, saying things like “Mr. Wegerif’s car . . . won’t get you very far,” “it’s yucky and green,” and “it’s a green machine” (p. 38) and continuing with the rhyming scheme and devolving into made-up words and increasingly silly comparisons. This kind of talk at first was viewed as “off-task nonsense talk” or “banter,” and it was originally dismissed by the researchers as less relevant to educational outcomes than speech that demonstrated explicit reasoning. However, Wegerif (2020) notes this kind of playful talk “makes use of a kind of spontaneous metaphoricity in dialogues” that can contribute to both creativity and social cohesion. He then links this to literature from the field of science communication that confirmed “analogical and metaphorical reasoning” not only leads to scientific breakthroughs but suggests speakers with this communicative skill may be able to more clearly reach listeners who lack technical scientific language. He concludes with saying he was convinced this type of language does play a key role in educational dialogues and calls for researchers to fill in the gap. This begs the question: Do teachers allow playful talk? Is it acknowledged and encouraged? Or is it viewed as off-task and counterproductive?

### ***Nonverbal Communication and the Function of Silence***

Although oral discourse is privileged in classroom conversations, teachers must also attend to more subtle forms of nonverbal communication and acts of silence. Nonverbal communication is categorized by the following elements: facial behavior, vocal behavior, gesture and body movement, eye behavior, and physical proximity. Individualistic societies, like the United States, tend to rely on low-context forms of communication that are explicit and direct, whereas interdependent and collective societies tend to rely on high-context forms of

communication (Knapp et al., 2013). As mentioned in a previous section, cohesive group membership is necessary for quality dialogue to occur, and nonverbal cues both reflect and reinforce cultural affiliations (Dovidio & LeFrance, 2013). Because nonverbal communication can either emphasize or contradict the spoken word, teachers must provide opportunities to bring awareness to the messaging of students' acts of nonverbal communication with the same attention as their spoken ones, especially to students who demonstrate low-context communication. This is critically important in a diverse group, as members of minority groups tend to show high vigilance for signs of prejudice in group interactions (Vorauer, 2006). Students or teachers who are unaware of their nonverbal communication may be unintentionally eroding group cohesion. Nonverbal communication and behaviors can also signal power relations and status (Hall et al., 2019). Because dialogic learning precludes an orientation toward minimizing the power differential between participations, effective nonverbal communication may be used to mitigate the emotional reactions to risks or threats during the dialogues.

In addition to attending to students' nonverbal communication skills during dialogic learning, teachers must also understand and navigate the role of silence. When students are not talking during dialogues, are they still learning? How is silence contributing to the conditions necessary for dialogic learning to occur? If learning outcomes are not linked to active participation in group dialogues, then could its use as an approach aggravate existing learning discrepancies? Asterhan and Eisenmann (2009) propose that face-to-face classroom discussions face constraints such as "superficial student involvement, unequal participation rates . . . peer dominance and lack of coherence" (p. 132) in which student silence is a natural symptom of a limited symptom of a learning approach. Stahl and Clark (1987), in their semi-experimental study quantifying the vocal participation of students, find those who knew they would not be

called on performed as well as those who were told to participate in the discussion on an immediate posttest but did not retain the information on a delayed posttest. O'Connor et al. (2017) examine silence and engagement in two sixth grade math classes, seeking to discover to what degree the silence indicated students' disengagement or disaffection instead of engaged silent reflection. Interestingly, they find that, although the overall quality of a mathematical discussion positively affected student outcomes, individual contributions to the discussion did not seem to have the same correlation. They posit that this points to active listening, or engaged silence, having the same effects as active participation. This implies that not all students must be speaking for classroom discussions to be beneficial.

Cognitively, silence may function to serve as a kind of "thinking time" (Alexander, 2006) in which speakers may pause during their turn or wait before taking a turn to internalize their thoughts before sharing them out loud. This kind of wait time has been found to produce more concrete answers, logical reasoning, speculative responses, questioning, and more student-to-student interactions (Rowe, 1986). Additionally, when teachers increased the duration of pauses in between speakers or thoughts, they were found to have better rapport with students (Michaels et al., 2008), higher quality questions, and more continuity in idea development (Rowe, 1986). However, teachers frequently view silence during dialogues as emblematic of unspoken discomfort or disengagement (Ollin, 2006) and will intervene to fill the silence, negating its positive effects.

### **Negotiating the Power Differential: Finding the Facilitator's Role**

A final consideration for teacher facilitators is how to position their role in the moment of the dialogue itself. Too much control stifles student voice and agency. However, if students do not have a clear and common understanding of the purposes and norms of classroom

conversations, the dialogue can derail. Reynolds (2019) advocates for teachers to be conductors, serving as neither passive moderators nor a “dominant force bending all interpretations to his will” (p. 488). Reynolds continues, “in the traditional dichotomy between monologic and dialogic, the role of the teacher-as-conductor is absent, leaving practitioners to wonder how to maintain their institutional control while still encouraging dialogic practices in their classroom” (p. 488). To reduce this ambiguity, Ding et al. (2007) describe three situations that require teacher intervention: when no group member can answer the question, when students exhibit problems communicating with each other, and when students dominate group work without allowing true dialogue. The teacher’s role, therefore, is to model effective rhetorical moves and monitor and attend to antisocial behavior by introducing tasks, policing norms, and facilitating transitions between ideas.

Differing teacher orientations toward intervention within conversations can lead to differing outcomes (Kathard et al., 2015). Reynolds and Townsend (2018), trying to fill gaps in the research about the appropriate amount of teacher intervention, studied two teachers’ facilitation moves in depth. One valued completely student-led discussion, and the other felt the need to intervene to provide scaffolding for students. This teacher found that, where teacher intervention was absent, students talked more but the discussion remained surface level and did not lead to deeper content knowledge. Where the teacher did intervene, participation was not as equitable, and some teacher questions were closed or leading, but the content knowledge was deeper. The researchers acknowledge that, although both positions were valid and affirming of students’ needs and experiences, they find teacher intervention in student-led dialogues was preferable to none but cautioned teachers to be wary of becoming monologic.

### ***Intervening to Model Rhetorical Moves***

Teachers may intervene to provide scaffolding and modeling of any of the different talk moves outlined in the previous section. For example, teachers might invite students to begin a conversation by expressing their ideas about a topic. When there is a lull in the conversation, the teacher might try to restart the dialogue by asking a question to start another line of inquiry. They might provide commentary to link speakers' ideas to one another if students are not doing it explicitly. Students generally are quick to express their ideas, and this is a feature of even low press classrooms (Webb et al., 2006). However, they may need modeling or scaffolding for other moves if the conversation stalls for too long or when students begin to disagree in unproductive ways (Tolmie, 2012).

Kay (2018) invites teachers to model how to “talk straight” by avoiding ambiguity and being clear that, even though teachers have more power in classrooms than students, they are not authorities in all subjects. He calls for teachers to name their beliefs, then “offer an invitation to disagree, or better yet, invite students to find holes in our arguments” (p. 47). In doing so, teachers not only model the rhetorical moves that lead to productive conversations but explicitly close the power differential in the classroom. They position themselves as participants instead of conductors. He also states he asks students to question his assertions “with exaggerated sincerity, even a touch of vulnerability, as if asking them to weigh my idea on their much truer scale” (p. 47). The successful navigation of teacher identity, authority, and power becomes critical to challenging harmful mainstream ideologies.

### ***Intervening to Curb Antisocial Behavior***

Many have written on the difficulty of navigating issues of teacher authority and identity in the classroom, particularly as it potentially silences or invalidates student experience (Delpit,

2006; Ellsworth, 1989; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Critics, most notably Ellsworth (1989), caution that overly decentralized pedagogies can perpetuate oppressive macro-structures, and that teachers have a responsibility and an obligation to step in and ensure equitable participation. Essentially, the question becomes one of intervention: an ideal conversation is one in which all voices are equally valid and heard. However, the reality is that conversations can replicate the existing power structures in the classroom. Students from more privileged backgrounds may be more likely to dominate the conversation and be dismissive of alternate viewpoints. As Delpit (2006) summarizes, “to act as if power doesn’t exist is to ensure that the power status quo stays the same” (p. 36). Both Ellsworth and Delpit remark that, to speak out against harmful narratives, teachers must accept and respect student beliefs while also providing commentary.

Kay (2018) explains that teachers must develop facilitation agility if they are to surface these harmful ideologies when they arise so they can comment on and hopefully dismantle them without putting the burden on marginalized students to do so. Lebedun (1998) categorizes four types of conflict that may arise in contentious conversations—over facts or data, over process or methods, over purposes, or over values—to which Kay proposes facilitation moves to address each type. When there is a conflict over facts and data, as when statistics do not support an individual’s lived experience, Kay recommends teachers validate the students’ testimony but remind them the statistics provide a possible picture of how students’ experiences fall into a norm. When there is a conflict over the methods in which information was collected, teachers might bring to the surface a discussion about positionality in data collection and reporting, leading to richer lines of inquiry about who controls the interpretation of facts and data. Teachers may also surface implications about the purpose of a system, institution, or idea to resolve conflicts while validating viewpoints. The most difficult conflicts to navigate are those over



entrenched values. Kay remarks that teachers must explicitly name the values difference if students are unable to do so, and “immediately push students to the middle of the Venn diagram: where they agree” (p. 54) because from that agreement of common ground, both students can continue a dialogue where previously they may have disengaged or derailed. Silberman et al. (2000) argue for a “climate of passionate interest” where people “negotiate differences side-by-side, rather than head-to-head” (p. 155). This, to me, is the core of productive disagreement: one in which differences of opinion are validated, questioned, and oriented toward solutions in line with common values, where they exist, and an opening to continue a dialogue where they do not.

### **From Theory to Practice: Examples of Curricular Approaches**

Over the last few decades, several well-known curricular approaches have been packaged as professional development for teachers. For this project, I will neither offer a critique nor an in-depth summary of the research into those approaches. However, teachers interviewed for the study were familiar with some of the approaches and used tools developed for them in their classes. Because of this, a brief discussion of the most well-known is appropriate to understand how teachers are currently being supported to develop facilitation skills. Approaches developed in the last few years to help teachers facilitate conversations about race are also gaining traction within the educational community (Kay, 2018; Singleton, 2014). Although these approaches were included in the literature review of the four dimensions because of their relevance to potentially contentious conversations, they are not explicitly included in the following section because, as currently structured, the methods are not suitable to all subject matters and content. Table 2 below summarizes the features of the four dimensions of teacher decision-making, as reviewed in the literature. I then provide an overview of the degree to which the most common approaches explicitly provide guidance for teachers.

**Table 2***Features of Teacher Decision-Making Around Dialogic Talk*

Knowing Self and Students	Culture and Expectations	Rhetorical Modes	Role of Facilitator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher reflects on their own multicultural competencies</li> <li>- Teacher honors noncognitive side of learning and develops multicultural literacies</li> <li>- Teacher values student-centered learning</li> <li>- Teacher chooses topics of study of interest</li> <li>- Teacher provides opportunities for providing testimony and encourages critical witnessing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher encourages explicit communal values</li> <li>- Teacher provides explicit task expectations</li> <li>- Teacher deliberately plans activities to build culture and community</li> <li>- Teacher provides opportunities to practice discrete rhetorical moves before student-led conversations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher provides opportunities to move through different rhetorical modes during conversation</li> <li>- Teacher provides support and scaffolding to increase uptake of different rhetorical moves</li> <li>- Teacher explicitly calls attention to and monitors nonverbal communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher monitors and encourage adherence to norms</li> <li>- Teacher models good conversation moves</li> <li>- Teacher intervenes to ensure safe and equitable participation</li> <li>- Teacher surfaces harmful or inaccurate ideologies</li> </ul>

***Accountable Talk***

*Accountable talk* is built on three principles: accountability to the learning community, accountability to reasoning, and accountability to knowledge (Michaels et al., 2007, Michaels et al., 2013). Some of the explicit expectations of accountable talk are that students actively listen to, respond to, and expand group members' ideas, perform logical thinking through explanations and self-corrections, and also remain aware of the evidence appropriate to the content area.

Writing on accountable talk explicitly outlines the following teacher talk moves: (a) revoicing

students' ideas, (b) restating others' reasoning, (c) applying reasoning to another students', (d) prompting students' further participation, (e) bids for clarification, and (f) challenging or providing counter examples (Michaels et al., 2007). The literature did not contain an examination of student talk moves or interventions to support students' development (Khong et al., 2019).

### ***Collaborative Reasoning***

*Collaborative reasoning* (Anderson et al., 1998) is an approach to discussion where students dialogue in small groups about issues in texts they read. In collaborative reasoning, teacher power is greatly diminished to the degree that there are no external signals (e.g., hand raising) to symbolize turn-taking, students decide "when to talk and what to discuss" (Reznitskaya et al., 2001). The teacher's role from this approach is to prompt students, think-aloud to model effective reasoning, challenge students, summarize, or validate strong reasoning.

### ***Dialogic Teaching***

In the mid-2000s, Alexander introduced a framework of *dialogic teaching*. Talk is used to push students toward deeper content knowledge by testing evidence, analyzing comments, and exploring participants' values (Alexander, 2008). The five dimensions of dialogic teaching are as follows: (a) teachers and students *collectively* deal with tasks together, (b) teachers and students *reciprocally* listen to each other and discuss, (c) ideas are shared *supportively* with trust, (d) teachers and students *cumulatively* build on ideas to create lines of inquiry, and (e) teachers *purposefully* structure learning opportunities to create the space for dialogic teaching. As a pedagogical approach, Alexander (2006) very explicitly lays out the conditions for dialogic teaching to occur, including recommendations for classroom layout, teachers' understanding of their role as co-negotiators, guidelines for different kinds of discourse interactions, and teacher feedback. Edward-Groves et al. (2014) build on Alexander's (2006, 2008) work to offer a

typology of teacher moves in dialogue, ranging from offering wait times to demonstrating active thinking and reflecting and reviewing learning.

### ***Exploratory Talk***

Barnes (1976) first introduced *exploratory talk* and positioned dialogue as a vehicle for students to move from “incompleteness and hesitancy on the part of the speaker” (Khong et al., 2019) to more crystallized understandings of the content. The nature of exploratory talk is “critical but constructive engagement” based on accountability, clarity, constructive criticism, and receptiveness (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). As a curricular approach, exploratory talk explicitly outlines six ground rules: (a) sharing relevant information, (b) inviting all group members to participate; (c) respecting opinions and ideas; (d) clarifying reasoning; (e) offering explicit challenges and alternatives and negotiating them, and (f) obtaining consensus before taking further action (Mercer, 1995). Exploratory talk has been found to improve reasoning, problem-solving, and content knowledge acquisition (Mercer et al., 2004; Rabel & Woolridge, 2013; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2004; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013; Rojas-Drummond & Zapata, 2004; Wegerif et al., 1999). There has been no specific mention in the literature of teacher self-concepts or approaches to understanding, nor a focus on teacher moves in facilitation.

### ***Philosophy for Children (P4C)***

Lipman (1988) developed *philosophy for children* (P4C) to promote philosophical thinking through the use of knowledge. In P4C, teachers design learning in three stages: first, students read a novel that contains social issues or problems, then they generate questions to initiate lines of inquiry, and finally they use those questions to drive whole-class discussion (Lipman, 1988; Scholl, 2013). Teachers are encouraged to build a classroom community that incorporates care, respect, trust, collaboration, and common purpose, a sense of “inquiry which

invites self-correction” (Khong et al., 2019). Splitter and Sharp (1995) explicitly detailed task expectations in a P4C community: students should care and respect each other and listen to and build on each other’s ideas by providing and analyzing statements, clarifying ideas, and giving examples of their ideas or counterexamples. When dialoguing, students should also encourage shy students to join the conversation, ensure no one speaker controls too much of the floor, be reasonable in their answers, and sit in a circle (Splitter & Sharp, 1995). Studies have found positive relationships between P4C interventions and the development of student dialogue, as well as students’ abilities to provide extended explanations and reasoning (Reznitskaya & Glina, 2013).

#### ***Philosophy 4 children (p4C)***

Building off Lipman’s work with P4C, Jackson (1989) sought to address limitations in Jackson’s approach, namely that the novels proposed by Lipman were not relevant to his students in Hawai‘i; teachers need deep knowledge of philosophy to be effective, and the local perception is that philosophy should be taught only at the college level. There are several key changes between p4c and P4C as approaches to dialogic teaching and learning. First, Jackson (1989) explicitly outlined a classroom ethos—community, intellectual safety, thinking, reflection, and inquiry—and second, he presented clearly structured learning activities to develop student skills with dialogue: community ball, plain vanilla, the good thinker’s toolkit, magic words, and evaluation criteria. Makaiau and Miller (2007) additionally expanded on Jackson’s work to make it more applicable to content areas by integrating content standards, developing context-sensitive activities like inquiry-guided note-taking in social studies or specific guidelines for annotations in language arts, and adapting discussion protocols to allow more or less structure, as needed.

## **Conclusion**

The facilitator's role during classroom conversations requires a complex series of negotiations, such as understanding the lived experiences of students to provide an environment in which they respect and honor students' backgrounds while providing a window to the larger world. This means creating spaces in which group cohesion is strong enough for dialogue to occur, but differences are celebrated enough to encourage productive disagreement. This means attending to and developing skills in diverse rhetorical modes: argumentation, narration, and nonverbal communication. It also means understanding when to intervene to affect the flow of the conversation and when to allow it to unfold more naturally.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

McLeod (1999) notes all research arises out of personal experiences, and making those experiences clear allows for transparency in the research design and analysis process. In this research project, I look at the intersections of effective teaching, dialogic learning, and cultural or ideological diversity. I, like many others who grew up in the mainland United States, was very rarely provided a space where these three circles overlapped. I grew up in a predominantly White, middle-class suburb of Hartford, Connecticut. I had limited exposure to students of culturally diverse backgrounds because of educational policies like ability tracking and the legacy of 1930s redlining. I remember few courses where we were encouraged to discuss anything, with most teachers preferring to lecture or assign independent reading and writing. However, during my secondary years, I transferred to a small boarding school an hour away from Providence, Rhode Island. Rigorous debate and discussion were built into all aspects of our education: classes were seated around circular tables, and we were assessed through presentations and oral defenses. I was taught the tools of civil conversation, and yet because of the homogeneity of the student body, I was not challenged in my thinking along issues of race, class, and culture.

I had fond memories of both my secondary and college years, and I hoped to replicate my educational experiences for my own students when I became a teacher. My first teaching position was in the 9th Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana, soon after schools reopened following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. I was unprepared. While I imagined myself like Kay's (2018) "smiling teacher," someone who led classroom dialogues with such skill that "quiet

students found their voice” (p. 40), I had not done the personal work necessary to effectively build meaningful relationships as a White teacher in an all-Black community: I was ignorant of the rich history of the neighborhood and the twin issues of poverty and racism affecting my students. I was unaware of the ways in which well-meaning White educators (like myself) were complicit in maintaining the status quo. Additionally, I was unprepared as a teacher and lacked the pedagogical tools to address my students’ needs, which were exacerbated by the storm. Almost every one of my students had experienced traumas of violence, poverty, and environmental disaster, and I wanted to give them a space to talk and write about these issues. But when the conversations derailed into shouting, physical fights, or disengaged silence, I reverted to lectures, worksheets, and test-prep: ways of teaching that are more controlled but less effective.

After almost two decades of teaching, researching, and reflection, I realize now I had made several major errors in trying to facilitate those early conversations. First, I centered class conversations around what was wrong with their communities, I think to assuage the “pain, confusion, or guilt” (Kay, 2018, p. 117) I felt as I began to learn about their lives. My own limited experience with Black communities meant I had not questioned the scripts I had constructed, and so I unconsciously and problematically viewed my role as a White savior: to help them get out and move on to better things. So when they shared stories of resilience, survival, and hope, I would inadvertently direct the conversations back toward the negatives in the guise of digging deeper or being more critical. Second, students had no input as to what classroom talk should look and sound like. Instead, I imposed my own White middle-class norms, with no additional language or cognitive support to bridge the differences between what they and I felt were good conversations. Moreover, even though I was integrating discussions of



issues that affected their community, I stressed objectivity and analysis over testimony and witnessing. I discouraged joking, asking students to take the conversations seriously.

Cole and Knowles (2001) wrote that the way we research is an extension of who we are. The literature outlined in Chapter Two suggests the way we teach is much the same. This chapter traces my personal and professional journey as a teacher and learner in the four domains of decision-making: (a) gaining awareness my cultural assumptions and biases to privilege my students' identities and experiences; (b) learning how to build a classroom culture for dialogue; (c) integrating rhetorical modes; and (d) navigating when and how to intervene during dialogues. Because my journey has not been linear, my narrative will be structured using those four domains instead of telling my story chronologically. Ultimately, this should illuminate the ways in which my personal and professional experiences have shaped both the design of this study and the interpretation of the collected data in the final chapter.

### **Negotiating My Identities and Experiences**

As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, I needed to develop an awareness of how my concepts about who I was personally and professionally shaped my ability to connect to and effectively teach my students. I grew up in the south end of Hartford, Connecticut. The neighborhood had historically been home to a large Italian population until the early 1990s, when Eastern European, Latin American, Caribbean, and African communities began to move in. My father kept us to the periphery of his Sicilian heritage. My siblings and I never learned to speak Italian, and we were taken to the Catholic Church in the neighboring suburb, further from the more recent Catholic immigrants. While I highly doubt this was conscious and intentional, it was interesting to note as I grew older. My mother was an ambiguous amalgam of White ethnicities—at times she told us she was Welsh, German, or Swedish—and she has been

meticulous about tracing her ancestry since the death of her parents. I was not as Italian as the other students in my neighborhood and school, but, because of my Italian ancestry, I was able to create some cognitive distance from the White supremacy we learned about in school. I may have been White, but I was not one of *those* White people whose families owned slaves and explicitly thought they were better than other racial groups.

At no point in my formal education was I asked to question that self-concept: not at my very traditional Catholic elementary school, which emphasized adherence to authority and rote memorization, nor at the public middle or high school I attended afterwards. I was always considered a good student, and my parents would push me outside of school to stretch my learning—my dad teaching algebra or calculus to me while we waited for our food to come at a restaurant, my mom taking us on nature walks or to historical sites. The schools I attended were considered good by traditional measures, but the classes and extracurricular activities I attended contained very little integration with students of different ethnicities. Because my parents had always stressed competition and merit, I assumed the people in my honors classes who looked like me were just naturally harder workers, and I was never asked to question this belief. I knew my town was ethnically and racially diverse, representative of many of the waves of immigration to labor and industry to New England, but I only remember one or two who were not White in any of my classes.

After a few years of boredom, disengagement, and academic stagnation, my parents transferred me to a private boarding school an hour away from where I was raised. I was immediately placed into classes based on my potential, rather than past performance. I was held to high expectations, and the curriculum was more academically rigorous than even some of my college classes. My humanities classes were taught through discussions and analytic writing, and

my science and math classes were taught through a problem-based lens, where discussion and reflection played a crucial role. Academically, I thrived and felt well prepared for the rigorous demands of college. However, because the school was 90% White, and almost exclusively students from the upper class, I still had little exposure to cultural and ideological diversity—and little need to unpack my cultural identities. If anything, because my parents were upper-middle-class professionals—my dad a lawyer, my mom a doctor—instead of senators, CEOs, stock traders, or fashion designers, I was considered an anomaly by the other boarding students, and my classmates would want to come home with me over the weekend to experience life in the suburbs. In exchange, I learned from them the codes of the upper class: how to dress, how to talk, and the conversational currencies that would mark me as one of them, if needed. I learned how to code-switch between the upper and middle class, which helped me network for jobs in college and earn credibility as a fundraiser for various campus organizations. Once again, this perceived distance allowed me to continue to deny the ways in which I did benefit from my proximity to Whiteness and power.

After college, I joined a program that placed college graduates directly into high needs schools with emergency teaching credentials. I thought maybe I wanted to teach, but I hated its lack of prestige. I did not want to spend time on a graduate degree for a career I did not view as terminal. My first classroom was in a FEMA trailer in the 9th Ward of New Orleans. There were black mold stains growing around the vents in the ceilings. The walls, barely stronger than cardboard, were dotted with holes from fights, careless furniture moving, and the stapling and re-stapling of posters and signs. My classroom bore color-coded signs for building paragraphs, essay structures, common editing mistakes, and to model student work. My desks were arranged in rows because, when I tried pairs and group work, I struggled to keep students on task. At least

my classroom library was full of my favorites—*Catcher in the Rye*, *the Crucible*, and *On the Road*, among others.

I was a hard worker, however, so I strengthened my pedagogy where I could, learning how to teach phonics and reading fluency to high school students in a way that was not condescending, scaffolding my instruction with sentence starters and visual organizers, but my attention to my students' culture was cursory. Additionally, when things became difficult in the classroom, as they inevitably did, my gut reaction was to teach the way I had grown up learning: with students sitting silently in rows and working independently on worksheets and essays instead of through discussion and collaboration—methods I knew would be more effective. When I cursorily added in African American literature to the curriculum, a student told me, “We don’t need to know about our own culture. We already know it. We need to learn what the White kids learn,” and I did not push back. I thought I was respecting their choice, without questioning that the texts I had included only focused on Black trauma (e.g., *A Raisin in the Sun* and *a Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, poems from Langston Hughes) or supported the institutional status quo (excerpts from Walter Dean Myers’s *Bad Boy*, where the main character learns to control himself in class and listen to his teachers). If my students thought that was all there was to African American literature, of course they would not want to read it. They viewed Black culture as joyful: soul food, second lines and bounce music, church, and cookouts in the park. When they *did* want to talk about the hardships they faced, I was unaware of the extent to which they were the result of deliberate racial decisions built into their local institutions. I was unaware of the way those same decisions had privileged my family. Again, at no point in my teacher preparation or professional development was I asked to consider these issues.

My deeply held cultural beliefs about agency and merit were tested over the next few years. I very much cared about my students' success. I was sad when my "bad" students made decisions that got them arrested, kicked out of school, or killed, but I thought they needed to take accountability for their actions and stay away from gang violence. I celebrated my "good" students when they graduated and went to college or got jobs at banks, restaurants, hair salons, and hospitals. Yet, over the next few years, I saw those same "good" students lost to violence, addiction, and crime. A pregnant salutorian was gunned down with her fiancé over a neighborhood disagreement. An honors-level sophomore, who watched anime and played in the marching band, was in the wrong place at the wrong time and killed in a playground. A senior on the cusp of graduation was unable to pay for the drugs he needed to manage his newly manifesting schizophrenic symptoms and drove his motorcycle off a bridge. Their individual traumas were informed by and imbued with institutional discrimination and structural injustices concerning the housing sector, access to health care, drug laws, and the ineffectiveness of schools to act as a primary social net. I was forced to reckon with my deeply held belief that my students' traumas could have been prevented if they worked harder or made better choices. As I learned from my students, I also became aware that although my Italian community may have faced discrimination in the United States when they immigrated, the same policies that held my students' families trapped in a cycle of poverty were ones that had propelled my family and community forward.<sup>4</sup> As I began to reflect on who I was in relation to my students, I was able to better pick topics of study and texts that would keep them engaged. I dropped the worksheets from the textbook and began designing my curriculum using project and place-based

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<sup>4</sup> Some of these policies include redlining and racialized residential segregation, police violence, and the carceral state and decisions around access to health care.

frameworks, always from a position of inquiry instead of authority. However, I still had not truly set up my class for dialogic teaching and learning. I still limited interactions between students, worried about potential conflicts.

Through constant reflection of who I was, and who my students were, I began to reposition the texts I used from a position of understanding content or history to providing a place for students to better understand themselves in relation to others. Take, for example, a study of *the Diary of Anne Frank*. I used to position the text in middle school to provide a relatable first-hand account of the atrocities suffered during the Holocaust. Anne has normal teenage issues like crushes, fights with her parents, and difficulties in school, but these banalities play out in hiding from the Nazi regime in Amsterdam. For many of my students, reading Anne's narrative was an academic exercise instead of a visceral one—until 2020, when schools closed. The school closures disproportionately affected many of my students, exacerbating previously existing issues tied to communities of poverty: the meals previously provided by schools were no longer available, parents lost jobs, and my students were more likely to lose family members to the disease due to a historical lack of access to quality health care and insurance. Many students shared stories of how the lockdown worsened already existing addictions, mental illness, and patterns of abuse within their families. Reading Anne's depictions of her terror of losing a family member, her hunger, her neighbor's threats of violence, her mother's growing inability to care for her, and her confinement for my students was no longer academic. My colleagues and I found the materials we had previously developed for the novel were no longer sufficient or appropriate, knowing what our students faced and were still facing. Where previously we had positioned the book as testimony to a historical atrocity, it is now positioned as a study of the different ways trauma manifests in periods of stress. Despite the challenges of virtual learning when we

instituted these changes, the quality of discussion, level of comprehension, and sophistication of literary analysis were deeper than they were before the shift.

### **Building Community and Task Expectations**

After four years in New Orleans, I got married and followed my husband to San Diego, where he had been given a job as a naval officer. I was hired to teach English language learners based on my experience with helping my students in New Orleans acquire the academic register. The school I worked in was ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse. For example, in one class, I had students of Mexican migrant workers; wealthier students from the Middle East and Southeast Asian countries, whose parents had moved to the area to work in the technology industry; indigenous students from Guatemala for whom English was a fourth or fifth language; and several students from Pacific Island countries. Even when the students spoke the same language, I could not assume similar cultural experiences. For example, a student who had just moved from Mexico City once wrote it was frustrating that everyone assumed he was just like the other kids of migrant workers: his father was an engineer, and he had more in common with some of our Iraqi and Korean students. They had vacationed in similar places and grew up in similar (albeit geographically different) cities. I needed to build connections between the students in a way that I did not have to in New Orleans, where most of my students' families had lived together in the same neighborhood for generations. I rewrote my first unit of study to emphasize sharing personal stories about place, family, childhood, and celebration. I would put students in groups to compete in challenges that were entirely nonacademic, like cup-stacking races and putting together puzzles. I was lucky to have supportive administrators who recognized the necessity of these activities, even as I fell behind in district-mandated curriculum pacing plans.

My department head, a skilled teacher-leader, coached me in the best practices for working with EALs and would frequently observe my practice to ensure my teaching echoed the research. She was supportive, inquisitive, and knowledgeable, and she stressed that all teachers need to be teacher-researchers, constantly reflecting on their own skill sets. One of the most immediate changes she made to my practice was developing a set of tools to promote student talk. She stressed that proficient speaking and listening for many of our students were precursors to mastery in reading and writing. She helped me become more proficient with the dimensions of speaking and listening in the classroom: the linguistic needs, the behavioral precursors, and strategies for developing a community where students feel comfortable speaking out. From then on, my students were constantly working or talking in pairs or small groups, presenting their ideas and summarizing those of their classmates. At all times, we were working to build students' confidence in talking to one another in English by providing sentence starters and word banks, practicing choral reading, and creating videos for each other, where students could re-record as often as they needed until they felt comfortable. As our students were learning new linguistic skills, we used relevant and engaging texts and tasks so there was something to talk about. During those years, all my students grew, and many were able to exit out of the EAL program altogether. If my time in New Orleans was about humbling myself to become open to new ideas, in San Diego, I was supported enough to learn what good teaching and learning could look like.

### **Navigating Rhetorical Modes**

New Orleans showed me I needed a better way to teach, and, during my time in California, I began to develop a toolkit for accomplishing those goals—building strategies and routines to get students talking to each other in low-stress situations, using games and



storytelling to build a sense of common ground, and setting clear procedures for facilitating whole class discussions. Over the next decade, my husband's job required us to move every few years, and I was grateful to find teaching jobs everywhere we went. Often, only having a year or two to learn about a community and my students before being relocated, I honed further my strategies for getting to know my students and building community with them. However, two experiences in the following years taught me that the models I had were still missing an element to truly reach what I considered the aim of dialogic learning: a stronger grasp of argumentation moves and students who cared-for (Noddings, 2015) the other members of our classroom community.

One of the incidents occurred during a middle school argumentative writing unit in my English Language Arts class while stationed in Hawai'i. Historically, many of the families who lived in the school's neighborhood had immigrated to work in a nearby sugar plantation. It was my second year teaching the same group of students, and I had spent my first year developing relationships with them, as well as teaching them the routines and structures I saw as necessary for dialogue. In my first year with those students, I limited the topics and texts they could use to develop a piece of argumentation to provide better scaffolds. My second year, I gave them the freedom to choose to take a stance on any social issue they thought was important to know about and create a piece of communication (e.g., a letter to the editor, a pamphlet, or public service announcement) to encourage their community to take action on their chosen cause. A young student had become pregnant the year before, so the topic of sex education in schools and abortion rights was a popular one with that year's group of students. I designed activities for students to test their arguments in pairs and small groups while they were planning and drafting and would conference with them one-on-one as they got close to their final drafts. One of my

more advanced students was creating a pamphlet urging lawmakers to consider legislation that would limit abortion access in the community. Her original line of reasoning was uncharacteristically weak, relying on fallacies about abortion's effect on women's health, quality of life, and finances. As I did with all my students' topics, I used questions to encourage them to clarify and support their ideas, and my student quickly noticed her line of reasoning did not make sense. We discussed how she might strengthen her claim. Moreover, as I always did at the end of our conferences, I asked her, "Did this conversation change your mind at all?" She answered no. This was surprising, given that she recognized the weakness of her argument, and she was usually so thoughtful and open to feedback. When I followed up by asking why, she told me her grandmother had told her none of them should be getting rid of their babies, because, on the plantation, they were not allowed the choice to have them.

Women in her community had shared with her that, after they had a few children, the plantation physicians would strongly encourage sterilization. This practice is corroborated by doctors' notes from several other plantations across the island in the period between World War I and Statehood in 1959 (Goodell, 1995), though my student remembered her family saying it continued to happen over the next few decades. My student did not think this incredibly salient and powerful narrative—the one that drove her topic choice—was worthy of discussion, despite its direct connection to the argumentative task I set for her. Her stance toward her topic was shaped by her need for intergenerational restoration and healing and to preserve that connection to her grandmother. By overemphasizing traditional argumentation and rationality, I had almost denied a space for that narrative to surface. We ultimately decided her project had no business being a pamphlet, and instead I asked her to do a series of interviews with her older family

members and neighbors about the topic to gather the evidence she needed for her argument. In this instance, the narrative rhetorical space needed to supersede the argumentative one.

A second incident occurred while I was teaching in a Department of Defense school on a military base in Europe. It was the first teaching assignment where, as the wife of an active-duty serviceman, I felt like an insider in the community, knowing our entire classroom community was linked by the unique experiences of both belonging to military culture and being Americans abroad. I think, because of this, I underestimated the degree to which I still needed to build a common culture for dialogue within my classroom. In the fall, my British Literature class was studying *Lord of the Flies*, a novel about a group of boys stranded on a remote island and trying to survive. I typically approach this unit as a study in government and leadership, and I pair the book with case studies of times in recent U.S. history that test the concept of majority rule. We discussed the following question: to what extent should measures to ensure safety and security limit personal freedoms? I knew my students could speak passionately about the topic.

My students supported their ideas with evidence from the book, from podcasts we had listened to, and from articles we had read about post-9/11 anti-terrorism measures and stop-and-frisk policies in New York City. At one point, one of my Black students argued that many security measures disproportionately and unfairly affected people of color. Another student, always quick to play devil's advocate, asked for her evidence, as I had trained my students to do. The first student shared that, during a school trip to Paris, she noticed she was being followed by security guards at every shop she visited. In response, the other student argued her personal experience did not make it true and said she needed real evidence like statistics or quotations to back up her point. Another Black student confirmed he had the same experience in Paris, as well as the store on base, to which some students whose parents were security guards took offense

over the implication that they would do something like that. Our devil's advocate dropped his counterargument and stopped participating, as did the students who had shared their experiences. Uncomfortable with the silence that followed, I ended the dialogue for the entire class. I did not yet have the tools to understand what had shifted and how to open the space for dialogue again.

In his reflection on the discussion, a student wrote it was unfair of those students to share their own experiences because there was no way to argue back without appearing racist, but that he knew he was right and "that's what you get for trying to point out the truth to Black people." His response was jarring and problematic on many levels. He was not viewing those two students as individuals or classmates but instead as all "Black people." He approached dialogue as a debate, and, by sharing their personal experiences, he felt my other students had somehow broken the rules. He also viewed his truth as static and authoritative, a stance that was antithetical to the aims of dialogue. In his defense, I had never explicitly primed my students to consider the role of testimony as a companion to facts, figures, quotations from experts, and statistics. I had also again failed to notice the change in my students' body language as they became uncomfortable with the shift in conversation and failed to notice the opportunity to intervene when I had the chance.

### **Deciding When to Intervene**

In many of the situations described above, I believe in-the-moment intervention could have prevented the discussion from breaking down. Ding et al. (2007) described three situations that require teacher intervention: when no group member can answer the question, when students exhibit problems communicating with each other, and when a few students dominate group work without allowing true dialogue. At the beginning of this chapter, I explained that I wanted to teach the way I learned at my college preparatory school, through dialogue and rigorous reading

and writing, but I reverted to traditional monologic ways of teaching when conversations broke down. It was only one day that caused this shift because I did not recognize the need for intervening when a class discussion became too emotionally fraught, nor did I have the tools to address that need.

I do not even remember what the discussion was about. I only remember that, seemingly out of nowhere, two female students were out of their seats and physically fighting. Although this was a common occurrence at school, it had never happened in my classroom. In hindsight, I am positive the emotional tenor of the discussion had changed, and I had not recognized how negative it had become. Before the fight, a girl who had been participating put her head down and tried to disengage. The other girl, who had been asking her questions, began to bounce her leg up and down, staring directly at her and sucking her teeth. During their suspension meetings, both girls confirmed the issue stemmed from the disrespect they felt they both suffered during that conversation, but I was entirely unaware. I thought the back and forth between the two girls was the productive disagreement I was encouraging, but each took it personally. As I realized I did not know my students well enough to be able to interpret their behaviors, and therefore could not ensure their safety (i.e., physical, emotional, or intellectual), I decided to stop asking my students to dialogue. The other students remembered the potential dangers of participating, so, even if the two girls were absent, the others would not engage.

This was an extreme situation, with two students who had needs far beyond what I could support in a 45-min class, but it is illustrative of a real fear that prevents many teachers from creating dialogic spaces in their classrooms: the loss of control and the threat to classroom cohesion. If I were in that same classroom, first, I would not have attempted to facilitate a whole class dialogue until I had addressed the social and emotional precursors: building relationships,

ensuring students knew that questioning someone's ideas was not a personal attack, more time attending to nonverbal communication, and explicitly practicing strategies for self-regulation during times of stress. If I had noticed my students' body language start to change, I would have intervened to help them find common ground, honoring their shared passion and commitment to the task and inviting someone else to share to take the heat off those two.

There were dozens of other times that conversations derailed. There was one time my class sat in silence for 12 minutes before I said something to end the conversation (I know, because I had my timer in front of me). That was a missed opportunity to step in with a new line of inquiry or an invitation to get another student to speak. I knew silence was important as a tool to let students process, but not 12 minutes worth of importance. At another time, a back and forth between two students became so domineering and debate-like that other students stopped trying to make bids to join, even though they had plenty to write about the topic during their reflections and would have added new layers to the conversation. I needed to step in earlier to prevent that from happening to ensure that power was more diffused through the community.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, I have grown more comfortable in facilitating classroom conversations, and now I provide instructional coaching to teachers trying to grow their practice. However, it still feels sometimes that, when the conversation is productive, it is because of luck. My interest in this project stems from a personal desire to be a better educator with regard to facilitating conversations to drive both content learning and community building. My interactions with other educators have led me to believe I am not alone in this need.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher decision-making about how best to facilitate and engage students in dialogic talk in classrooms. As discussed in the previous chapter, my interest in this project stems from a personal desire to be a better educator with regard to facilitating conversations to drive both content learning and community building, as well as to provide better mentorship for teachers wishing to strengthen their skill. In this study, I used a qualitative (Creswell & Poth, 2018), constructivist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2015), blend of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and phenomenology (Van Manen, 2014) methods to generate a theoretical model for the process of teacher decision-making in designing opportunities for dialogic learning in their classrooms. This chapter begins with a review of the research questions and then presents the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology used to design and conduct the research. It offers a narrative of the research design process and descriptions of the participant selection process, the instruments used to collect data, and the data collection plan. This chapter concludes with the data analysis plan and a discussion of the limitations of the study.

#### **Review of the Research Questions**

##### ***Central Research Question***

- How are teachers creating the space for dialogic talk in their classroom, and how do teachers negotiate their own talk within that space?

### ***Subquestions***

- How are teachers negotiating their own experiences with the experiences of their students in designing opportunities for dialogic talk?
- How are teachers building classroom culture and an understanding of task expectations for students?
- How are teachers negotiating the tension between academic rationality and other less validated modes like storytelling and social talk; what is the role of culturally specific communicative language?
- How are teachers negotiating their role during the conversations?

### **Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Framework**

Cole and Knowles (2001) explain that the way we research is an extension of who we are as individuals, and we must understand our epistemological and ontological assumptions to guide our research process. My rich variety of experiences have led me to believe reality is constructed through both lived experiences and the interactions we have with others. I want my research to honor the perspectives and experiences of the participants of the study, and so I selected a qualitative (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and constructivist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2015) approach blending grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and select tools of phenomenology (Van Manen, 2014).

### ***Qualitative Methods***

The qualitative methodology approaches research assuming the importance of subjectivity in the creation of the social world (Cohen et al., 2011). McLeod (2011) says, about qualitative methodology that,



at its heart, qualitative research involves doing one's utmost to map and explore the meaning of an area of human experience . . . Good qualitative research requires an *immersion* in some aspect of social life, in an attempt to capture the wholeness of that experience, followed by an attempt to convey this understanding to others. (p. ix)

For McLeod (2011), the “wholeness” of the experience speaks to the ontological perspective that, for qualitative researchers, reality is subjective and polyphonic in that no single perspective contains the whole truth (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative methods allow researchers to “identify variables that cannot be easily measured” when “we need a complex, detailed understanding of an issue” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45). Creswell and Poth (2018) additionally advocate for using qualitative research methods when partial or inadequate theories exist, as in the case of teacher decision-making in dialogic talk. Epistemologically, qualitative researchers try to get as close to the participants as ethically possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21) to minimize the “distance” and “separateness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between themselves and the participants. Finally, the inductive procedures in qualitative methodology allow for the flexibility in research design, data collection strategy, and analysis that I believe are necessary to adapt to the constantly changing situations in education research (e.g., teacher turnover, school interruptions, changes in policy, or dictated curriculum).

### ***Social Constructivism***

The qualitative methodology has helped me conceptualize a more general outline of the project. Social constructivism provides an approach to develop the project's contours. Social constructivism emphasizes the varied and multiple meanings that individuals ascribe to their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Approaching research from this perspective leads the

researcher to look for complexity instead of trying to oversimplify, and it addresses the processes of interaction among the researcher, participant, and socially and historically negotiated meanings. Brown et al. (2006) posit the researcher's intent, from a social constructivist approach, is to make sense of the meanings that the research subjects have about the world. The utility of a constructivist research project allows for a vivid description of participants' experiences. From my perspective as a researcher, this necessitates using methods that provide rich data from participants about their experiences and interpretations of designing and facilitating opportunities for student dialogic talk.

### **Research Strategy and Approach**

I conceptualized the research questions using Tyler's (1949) four questions regarding curriculum development:

- What educational purposes should a school seek to attain?
- What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

I believe, like Dewey (1916), that the purpose of education is to create spaces for students to develop the values, skills, mindsets, and habits that will allow them to leverage their strengths for the common good of their communities. This requires students not only develop academic mastery of content-area knowledge and skills but also a care for their community paired with the habits that maintain social cohesion. I have observed classrooms where this happens. Students critically share testimony, make connections, and respectfully question each other's assumptions in a way that never seems to compromise a sense of classroom community. Many curricular approaches have been successful in developing this space for dialogic talk (Soter et al., 2008).

The most successful curricular approaches consider and organize aspects of teacher instruction, student tasks and routines, and the assessment of classroom conversations. However, absent from the research has been consideration of how experienced teachers negotiate the different tensions inherent in facilitating classroom discourse. The research questions were designed to fill some of those gaps and provide a framework for teacher decision as they design instruction to incorporate dialogic talk. This study is essentially twofold: it seeks to develop an understanding of the processes that teachers use to make decisions about that talk, and to understand the nature of the experience of teachers who value and facilitate student-centered dialogic talk. Therefore, a blended approach of constructivist grounded theory and phenomenology would best fit the respective aims of those two goals. Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allows for the development of theories related to the decision-making process, whereas phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990, 2014) provides methods to allow for a rich description of the phenomena of facilitating talk. Both the research methods and analysis draw on these two traditions.

### ***Grounded Theory***

Methods from traditions of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) are best able to uncover the processes through which teachers make decisions. In *the Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), Glaser and Strauss countered existing perceptions of qualitative research as being less valid than positivistic, narrowly scientific ways of knowing. The “revolutionary message” that “systematic qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7) provided a strategy through which researchers could develop theoretical explanations of social processes. Grounded theory tends to focus on steps and phases as they occur over time. Charmaz (2002) describes grounded theory as a set of

methods “aimed to develop middle-range theories from qualitative data . . . to demonstrate the relationships between conceptual categories and specify the conditions under which theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained” (p. 657). In this study, I seek to understand the relationships that exist between elements of student-led dialogic talk: the experiences, identities, and orientations of the teacher and students, their social connections, language use, and cognitive transformations. These elements interact in real time, and the decisions that teachers make will change those interactions.

### ***Phenomenology***

Whereas grounded theory methods help uncover patterns in decision-making, thus allowing for more generalizable theory, I was also interested in commonalities of experience for those teachers who make talk a daily practice in their classrooms. The purpose of phenomenology is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75) of the object of study, which in this case is the experience of facilitating dialogic talk in an educational setting. Drawing on diverse perspectives from philosophy, sociology, psychology, and education, phenomenological theorists find common ground in the idea that research methods should examine the consciously lived experiences of people (van Manen, 2014) and develop rich description to “grasp of the very nature of the thing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 163). To do this, researchers must elicit data from individuals that illuminate both “the subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of something in common with other people” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). Inductive data analysis leads to detailed descriptions of a subjects’ experience of the phenomena, as well as their reflections on how they experienced it. Researchers generate themes from an analysis of participants’ statements about the object of study. As in other qualitative traditions, in

phenomenological studies, researchers explicitly connect their own experiences and assumptions about the object of study as a recognition that this shapes the design, conduct, interpretation, and dissemination of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015).

Although most of the study's methods come from grounded theory traditions, I recognized the need for a tool to help separate my own perspectives and experiences in facilitating talk from that of my participants, so I could "[suspend] my judgments to focus on the studied phenomenon" (Peoples, 2021, p. 30). Van Kaam (1966) suggests the process of bracketing to stay phenomenologically vigilant (p. 259), which is an approach where the researcher intentionally finds *horizons* where participants' experiences diverge from their own understandings. In this way, I recognize I will not be able to perceive everything of the participants' experience as we discuss their classroom practices, and I must take care to not allow my prior assumptions to color the interviews or analysis.

### ***Researcher Positionality***

The experiences I have, personally and professionally, with dialogic talk are described extensively in Chapter Three. Because I am aware of the ways my perspectives shape the design of this project, I also must ensure the data collection and analysis prioritizes the voices of the other educators. I believe, like Smith (1999), Cram (2001) and Pipi et al. (2004), in their designing of a Kaupapa Māori,<sup>5</sup> that educational research must allow for participation with the researched community. Furthermore, the researcher must maintain respect for the dignity and voices of the participants throughout the design, conduct, and dissemination of the research.

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<sup>5</sup> An approach to emancipatory research that provides a code of conduct for researchers collaborating with Māori communities.

With this in mind, I designed this project to be at best mutually beneficial to the participating teachers and, at worst, to be unobtrusive and respectful of their time and expertise.

While developing the research proposal, I sought the input of potential participants to ensure there was a balance between building enough design structure to be able to generalize about the nature of classroom talk and having enough design flexibility that teachers maintain their authority in their classroom. This means the form, duration, or preparation for student conversation and reflection might differ among participating teachers. The topics and the structures the teachers use to encourage talk might also be different.

To ensure the research design was cohesive with their classroom practices, the participants were screened with two criteria in mind:

- Talk is a frequent part of their instructional practice. The more experience teachers had with talk, the more likely I was to be able to generate the rich data needed to uncover the thought processes honed by years of routine talk facilitation.
- That developing effective classroom conversations is supported by their administration. Increased administrative scrutiny of lesson pacing or divisive classroom cultures can add additional stress to teachers. I did not want teachers to feel at odds with their administration over their participation in the study.

Using these lenses helped ensure the project design has space for teacher voice and smooth data collection. Once I had the preliminary findings, I shared them with the teachers to provide a feedback loop. The intention was to provide a mechanism for the participants to be able to question the findings and provide additional insight to my interpretations, if needed. Several participants did elect to share additional information in response to reading testimony from the other teachers, and their feedback was incorporated into the final draft of the findings.

### *Description of Participants*

I used a sampling strategy that was purposeful and criterion-intense to select teachers who could provide the richest data to “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Using professional resources and networks, such as conferences, teacher educators, and school-based administrators to identify potential candidates, I reached out to possible candidates individually. I provided them with information about the project and asked preliminary questions to determine whether they would be a good fit for the research, using the criteria listed below. Each of the volunteer teacher participants were selected based on their level of experience with and commitment to facilitating dialogic talk. They were selected based on the following conditions:

- They work, or very recently worked, as lead or coteachers in Hawai‘i in a secondary school setting. Limiting the search to teachers from Hawai‘i allows for a discussion of the specifics of being a teacher in Hawai‘i. The focus on secondary teachers mirrored my own professional experiences and allowed a more limited focus for the implications of the study. Over the course of data collection from 2019–2023, many of the originally recruited teachers moved off the island, changed positions, or retired before the data were collected.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in another round of recruitment in fall 2022.

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<sup>6</sup> Teacher shortages and attrition remain a critical problem in Hawai‘i because of the high cost of living compared to teacher salaries, stressful working conditions (e.g., long hours, high temperatures in classrooms lacking air conditioning), and an over-reliance on out-of-state recruitment (Auganbach et al., 2020). COVID-19 exacerbated already existing trends in teacher attrition (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021; Zamarro et al., 2022).

- They have reputations of being effective teachers in various professional networks. Competency in dialogue facilitation was not considered because there are few existing comprehensive tools to evaluate it effectively.
- They prioritize using student-led dialogic conversations as an instructional practice. This allows for participants to meaningfully reflect on a wealth of experiences. Again, competency was not measured or considered, but it was important to choose candidates that frequently facilitated student-led conversations so they could provide rich data.
- They are reflexive and open around sharing their own identities and experiences. To gain an understanding of teacher decision-making, I needed teachers willing to share both what worked and the times they fell short of their own expectations.

Although teacher demographics were not prioritized in the selection of participants, they were explored as an important aspect of individual identities in the study. However, I considered the demographics of the schools in which the teachers teach, as well as the range of their content areas, to better represent the wide range of educational contexts and experiences in schools in Hawai‘i.

Using the criteria, I approached 21 teachers from 2018–2022, asking about their participation in the program. Some declined participation because of personal factors (e.g., young children, postgraduate work), but more who were open to participation experienced a professional change before I was able to collect data—which no longer made them suitable candidates, based on the criteria (e.g., moving from Hawai‘i, leaving the classroom for other educational positions, or leaving teaching altogether). Further limiting candidate recruitment, many of the pathways through which I was previously able to identify potential candidates were no longer an option when schools and conferences were closed to in-person attendance during



the COVID-19 shutdowns. As participants were excluded from the study, I was unable to find newer candidates. From the original group, I was able to select five candidates. Despite the smaller sample size than is generally recommended for grounded theory (Saldaña, 2021), I was still able to collect enough rich data from the participants to apply the intensive analysis process detailed in the phenomenological and constructivist grounded theory approaches.

The participants represented a cross section of teacher demographics, as summarized in Figure 1. Information from the participants was self-reported. I also assigned the teachers pseudonyms and stripped them of identifying features to protect their privacy.

**Figure 1**

*Consideration of Human Subjects*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Content Area</b>	<b>School Placement</b>	<b>Location of Early Childhood</b>
<b>Jen</b>	Female	Mid-40s	Caucasian	20–30 years	Math	Public Charter	Continental US
<b>Sean</b>	Male	Mid-40s	Caucasian	20–30 years	Social Studies	Private	Continental US
<b>Sara</b>	Female	Early-60s	Okinawan	30+	ELA	Public	Hawai‘i
<b>Molly</b>	Female	Mid-30s	Caucasian	16–20	Special Education	Public	Continental US
<b>Malia</b>	Female	Mid-30s	Hawaiian	16–20	Science	Private	Hawai‘i

The University of Hawai‘i’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study. I took measures to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants involved in the study and changed identifying information such as names, school placements, and teaching assignments in the analysis and discussion. The benefits that teachers experienced by participating in this project outweighed the potential for the psychological discomfort experienced as participants shared their experiences with and reflections of dialogic talk. All the participants signed consent forms and were allowed to remove themselves from the study at any time. The Institutional Review Board approval documents detail the process (see Appendix A).

### **Data Collection**

The intensive interview was the primary method of data collection because it “enables participants . . . to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 409). Interviews are interactional relationships in which informant and researcher reflexively make meaning together (Kvale, 1996), a process in line with my beliefs about research and the relationship between researcher and subject. Intensive interviewing combines flexibility and control and opens the space for unanticipated lines of inquiry (Charmaz, 2014, p. 58). To do this, interviewers rely on open-ended questions to obtain detailed responses about participants’ perspectives, meanings, and experiences, and follow up with questions to surface implicit views and accounts of actions. Intensive interviewing fits both phenomenological and grounded theory approaches because it is “open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 85).

The conducted interviews were semi-structured in that I used common open-ended questions to generate participant elaboration and reflection. Initial questions were broad and

were developed from the considerations discussed in the review of the literature in Chapter Two. A list of these initial questions can be found in Appendix B. However, during the interviews, I followed up the teacher responses with clarifying questions or bids for further elaboration, especially when teachers shared something that to me was surprising or diverged from what I read in the literature.

During the initial interviews, I realized my original questions were not broad enough to capture more general teacher philosophies about the nature of classroom talk and more general approaches to facilitating student talk. Charmaz (2014) notes that, through intensive interviews, *theoretical directions* begin to emerge and may necessitate a rewriting of questions or a difference in how researchers ask them. This was the case in this study. During the initial stage of data collection and teacher recruitment, schools were forced to close due to COVID-19, creating drastic changes to the educational system by offering remote learning without much preparation or planning (Sun et al., 2020). Originally, the proposed research design included classroom observations and an examination of the relationship between teacher decision-making and student talk. However, without access to classrooms, I redesigned the study to focus solely on teacher interviews. One of those classroom observations was completed, and although not used as a source in the final data analysis for the project, data from that observation were included in the discussion to provide a rich description of what certain phenomena related to dialogic talk looked like in practice. Because I was interested to see if any teachers changed their approach to designing opportunities for student dialogic talk (other than the obvious use of a virtual space), I did follow up with the two participants who were interviewed prior to the school shutdowns. I collected the data from those interviews and transcribed and analyzed them using the same procedures as the initial interviews. The revised questions are reflected in the list of

initial questions found in Appendix B. The two teachers interviewed before the changes were asked the new questions in a follow-up interview.

## **Data Analysis**

I conducted the interviews virtually through Zoom and recorded them using both Zoom's internal recording program and otter.ai, a software program that I then used to convert the audio file to a textual one. I reviewed the transcription to ensure the audio was correctly interpreted and created line breaks to show the flow from one topic to another. I then bracketed commentary based on salient nonverbal features like facial expressions or pauses, as well as my lines of questioning and commentary to address the way that I as the researcher affected the shared information. I then uploaded the written transcript to atlas.ti, a program used to manage coding schemes and memo writing, and I used the coding management capabilities in atlas.ti to keep track of the coding as I moved through the initial and axial stages of coding, as described in the following section.

### ***Initial Coding of the Interview Transcripts***

In the initial stage of coding the interview transcripts, I broke down my data into discrete parts, examined them, and then compared them for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102) to “remain open to all possible theoretical directions” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 148) suggested by the data. During the first round of initial coding, I employed in vivo coding and process coding simultaneously. In vivo coding is a strategy in which important words or phrases from the interview are used within the coding scheme. With process coding, I used gerunds to label real or conceptual actions revealed by participants (Saldaña, 2021). Doing this created a starting point for analytic leads for further exploration “to see the direction in which to take the study” (Glaser, 1978, p. 56). Focusing on in vivo and process coding simultaneously

allowed me to stay focused on the ways teachers described their actions, which would allow for an examination of their process of decision-making when designing opportunities for student talk.

I was also interested in the nature or phenomenon of facilitating classroom talk in these. After transcribing all the interview transcripts and employing in vivo and process coding, I then simultaneously used a combination of emotion coding (Liu, 2015), values coding (Gable & Wolf, 1993; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), and versus coding (Hager et al., 2000; Wolcott, 2003) to uncover themes in participants' inner workings, values, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, and worldview (Saldaña, 2021). Emotions coding asks researchers to label emotions recalled or experienced by the participant. Corbin and Strauss (2015) remind us that "one can't separate emotion from action; they flow together, one leading into another" (p. 23). This stage also involves paying closer attention to bracketed descriptions of nonverbal cues from the transcript because this is critical for emotion coding (Saldaña, 2021). Values coding (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) is the application of the codes that reflect the participants' values, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, or worldviews. The values coding was supplemented with versus coding, in which teacher descriptions of binaries (e.g., teachers vs. standards or product vs. process) can help unearth the tensions present in "patterns of social domination, hierarchy and social privilege" (Agar, 1996, p. 27). At the end of the initial coding process, I had developed approximately 700 preliminary codes. I eliminated any redundancies (e.g., "care for students" and "caring for students" were combined into one code because they expressed the same idea) before moving into the focused coding stage. After eliminating the redundancies, I had 520 initial codes.

### ***Focused Coding, Axial Coding, and Constant Comparative Analysis***

From my initial coding, I used focused coding “to develop categories without distracted attention . . . to their properties and dimensions” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 304). During the focused coding stage, I also began to compare initial codes between participants. I used several strategies to begin to combine the in vivo, process, emotions, values, and versus coding into categories. First, I began to group the initial codes into categories. For example, when teachers described comments made during conversation, I would group those comments into the dialogue moves, as described in Chapter Two: inviting moves, responding moves, building moves, and regulatory moves, marking whether the move was made by the teacher or the student. I also began to group descriptions of teacher and student emotions into the major emotional categories of fear, happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, and disgust. I used memos to document my thought process as I grouped and split codes to refine the categories to ensure most participants (at least three of the five) contributed to each category. By the end of the second iteration of coding, I had 34 categories of codes (listed in Table 3, along with a summary of which interviews contained related codes.

**Table 3**

#### ***Outline of Second Iteration Codes and Interview Locations***

<b>Coding Category</b>	<b>Molly</b>	<b>Jen</b>	<b>Malia</b>	<b>Sean</b>	<b>Sara</b>
Acknowledging logistical barriers to facilitation	X	X	X	X	X
Acknowledging personal barriers to facilitation	X	X	X	X	X
Teacher professional self-concept/kuleana	X	X	X	X	X

Joy	X	X	X	X	X
Professional networks/connections growing facilitation skills	X	X	X	X	X
Talk time is sacred	X	X	X	X	X
Paying attention to space and place *“We are a classroom in Hawai‘i”	X*	X	X*	X	X*
Social-emotional spaces for talk	X	X		X	X
“Relationships pay dividends”	X	X	X	X	X
“We are not robots”	X		X	X	X
Low-floor entries for talk	X	X		X	X
“You can’t just jump into the conversation”	X	X		X	
Integrating talk into lesson/unit plans	X		X	X	
Reducing anxiety about talk with choice	X	X		X	X
Allowing students to opt-out of conversations	X	X		X	X
Emotional release	X	X		X	X
Flexibility/spontaneity of student grouping as a response to challenge	X	X	X	X	

Flexibility/spontaneity of communication mode as a response to challenge	X	X		X	
Content-area self-concept	X		X	X	
Common values, norms, and expectations	X	X	X	X	X
Scaffolding	X	X	X	X	X
Shared experiences	X	X	X	X	X
Consistency/routine	X	X	X	X	
Transitioning from teacher to student questioning	X	X		X	
Developing student building moves	X	X	X	X	
Integrating humor, fun, and play	X	X		X	X
“Storytelling is the engagement”	X		X	X	X
Teaching nonverbal communication	X	X	X	X	
Assessing climate with nonverbal communication	X	X	X	X	X
Student discomfort vs. unsafe space	X	X	X	X	X
Modeling language moves	X		X	X	X



Engaging with anti-social behavior	X	X	X	X	X
“I offer myself on the altar”	X			X	X

For the third iteration of coding, I then reassembled the data into categories around *axes* to establish the properties and dimensions of the categories, a process called axial coding.

Charmaz (2014) explained the purpose of this stage of data analysis “aims to link categories with subcategories and asks how they are related” (p. 148). In creating these categories during axial coding, “the code is sharpened to achieve its best fit” (Glaser, 1978, p. 62). I began grouping like categories together to determine the relationships between the categories, which led to the findings described in Chapter Five.

## Conclusion

In this study, I examined the relationship with teacher thought processes around and during classroom talk and student talk. The research design was grounded in pragmatism and utility for the participants. I collected both qualitative and quantitative data from the interviews, field notes, audio recordings of the classroom conversation, and teacher and student written reflections of the classroom conversations. The results were shared back to the participants to better assess their validity in a highly contextualized space.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that the process of analyzing data amounts to breaking it down and reassembling it to determine underlying patterns. I thus coded and analyzed the qualitative data using the Atlas.TI software program, which allows researchers to organize, code and triangulate qualitative data from multiple sources. The coding system was developed through constant comparison, in which preliminary codes and themes were developed from the data and continuously refined and revised as new data were analyzed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS

From the initial line-by-line coding, the concrete statements made by participants began to find shape in analytic interpretations. As the codes became categories, I used memo writing to increase the understanding of the data and refine my thought process as I began to unearth the connections and implications suggested by the data. I present the findings from the analysis of the data in this chapter following the organization of the research questions and using direct quotes from the participants' interviews. I replaced identifiable information like participants' names, school names, and course names with pseudonyms. Overall, 11 major themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interviews. The themes are organized by the research questions outlined in previous chapters, and serve to answer those questions using the data from the interviews.

#### **Opening the Space for Classroom Talk: Barriers and Enabling Factors**

The central consideration for this study is understanding how teachers create the space for dialogic talk in their classroom, as well as how they negotiate their own talk within that space. As discussed in Chapter One, many teachers are resistant to using student-centered dialogic talk because of time pressures, an overemphasis on tested skills, fears that the chosen content will not be interesting or relevant, a fear of the perceived loss of classroom control, a lack of understanding of facilitation moves, and fears over potentially negative interactions between students (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996). Some of these factors are not under teachers' control, like the curricular priorities of their administration or the amount of time they have allocated for their classes, or the scope of content teachers are expected to cover. Molly

expressed worry that her new school administrators were not as supportive as previous ones who had nurtured a culture for talk by bringing in professional development and publicly recognizing skilled facilitators. Malia mentioned several times her “schedule keeps getting shorter and shorter” (p. 19), and, in making decisions about cuts to the curriculum, she sometimes needs to remove material or activities she knows would be engaging to keep pace with her curricula map. Jen also spoke about how a 45-min class period was also sometimes too short to cover both the content and the support needed to encourage math talk, especially as many students were coming back from virtual learning with academic gaps and fewer social-emotional skills necessary for meaningful engagement.

The teachers unaffected by institutional barriers expressed gratitude for the conditions that enabled the space for talk. Sara spoke explicitly about how her 90-min block would be too long to keep students engaged without talking as a “brain break” from more traditional learning. She is grateful that not only does she have enough time to prepare students for the task, facilitate discussion, and have them reflect on their learning but also students view it more positively than they would in a shorter class. Sean expressed similar gratitude that his smaller class sizes enable student talk, saying “class sizes are about 15, so it’s doable, right? It’s doable to go around to each kid. For it to work, there needs to be institutional conditions to make it doable” (Sean, p. 10). He continued later, in the interview, to say that in his smaller classes he was also able to integrate dialogues more consistently into his daily instructional practice. He explained that smaller classes enable this for two reasons: first, if the intention is that all students participate (as is his expectation), that means there is enough time for all students to contribute and to build relationships with informal talk. It also allows him as a teacher to be able to attend to student

needs individually, a point he brought up repeatedly throughout the interview and follow-up questions.

The data show no participating teacher expresses worry over the potential barriers to quality talk found in the literature that they do have control over—the relevance of their content to students’ lives, their skill in facilitation moves, or a fear of negative interactions between students. They (a) all developed a toolbox of strategies to address these issues, and (b) viewed these challenges as inevitable and part of the learning process. These two ideas will be discussed in-depth later in the chapter.

However, a challenge in opening the space for quality dialogic talk that several teachers share is the rise of students who are totally and consistently disengaged from school. This was not explicitly mentioned in the literature as a common barrier for the facilitation of quality talk, but many of the teachers say it prevents them from being able to effectively teach all their students. For Malia, this disengagement manifests as a sharp increase in students putting their heads down and trying to sleep, regardless of the strategies she uses to keep them awake. For Molly, one of her biggest challenges since the return from COVID-19 school closures was just getting students through her classroom door. She said many of her students have “an attitude of why I don’t have to be at school today” (Molly, p. 30). She continued,

I mean, I know it doesn’t really matter in the grand scheme of life, right? But then all of a sudden people are missing for a couple days or they don’t mind if they’re 20 minutes late, and these are just like the little stupid things that get in the way of having consistency from day to day. (Molly, p. 31)

She explained that, in her first period of 22 students, she only saw 14 of them regularly, and, by the middle of the year, four had yet to show up. When I asked her how she thought student

attendance affected the quality of student talk in her class, she said, “I know I want to continue to commit and find a way because I truly do believe that we have to get back to the dialogue piece . . . but that can’t happen if they’re not in school” (Molly, p. 35).

Recognizing the previously discussed challenges, as well as the novel ones unearthed in the interviews, I was curious what enabled these teachers to persevere in opening the space for talk—where others might not. I found three main themes:

- For all participating teachers, observing and participating in quality dialogic talk is a source of profound joy.
- All teachers are fiercely protected of the time set aside for talk in their classes.
- Many teachers do not view dialogic talk as just an activity or strategy but as a pedagogy.

### ***Theme 1: Dialogic Learning as a Source of Joy***

One of the most salient themes that emerged multiple times over the course of every interview was that, for all participating teachers, dialoguing with students, and then seeing students successfully dialoguing without intervention, was a source of joy and inspiration. The data show that joy arose in two categories: (a) a feeling of happiness while engaging in talk with students; and (b) as students are better able to engage meaningfully in content talk without teacher interventions, the joy of watching them grow and find success for themselves.

Molly, like most of the others, very much viewed herself as an active participant in the dialogues and expressed that she was often so excited to jump in with a question or connection that she had to hold herself back so as not to dominate the discussion. Her discussion of this is direct and unambiguous, effusing:

I love a good class dialogue. We want to keep digging and finding more of our truth or whatever the case may be. I love it. I love a good conversation. There’s

nothing more rewarding as a teacher to really see the gears going. I love it when they get really lit up about stuff and just find ways to connect. (Molly, p. 35)

Jen also expressed a similar sentiment: that creating the space for quality talk allows her to experience the best moments of her teaching career. She said that, when the task was strong enough, students naturally “just start talking about it. It’s magical, you know? That’s the absolute best part of teaching when you can step back and hear them engaged in conversations around your subject. It doesn’t get better than that” (Jen, p. 29). Sean and Sara were also clear and direct about why they chose to consistently use dialogues as a method: “I love it” (Sean, p. 22; Sara, p. 29).

Facilitating student talk also provides a space for participating teachers to witness student growth, which is also a source of joy. All participating teachers mentioned the ways they value and encourage a growth mindset toward student talk. Jen said that one of the mantras in her class is “mistakes are how we grow” (p. 11), whereas Molly and Sara spoke of meeting students wherever they are in their skills to move forward. Although this mentality is common in teaching, what is striking is the ways in which the teachers speak about how that growth in talking skills affect them personally. Sean stated that, for him, as a teacher,

Getting the quiet kid to be like, chatty Cathy is not really the goal. The point is getting this quiet kid to say, ‘Hi, how was your weekend?’ is a great success in and of itself. And maybe some kids are already there by week one, and another kid is week twelve. But that week 12 feels so good that they got to where they are in terms of that ability to connect with an adult. And I have such gratitude for when this happens. (Sean, p. 14)

In my memos responding to Sean's interview, I wrote about the emotional impact of Sean's humility. He spoke about the moment when a student connects with the teacher as if it is all on the student, and not on the conditions he creates to make it happen. Although all participating teachers discussed challenging moments and students, they returned repeatedly to the sentiment that hearing students engage in quality talk is "magical" (Jen, p. 29), "the best" (Molly, p. 42), and "wonderful" (Sara, p. 7).

### ***Theme 2: Finding and Protecting Time for Talk***

The second theme relating to opening the space for quality talk centers around the idea that not only are teachers deliberate in integrating time for talk into their lesson plans but also fiercely protective of that time. As discussed before, the teachers describe lack of time as being one of the biggest barriers to facilitating quality conversations, and so they need to deliberately carve out time to create the conditions for quality talk to occur, as well as carve out time for the talk itself.

First, teachers speak of making sure they invest time in the beginning of the year for students to talk to each other and build community. I asked Molly, who has a background in special education and often works with students who have increased social-emotional needs, whether she approaches dialogic talk differently with those students than she would with general education students. She responded that she does not:

I'm more of a proponent of we need to spend a little bit more time on community before we can get to that piece [of student-led talk]. I have no problem spending the first four weeks on community if that's what needs to happen. To me, if you're not going to have a community that functions, then what are they even learning? (Molly, p. 17)

Jen similarly said she invests time in the beginning of the year building relationships because talk is “something that we’re all putting our time and effort into this thing and . . . use it regularly” (p. 8), and Sara introduced her class by explaining “We’re going to have some fun discussions. We’re going to play a game where I’m going to find out about you and you can ask me anything at any time” (Sara, p. 2) and that makes it more likely that her students will find something to connect with. Sean also explained that spending time on talk for the sole purpose of building community is critical for success later in the year when he needed students to feel intellectually safe.

Many of the participating teachers spoke about the activities they used at the beginning of the year to get to know their students, starting with learning each other’s names by “playing the name game where everybody has to say everybody’s name, like that silly icebreaker thing” (Malia, p. 5). Beyond names, teachers also described the activities they plan for the first few days to begin to build an environment conducive for student talk. For example, Sara asked her students to design a virtual locker with 10 objects, and she used this as an opportunity at the beginning of the year to teach her students to both share their values with her and begin to share in a low-risk way. She asked students to create a “numeric me” in which they choose four numbers that are important to them and present those to the class, saying, “I find that when they can’t talk about themselves, it’s also going to be really hard for them to talk about the math . . . so that from the first day they all participate and value each other’s talking time and thinking time” (p. 12). Her last low-stakes talk introduction activity was providing a list of 25 questions for students to use to interview their classmates and find connections before then using those connections as a way to structure student pairs later on. In this way, she used formal, structured



activities to understand who her students are, build peer relationships, and begin to build task expectations for talks.

Malia is the sole exception to this pattern of spending a significant amount of time on building communities for talks at the beginning of the year. Many of her students live together in dormitories and have known each other for a long time, so although “pockets of friendships already exist, boarders are already friends, the baseball players are already friends, so they’re already hanging out together” (p. 16). She stated that although she does do some icebreaker activities to “foster an environment of mutual respect and care so they all feel comfortable talking to each other,” she does not spend nearly as much time building those relationships as other teachers seem to. Of all five teachers, she also taught the most homogenous group of students in that all her students have a shared Hawaiian ancestry.

Once teachers allocated time for talk in their classes, they also spoke of ensuring students place value on that time: all teachers described ensuring students do not waste time or encroach on other students’ talk or think time. Sara and Jen spoke of using timers during talks to ensure students have and use time effectively. Sean stated he was “fiercely protective” of student talk time, and that it was important to him that “kids allow other kids to finish talking because it’s important to give everybody some space to talk” (p. 12). Sara spoke multiple times about the ways in which she was frustrated by students who do not respect the talking time. She said of a challenging student:

She knows she has 90 minute [sic] in my class, but she chose to come in 30 minutes late first class of the day, because heck, she’s got time. And she finished her work, but I tell her “Ah. You missed my introduction. You missed our time to talk. You don’t know about me and I don’t know about you. We’ll become

familiar with each other, but that time is gone. We're not going to get it back." (p.

29)

I asked her later about how she responded to students who did not follow the expectations she set for talks, and she brought it back again to how addressing student behavior always starts from a place of valuing time: "I spent all night, all weekend, planning for you to talk about this concept, and you sleep? What's going on? You are wasting class time, what's going on?" (Sara, p. 43).

She spoke more negatively about students wasting time than she did describing other misbehaviors, such as making things sexual or using inappropriate language. This repeated focus on the value of time demonstrates she at least implicitly views her role as maximizing learning time, a sentiment repeated by Malia when she said, "my kuleana—my responsibility as a teacher—is to maintain a certain environment and to make sure the kids who really want to learn are not pulling their hair out because I'm not getting this place in order" (p. 27).

Finally, the teachers who felt they did not have as much space for student-led whole class dialogic talk in their content areas (primarily, the teachers who teach STEM<sup>7</sup> classes), mentioned making sure they carved out opportunities when it was appropriate. For example, Molly said she looks forward to the genetics unit in the biology class she supports because the controversies over ethics allow students to dig in and connect the content to real-world issues. Similarly, Malia explained that because "we [Hawaiians] are ocean people" (p. 5) many students have personal connections to the content, and so she creates the space for them to be able to share their stories about the ocean. Jen, who felt there was no room in her content for "Socratic Seminars or debates or activities like that" (p. 12) regularly planned an activity she calls a caring circle, where students have the space to bring attention and support to important people and issues.

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<sup>7</sup> STEM is an acronym stands for science, technology, engineering, and math.

### ***Theme 3: Dialogic Talk Is a Pedagogy, Not an Activity***

The third theme that emerged was that many teachers speak about how, for them, centering student talk was not just an activity or a strategy for content-knowledge acquisition. Instead, it was a pedagogy and practice that was a natural extension of their priorities as a teacher: connection, care, and curiosity. Jen described how all planned talk in her classroom connects at least superficially to math, with one exception: she has a routine she calls the caring circle, as previously mentioned, in which members of her class can put the names of people who need extra support in a metaphorical circle surrounded by the members of the classroom community. Although students did not *need* to talk more about why that person needs support, many of them still did, and so the circle became a “tool for some really overwhelming situations” (p. 14). For example, she shared how one of their classmates was battling cancer and was frequently placed in the caring circle. Sometimes students would put themselves in the circle, like when a family member or pet died. She said, for a lot of her students, the death of Kobe Bryant was difficult, and because math does not often provide opportunities for students to share that degree of emotion, without the caring circle, she would not have known how to help students process that level of collective grief. In her class, circles for talk are about opening a space for social-emotional caring to better facilitate academic and cognitive caring. She allowed that “it takes a special kind of community for that approach to work” (p. 15), but these experiences in return create communities in which students will have a higher chance of success in talking about math.

Other teachers similarly described talk in their class as being about much more than just a strategy to learn content. Molly, who has extensive professional development in p4c (Jackson, 1989), one of the curricular approaches outlined in Chapter Two, said it is frustrating that many

teachers cannot see its utility for their students. Finding the approach at the beginning of her career felt like “total alignment” (p. 6) with what she wanted for her students. She stated,

It’s not just an activity, it’s how I approach teaching. Granted, I don’t do [whole class conversations] every day, but at the base of every class, we are still working on our community. We’re still working on inquiry. We don’t always do what people recognize as flagship p4c activities, but we provide the space for them to be able to work together. And when we get pushback from other teachers, it’s like, if you value your relationships with students? That’s p4c. If you let them ask questions and you ask questions that help them guide their learning? That’s p4c. If you think about things that are everyday part of their lives, and if you’ve stopped to take a look at how your thinking has changed, that’s all p4c. It’s just good teaching. (Molly, p. 7)

Although she values many of the tools p4c uses to build students’ inquiry skills, sense of community, and understanding of content relevance, she is quick to point out that other tools can accomplish the same goals. It is not about the “flagship activities” but instead about a flexible set of practices that lead to student success, centered by and facilitated through talk.

### **Domain 1: Teachers Negotiating Their Own Identities With Their Students**

The first decision-making domain posits that dialogic discourse is predicated by an orientation toward a democratic space in which teacher experiences are diminished and students’ experiences and backgrounds are honored. In this study, I sought to understand how teachers know who they are in relation to their students and how they use that knowledge to make decisions to design more relevant curricula to strengthen opportunities for dialogue. Two themes emerged in relation to this decision-making domain:

- All teachers express that informal talk is the driving force to building relationships and intellectually safety.
- All teachers use their knowledge of students to ensure a low-floor entry into conversations that later connects to content knowledge.

#### ***Theme 4: Informal Talk Is a Building Block for Quality Content Conversations***

The fourth major theme was that, although all participating teachers are planning opportunities to get to know their students, for them, talk-story and informal talk generate the most usable knowledge for connecting students to teachers and content and begin building safe spaces. During informal talk during passing or free times, the beginnings and ends of classes, or outside of class time, many of the teachers share information about their own experiences and identities to develop and deepen their connections with students. They then use what they know to decide how far to push students' learning discomfort or confusion or create bridges between what they know about their students and the content to extend student understanding. In this way, informal talk between the teachers and their students is self-generative: it creates a space for teachers to share who they are and get to know their students, and it provides material to create future opportunities for student talk that is relevant to students' lives.

**Teacher Self-Concepts.** All teachers in the study express explicitly that they share who they are as people and professionals with their students. In response to the question “tell me about your path to becoming a teacher,” all participating teachers answered with information about how they view themselves as professionals and cultural beings, as well as how their multicultural identities connect to or diverge from their students. I wrote in a memo that it strikes me that this is how all teachers interpreted the question, which I had asked as a bid for basic background information about their influences, schooling, and teaching placements. For me, this

reaction confirmed that teachers who can enter into quality talk with culturally diverse students are able to view their own identities as “personal, local, and immediate” (Singleton, 2014, p. 88), and they are readily open to sharing these identities. This allows them a starting place to build authentic relationships with their students.

For example, Malia spoke about being a Hawaiian scientist and how the integration of those two lenses (being a scientist and being Hawaiian) shaped her role as a science teacher. She stated,

I was a local girl who never thought I would do science [until] I took marine science as a high school student and became interested in marine biology . . . my worldview and my philosophy really is shaped through the lens of being a scientist, and also caring a lot about my culture and language. They were all important to me. And so as a teacher, I draw on that background which fuses science, culture, and Hawaiian language. Whether I’m teaching in English or in Hawaiian, I’m always delivering my content from that place, that fusion of those world views . . . and not completely irrelevant is that I’m also religious and spiritual. These things that people think of as discrete ways of knowing, that’s really what I draw upon as a teacher. (p. 2)

She further spoke of how she shares this knowledge with her students “during free time” (p. 3) and when they come into her room for free periods or lunch, as well as of being able to identify with conflicts her students and their families feel about the ways in which academic institutions force many families to choose between those two lenses:

For a lot of families—actually me, as well, because as you might guess, I’m raising my son speaking Hawaiian and he’s about to go to an immersion

preschool—for a lot of families, it’s a dilemma, and a hard choice to go between your value of [academic rigor] and having an immersive environment for the language. This class gives them an opportunity to get the best of both worlds, so they can still be in an immersion environment, but they’re still at [a rigorous school]. (Malia, p. 11)

Sharing these experiences and identities with her students, she also creates a space for her students to share their motivations for choosing her school and her class.

Like Malia, Sara grew up in a community she described as very similar to the neighborhood in which she teaches, “because you have the variety of ethnicities, socio-economic status, types of teachers and classmates, only difference is [my current school] is so much bigger than the school I went [sic]” (p. 47). She drew on this connection frequently, telling her students:

“I love this school. I love this community. I’ve been here for 35 years to prove it.

Teachers can go anywhere they want to go after three years. I choose to stay.

Please don’t ruin or change the reputation of this place. I’ll be so hurt if you do.”

And then they know you want them, and you’re trying to make them look good.

(p. 2)

Sara acknowledged that the school where she teaches has a reputation for being challenging. Most students and their families are first- and second-generation immigrants to Hawai‘i and live below the poverty line in a neighborhood with a history of gang violence. Yet she strongly identifies as being one of them, despite growing up on the other side of the island: she knows and acknowledges that many outsiders view them through a deficit lens and acknowledges this creates a high turnover of teachers. Because she has been there for so long, she has taught many

of her students' siblings, parents, aunties, uncles, and cousins and speaks of the ways she uses that to connect with her students.

In contrast to Malia and Sara, the other three teachers in the study were transplants from the mainland. All came and stayed for different reasons, but they all shared that not only do they have extensive experience working in schools with students who come from different communities than they grew up in but they also value that student diversity and seek it out.

Molly stated,

I always tell my students that I'm a White teacher in Hawai'i. I have very White experiences, and I will put that out there. I'll be like, this is where I came from.

This is what I would have said when I was your age. Because this was the environment I was in. Now I've had the chance to be in more environments and find out there are lots of different places, people's opinions, and ideas out there.

That's why I do this, because this is the chance for me to learn more and I want to learn from you. (p. 35–36)

In being aware of the ways in which her upbringing created potential barriers for getting to know and care-for her students, she is able to de-center her own experiences to better honor those of her students. She is explicit in valuing student input and wanting to learn from them, an orientation that likely leads to her success in dialogue facilitation.

**The Power of Talk-Story for Building Relationship.** All teachers emphasized that, more than through the formal, structured, classroom activities discussed in the previous section, their relationships with their students were built primarily through talk-story,<sup>8</sup> especially during

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<sup>8</sup> Talk-story is a collaborative story-telling style where teachers relax control of classroom talk (Au & Kawakami, 1985).



free or passing times. For example, Malia explained she cultivated her classroom to be an open space where students would hang out during their free period or stop by during passing time to talk to her, which is how she learned a lot of the details of their lives. Likewise, Jen maintained explicitly that she was “not one that talks story with the kids all the time because I really get down to business” (p. 4). However, later in the interview, she allowed that “the longer I’ve taught the more I think the relationship is important to get kids talking” (p. 14). She provided an anecdote about how “in virtual learning, the kids only wanted to talk about the knickknacks on my shelf, but now we’ve been back to school for two weeks and they still are talking about the knickknacks” (Jen, p. 4). She described how it is fun to engage with the students in football talk generated by the Chiefs lanyard she wears. I noted in a memo analyzing her interview that I believe this contradiction between what she says she does (limits talk-story) and what these anecdotes show she does, lies in our different interpretations of class time. For her, talk-story seems to only happen outside of the formal lesson structure during these extra-curricular times, whereas what I was viewing as class time is any time spent with students in the classroom.

The integration between talk-story as *part* of the lesson instead of something *outside* of it seems connected to the content area: the more a teacher’s class was concerned with the human experience, like history or literature, the more able teachers could justify carving out class time for talk that seems “extra.” Sean developed a blend between a formal, structured approach toward talk-story in that he deliberately plans for a looser style of sharing to ease into the content for the day. He told me, “every class starts with an opening. If it’s towards the end of the week, it’s ‘give me the top two things you want to do this weekend,’ and then if it’s Monday or Tuesday, oftentimes it’s a high and low from your weekend” (Sean, p. 10). Sean acknowledged

the decision to regularly structure openings to include talk-story complements with the content he teaches:

My courses are so naturally relevant to students. I admire math teachers a lot because some kids go into math, and the teacher oftentimes just has to be so good at engaging kids. Like doing the song and dance of the circus, just to get them to maybe love numbers or at least have enough engagement to learn. My classes are just naturally an environment to talk-story, right? There's just a natural way of being able to do that, so we can connect things starting off at such a superficial level of building that relationship with just 'how was your weekend' and then we can really go inside our topic for the day. (p. 10)

In her English classes, Sara also deliberately planned for talk-story but “in time, in place” (p. 24) to break up the mental load of new material, whereas Molly explained every day she infuses “every day stupid stuff” (p. 23) into her discussions with students to take off some of the cognitive and affective load during class.

**Using Knowledge of Students to Drive Instruction.** Teachers use the knowledge of their students generated during informal talk to drive their instruction in two ways: to push dialogic talk in further than could have occurred without the strong relationship being there, and to create a bridge between the lesson content and students' personal lives. Sean shared that, for one of his classes, they have to cover content that addresses issues of sexual health and motivation. In describing getting his students to discuss something objectively awkward, he stated,

I tell them that I know the last thing you want to do is be talking about sex with a middle-aged man. I totally get that, but these are just certain things you have to

know about in this course, and this class is a challenge by choice. If there's anything that you're not comfortable with—and this is where relationships really pay dividends—kids do feel comfortable saying, hey Mr. O . . . [he trails off]. (p. 19)

The implied end to his discussion is that kids feel comfortable sharing with him about things that are awkward and uncomfortable solely because of the relationship he has established through the daily, consistent interest in their lives and ideas. They are willing to make themselves vulnerable and open to that discomfort because they feel safe that they are up to it, and it is worthwhile.

Teachers also use the information gleaned from informal talk to make connections between what students share and content knowledge in their course. About bridging to course content, Malia said one of the most important things she needs to know is her students' relationship with their places:

Malia: Most of the examples in my lectures are based on places that I know they live and care about, since a lot of what I teach is place-based because we're ocean people. So if I know that a kid is from Kauai, then I'm talking about something that I know exists there.

Whatley: So that means you really need to know their places well and anticipate what in the ocean they may have experience with?

Malia: Yeah, it's not only remembering where they come from, but knowing enough of my content that I know what they should be seeing or what they should be familiar with, or how they can relate it to their own islands. Even though I'm from O'ahu, and sometimes the class feels O'ahu-centric, I always try to relate the discussion back to their places. (p. 5)

This level of deep student and content knowledge required to be able to anticipate what students might already know about the content in her class might be less feasible in a more heterogeneous class and would be virtually impossible with a teacher who did not grow up locally. She also resists overgeneralizing assumptions about her students, understanding that there are cultural specifics unique to students on different islands and neighborhoods. In this, she can make the academic visceral and link students' lived experiences to her content matter.

### ***Theme 5: Students Need Easing Into Dialogic Talk***

Most participating teachers spoke of needing to provide opportunities for students to engage with quality talk around topics that require very little cognitive or linguistic support, and then offering students the choice to opt out of participation. In this, all students are provided with a low floor entry into the conversation. Sean described this as “needing to go into the shallow end first a little bit to be able to go deep,” (p. 47) whereas Jen explained it as making sure “everybody at least has the opportunity to enter in and do something at their own level, so that at least gets everybody talking” (p. 11). For her, this usually looks like a *notice and wonder* prompt, where students look at a picture, table, graph, or diagram, and then just list what they notice or questions they have. She said she often pairs the content question with something personal, like,

If there's a question about roller coasters, I might say 'what's your favorite ride at the school carnival?' and they talk about that before they talk in their group about the math question. But if I just say 'Ok, I'm going to put you in your groups and want you to talk about what you think Dan should do to solve this problem,' then their groups would go around and there'd be crickets. (p. 21)

More than any other emotion, participating teachers spoke of needing to manage student fear and anxiety around talk to ensure it happens, which accounts for the power of beginning

conversations from easily accessible entry points. Molly shared that “for a lot of our students, the anxiety of sharing out things can be tough” (p. 30) and that she needs to find ways to prepare students emotionally for participation and honor whatever engagement quieter students can manage, similar to the growth mindset discussed in Theme 1.

One way participating teachers are reducing anxiety around talk and easing them into the practice is by allowing student choice for topics, as well as allowing students opportunities to opt-out of the discussion, if needed. In fact, four of the five teachers explicitly mentioned they do not require their students to share if they do not feel ready. The one exception to this is Beth, who requires all students to participate. I wrote in a memo that this was surprising to me, as I had previously believed in my own practice that allowing students to abstain from speaking made it too easy for them to disengage and undermined the entire ethos of valuing *everyone’s* perspectives. And yet I wonder if, by not giving students the option, I was suppressing their ability to participate in a meaningful way.

Sean spoke openly with his students about why he felt offering them choices in how they engaged in dialogic talk was critical to their success. His students learned about a study in psychological research in which mice were exposed to electric shocks on the floor. He told them that one mouse has a lever to stop the shock, and the other has a lever that does nothing, and asked them the following:

Which mouse develops ulcers, when they have the exact same experience other than the lever? And the kids always know it’s the one that doesn’t have the lever to stop the shock. I say ‘Why? What’s the life lesson here? It’s okay to be stressed, but your body handles stress way differently when it knows it has a choice in that

stress versus not having choice. The idea that the magic bullet of stress is choice.’ I put that into practice and give kids choice so they’re not as stressed. (p. 43)

His attention to students’ emotional health resonates throughout his interview, as well as with the other participants.

The data show the participating teachers are attuned to the ways in which students experience dialogic talk as a social and emotional threat and felt a responsibility to mitigate that risk. I asked teachers if there were any topics they felt were too controversial or emotionally loaded to allow in class, and only Molly said she was open to whatever students choose to discuss. For example, Sara did not include topics she believes would cause harm or trigger strong feelings of sadness or fear, although she did design opportunities for talk to get adjacent to the students’ trigger. She provided the following example:

Like if someone just lost their grandparents, we aren’t going to talk about a grandparent’s death as a topic in class. And yet, we might talk about a family pet to kind of get the gist of the theme across, but we wouldn’t touch what’s too close to home to someone, you know? So it takes a lot because you got to make sure you know the students and their warning signs . . . I’m gonna go outside and say, “I heard you had something similar happen in the family. Was it Grandma? Is it okay that this came out in the story? You tell me if you’re too uncomfortable to talk. You give me that look, and you can go pull yourself together, whatever it takes.” (p. 26)

As with Sean, she provides the space for them to talk but does not require them to. In fact, she explicitly invites them to remove themselves from the conversation, if necessary, and because she needs to know “know the students and their warning signs,” she cannot introduce topics,

texts, or themes she knows have the potential to be triggering too early in the year. This speaks again to the power of these teachers knowing the communities in which they teach and then investing time and energy into learning about and from their students before delving into content that has the potential to be emotionally charged.

Similarly, Beth said that although she does not censor any topics related to her content, she admitted she does tread lightly with some conversations that have the potential to be emotionally charged because of her students' backgrounds. For example, she said,

If we talk about Kaneohe Marine Corps Base, and how they've altered Kaneohe Bay, and dredged and polluted and all these things, in the back of my head, I'm thinking that some of [my students] might live on this Marine Corps Base for all I know. But military related things sometimes have environmental implications.

And it's a charged topic in general in Hawai'i, but I can't assume that none of my students have military ties. It's definitely one thing that I tread lightly on. (p. 14)

She continued that there are other topics she recognizes may be charged, but she will not tread lightly on:

When we talk about climate change, depending on a student's background or family or political influences from their family, they may or may not believe that climate change is real, but I don't really have much regard for their backgrounds [in that situation]. I'm not disrespectful about it, of course, but it's just the facts of the world. I'm just saying the news. I'm just reporting the news. (p. 15)

This example sheds light on one of the more complicated negotiations teachers make in moment-to-moment decisions while facilitating dialogue. They must make decisions about which is more important when there is a conflict regarding the validity of the facts. This example delineates the

limits of validation of students' beliefs and experiences: they do not get to supersede established, scientific facts.

## **Domain 2: Building Classroom Culture and Task Expectations**

The second domain of decision-making during dialogic talk posits that classroom discourse is by nature flexible and changing, with students expected to understand the rules of the “language game” (Wittgenstein, 1953) and develop proficiency in different rhetorical modes. In this study, I sought to understand how participating teachers attend to their classroom culture and provide clarity about task expectations for quality talk to occur. Three themes emerged in response to this domain of decision-making:

- All teachers routinely and consistently designed shared experiences to integrate elements of dialogic talk into their practice, so students developed common values and skills.
- Most teachers use dialogic talk to encourage students' development of an academic self in their content area.
- All teachers have a flexible toolbox of spontaneous strategies to reduce the emotional or cognitive load of a task when students were not engaging in quality dialogic talk.

### ***Theme 6: Establishing Routines and Consistency With Shared Experiences***

The data show all teachers established quality dialogic talk as something that can only be developed with consistent, routine, and repetitive exposure to talk, prompted by shared experiences. This is similar to the finding that talk in the participating classrooms is more than just an activity or strategy—but also a pedagogy. Where this theme differs is in that participating teachers share they use a limited toolbox of speaking activities and then repeat them, so students are familiar with them. Sean said, “if talk is something that you do enough, the kids just get used to doing it, and then they become more talkative, and the conversations last a little longer, and



they become more familiar with each other” (p. 23). In Chapter Two, I summarized some of the major curricular approaches to facilitating student talk, but it is clear from the data that teachers are not trying to expose their students to the entire range of educational talk experiences. Limiting it to just a few, such as inner and outer circles, numbered heads, or plain vanilla conversations, reduces the anxiety students feel toward novel experiences.

The data show teachers are also using arts integration, such as music, film, and various visual arts, to create shared experiences to prompt student talk. Some of this is informal, as when Sean spoke about noticing when students are playing music as they walk into class. He will often ask them about the artist or song and then pull it up on Spotify for the class to listen to together. This connection over music becomes both a way to pull in some quieter students to the classroom community and generate conversations informally between students. Molly also talked about playing music for students to sing along to while they work on assignments or prepare for discussions. These teachers deliberately invited popular music into the classroom as a way to bond with students and create bonds between students.

The teachers also used arts integration to formally open talk spaces as well. Jen shared how, oftentimes, without intending to, assignments where she asks students to integrate art into their understanding of the math content became an opportunity for students to generate talk. For example, she described a project that was about Pythagorean’s theorem, where students illustrated an understanding of right triangles by arranging them into something meaningful. A student spoke about how the triangles looked to her like a broken mirror, which led to a discussion about gender roles, appearances, and expectations. Jen reflected on this, saying, “For me [as a teacher] it was like, wait, this is a math project about the Wheel of Theodoros, but it made me cry and I thought, how is it 2021 and girls are still feeling like this?” (p. 26). So even

though the talk was designed to be math-focused, “there are a lot more social issues on their minds,” (p. 27) and she tries to create spaces for that talk to occur when students need it.

### ***Theme 7: Encouraging the Development of Academic Self-Concepts***

The data show many participating teachers help students develop an academic self-concept<sup>9</sup> specific to their content area through their use of dialogic talk. This involves building students’ sense of self—for example, as a mathematician, historian, or reader—while also building their content-area knowledge and skills. Sean explained that one of the more challenging aspects of his class is that although he views his content area as “naturally relevant to students’ lives,” his students have not developed an “academic sense” or “academic lens” (p. 15) for his content area. He described how he might design an activity, for example, where he asks students to talk about patterns they notice in human development. Students discussed their own observations and experiences before Sean introduced them to the day’s learning target—the theory or research study under examination—and connected it by telling them, “You’re already doing social science work. You don’t have to memorize it, you have to know it, and you’re already doing it. You intuitively do it and talk about it, and this is what social scientists do” (p. 17). In essence, the teachers building their students’ content-area self-concepts are telling them that, when they talk about and do what people in their field do, that makes them part of their field. Similarly, Jen and Molly spoke about asking students to begin to connect their identities to math or science practices by sharing the ways in which their identities overlap with disciplinary practices—sharing, for example, the ways they do math and science daily because of who they

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<sup>9</sup> Disciplinary self-concept encompasses students’ beliefs about their own competence in and skill in an academic setting (Shavelson et al., 1976).

are. In building this self-concept, teachers increase the likelihood students will persevere through academic challenges.

Malia is in a unique position in that she is trying to develop two self-concepts simultaneously: that of her students being scientists, and that of her students being Hawaiian. Although she is clear these concepts are “fused together” (p. 2), she speaks of creating opportunities for students to develop both simultaneously while seeing the connection between the two. She teaches the same course both in English and ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i and uses talk to provide a bridge for her students between the science content and the Hawaiian worldview. She further remarked,

People would be surprised to know that I approach the two [courses] similarly because for my Hawaiian language science class, I want to make sure that the rigor of a science class is maintained. And yes, you’re taking it in Hawaiian, which is going to add another layer of understanding based on learning it in a different language. But you’re still going to be learning the scientific method and you’re still going to be doing labs and writing lab reports, so it’s still a science class taught in Hawai‘i. (p. 8)

She then continued that, for her English classes, “It’s kind of like the flip” (p. 8):

They’re learning science in English in the language they’re used to learning in, but many of them need to learn the Hawaiian worldview. It’s through incorporating our place, our own natural ecosystems, our own species. It’s the discussions that we have about ike kupuna, which is ancestral knowledge. (p. 9)

For Malia and her students, the act of situating Western science within a framework of indigenous Hawaiian knowledge of place is an act of cultural sustainment. She encourages her

students to not view science as separate from their Hawaiian heritage, similar to Tofel-Grehl's (2023) discussion of the *rightful presence* of indigenous Hawaiian students in science discourse. In having these twin aims of self-concept development, Malia also recognized the historical (and sometimes current) conflicts between the two. For her students who can more readily envision themselves as scientists, she tries to create opportunities for them to develop an understanding of what it means to be indigenous in science. For her students who already have a strong connection to their Hawaiian heritage, she tries to help them understand that they already have many of the mindsets necessary to becoming scientists. After all, as Malia points out, Hawaiians were hydro-, terra-, and bioengineering long before Western civilizations were. Reinforcing the concept that indigenous Hawaiians have always culturally been scientists, she explained,

The way I created the curriculum, I actually had to create a lot of new words. So for my students learning marine biology in Hawaiian, if they speak Hawaiian fluently, the meanings of the words are sometimes more obvious to them [than the English is]. The word in English to my English speakers, because they don't know Latin and Greek and roots, sometimes because of the way the words were created it's actually easier for my [Hawaiian language] students to grasp the content sometimes because they're not hearing all this big, long English scientific jargon. It actually simplifies the content and makes it even easier to grasp and understand. (p. 10)

She further strengthens this link between the Hawaiian language and scientific language by integrating 'ōlelo no'eau<sup>10</sup> into her practice as well. She incorporates several idioms into her

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<sup>10</sup> 'ōlelo no'eau are indigenous Hawaiian proverbs and idioms that describe the natural world but espouse indigenous Hawaiian wisdom and worldviews.

instruction, and then asks students to explain the context and meaning of the idioms in relation to the object of study.

***Theme 8: “It’s Not Always Moving Forward”***

All teachers spoke of the necessity of having a flexible toolbox that allows them to spontaneously adjust their instruction based on the emotional temperature of the room. They spoke of using tools like “glossaries and translations” or “outlines” (Malia, p. 10) strategies for scaffolding turn-taking, adjusting grouping size, and using writing as a bridge to encourage speaking. For Malia, she did this “so they don’t feel so overwhelmed trying to do something completely new for the first time, in for some of them their second language” (p. 11).

Sean spoke in depth about his thought process in how he plans and adjusts student grouping:

You know, sometimes I’m not sure if it’s going smoothly. I need to give multiple opportunities so everyone can express their learning in some way. So sometimes I know I can get them to talk in a whole group, but sometimes I’ll tell them to just write down their thoughts individually. And maybe I’ll tell them I want them to share, and it doesn’t have to be with the whole class, but maybe let’s just start with pairing up. You give them an opportunity to begin to share and you walk around and you see engagement or lack of it and you adjust as you go. And then from pairs you can get a little bit bigger, but you’re probably not going to get into the whole class if they can’t do it in pairs. (p. 17)

Sean noted the necessity of carefully sequencing the learning opportunities based on students’ readiness to participate in talk. In theme five, I talked about how the data show teachers are creating entry points into conversation with all their students. The implication of this is, with the

right entry point, all students will have the opportunity to feel successful, which will beget further success. Sean's comments here belie that sometimes progress is not linear, and teachers need to be able to adjust on the fly for the days when the emotional tenor is off. He reinforced this later in the conversation, where he reiterated that he gives multiple opportunities for students to engage "if there's been a little bit of crumbling or a backward step in that relationship building" (p. 27) because "it's not always moving forward with relationship building with kids" (p. 29). He continued that he understands their behavior is not personal, or in response to anything he is doing, but that sometimes students are in "a different place than you are, and it's a step backwards" (p. 30). Using the tools described in the beginning of this section, teachers can provide students a safe step backwards without losing too much progress and then use the same tools to push them back forwards when they are ready.

### **Domain 3: Navigating Rhetorical Modes**

The third domain of teacher decision-making posits that, during classroom dialogues, participants must navigate different rhetorical modes and communication styles such as argumentation, storytelling and social talk, and nonverbal communication. In this study, I sought to understand whether and how teachers develop and encourage students' navigation of and attention to the different modes because the current literature examines the modes in isolation.

One theme emerged from the data:

- Most teachers explicitly integrated the three modes, with storytelling being prioritized for student engagement and content-area knowledge and skill development.

#### ***Theme 9: All Rhetorical Spaces Are Valued***

Another theme that emerged from the data was that all teachers valued, supported, and integrated the three rhetorical spaces described in Chapter Two: argumentation, storytelling and

social talk, and nonverbal communication. Despite the literature situating dialogic talk in a framework of argumentation, the data suggest, at least in practice, these teachers are incorporating all three. In fact, several teachers share that they often prioritize storytelling and social talk over argumentation, explaining that oftentimes “storytelling is the engagement” (Sean, p. 15).

**Developing Argumentation.** Because dialogic talk is almost always positioned from a stance of argumentation, it is not surprising that all the participating teachers spoke about nurturing strong argumentative moves for quality discussions. Several teachers noted how one of the harder skills to develop was questioning skills, and that this sometimes made it difficult to get conversations started without teacher intervention. Jen expressed a desire to get “them to initiate conversation . . . it would be nice if I didn’t have to go to all the steps to get different people to start the conversation” (p. 13). Molly also told me several times that developing student questioning skills was a routine part of preparing for dialogic talk, and that she would often pull a student aside to work with them on strengthening their invitation moves so they have the confidence to begin the discussion.

The teachers also trained students to attend to the line of reasoning and sourcing within class discussions by modeling and encouraging building moves between students. This also strengthened the social fabric of the class. Jen, Molly, and Malia explicitly discussed that an important part of their work in dialogic talk was ensuring students are connecting their ideas to others in class by name. Jen explained she does this by not intervening when students are wrong and hoping someone in her class will jump in to correct a student on their mathematical practices. She stated,

I expect students to say something like they disagree [with their classmate's answer], but the part I think is more important is that they acknowledge whoever had done the work. So they might say "Oh, I can see why Tyler said seven squared is 14; it's really easy to get mixed up with seven times two and that squared means seven times seven, so I think in step two you know it should be 49 instead of 14." Just acknowledging the person and how it can be really easy to make errors. Because in middle school, they really want to be accepted by their peers. So adding in that piece of talk like "Oh, I can see why you said that" helps that happen. (p. 8)

Jen referenced the common misunderstanding that dialogic talk should be positioned solely through argumentation when she said some of the highest quality math talk she will get in her class "is not like a debate or any engaging thing, just a simple task that every person can enter into and have lots of different solutions that aren't really necessarily clear" (p. 19).

**Developing Storytelling and Social Talk.** All teachers spoke about the importance that storytelling played during dialogic talk, and many teachers specifically mentioned the different ways they encourage social talk, such as joking and humor. For example, Malia stated,

During my lectures, I tell them my own stories as it relates to the content we are learning, even including pictures in my slides if I have them. So for example, the last two days we have been learning about the scientific mechanisms behind the sting of a jellyfish. At one point, I had them do a turn and talk to share stories of when they've been stung before, which most of my students have been. I wanted them to share what beach they were at, where they were stung, what did you do, all of that. After the small group discussion I had three students share out their



stories to the class, and then I shared a story and pictures of when I got a bad sting. (p. 27)

The data suggest that, for these teachers, storytelling helps bridge the gap between what students are learning and what they are living.

**Developing Nonverbal Communication.** Jen described an activity she incorporated in the beginning of the year, where she asked students to solve an easy math problem that involved group work, talk, and collaboration. The focus for her was not the math itself but rather building an understanding of nonverbal communication and what that looked, sounded, and felt like—and when it was successful and when it was a challenge. While they were working, she described how she takes a picture of them engaged and working, and then she asks students to discuss how they know whether the group is working well or not. She spoke about how powerful it was and will occasionally revisit pictures of students working throughout the year as a checkpoint. She described a conversation her class had after a difficult group assignment, where “you can tell [the student] is not looking at the paper, one person folded their arms, and another is backed away from the group” (p. 19). By providing her students the space to learn about the message they are sending through nonverbal communication, she increases the likelihood the group dynamics are strong enough to maintain quality talk.

#### **Domain 4: Teacher Intervention During Student Talk**

The fourth domain of teacher decision-making posits that the role of the teacher during classroom conversations is contested because too much control can impede the democratic foundation of the conversation, moving the conversation back toward monologic patterns, and too little control can derail it or undermine the dialogue goals. In this study, I thus sought to

understand how teachers decide when to intervene and the nature of the intervention. Two themes emerged from the data:

- Teachers assess nonverbal communication to know when intervention was needed.
- Teachers most often intervene to model emotional vulnerability and reduce student social-emotional distress.

***Theme 10: Monitoring Nonverbal Communication to Assess Emotional Temperature***

For me, one of the more surprising findings that emerged from the data was how some of the teachers view the nature of intervention during classroom dialogues, especially when engaging with students who test or violate community norms. Before the teacher interviews, I had assumed the role of the facilitator was to model quality talk moves for the students who sometimes seem intent on derailing the class's progress—or to shut those same students down before they derail the group's progress. In my class, these are often students who imagine themselves as devil's advocates, but who instead present blatantly false or harmful narratives and try to establish the superiority of their ideas by belittling those of others. However, Sean best expressed a different approach that the other teachers implied but did not make explicit: that the role of the teacher is not to model prosocial behavior for the challenging student but to model for everyone else how to appropriately engage with them. He stated that, although he seldom has students show outright antagonistic or aggressive behavior, he does have “students who get frustrated with each other, especially if there's that socially awkward kid who can't read a room” (p. 27):

Whatley:        So what do you do in those situations?

Sean:            I try to engage that kid in a public way, because most kids who can't read

the room are still outgoing, so they don't mind an audience when they're talking to me. It's never the quiet kid that can't read the room. So I'm trying to model that social frustration of like, 'Oh, why do you think that? Have you considered this?' and not so much challenging the kid, just modeling engagement of patience with that kid and not putting another student in that position.

Whatley: So to clarify, the modeling is for the other students? Not for the kid that can't read the room?

Sean: Yes! Because there's know-it-alls all over the world, and in my experience they don't like to change that much. And so me giving the feedback to a kid that he's a know-it-all will only make him defensive. But if you're giving alternative points of view in a gentle way, the learning opportunity for me is giving other kids a modeling of how to navigate that frustration without confrontation . . . I think socially, you having to deal with that bullshit is still a good life lesson. (p. 31)

This was the only time in the entire interview where Sean did not speak about his students from a lens of growth and potential and instead discussed the limitations of dialogic conversation as fertile ground for transformation. For Sean, the transformation does not occur in the individual but instead in the community. Modeling the engagement of antisocial behavior helps create a system of resilience in which those personalities are diminished.

***Theme 11: Using Self-Disclosure to Model Vulnerability and Reduce Social-Emotional Distress***

All teachers spoke about using a high degree of self-disclosure “obviously within professional reason, of course” (Molly, p. 24) as a participant during conversations for three reasons:

- To humanize themselves as people and participants in the discussion
- To model vulnerability and disclosure as a way to encourage students to do the same
- To reduce student social-emotional stress by “taking the heat” from students

Molly explained she wants to ensure students view her as “a human being who doesn’t just stay at school and power down while you’re not here” (p. 13), and “not just a robot” (p. 14). She stated, “I offer myself up on the altar” (p. 14), which illustrates a finding found in several interviews: teachers are willing to humble themselves to model the same qualities they want students to during conversations. Teachers speak of modeling confusion, awkwardness, and expressing the full range of emotions during conversations. Sean stated,

Getting kids started [speaking], I do self-sacrifice a lot here. Like, I don’t say “Hey Johnny, tell me about the hardest part about the struggles you’re going through in this thing.” I don’t do that. It’s more like, “Hey, you guys want to hear something hilarious about my first dance?” I told the story that at my first dance I took a date out to dinner, and she ordered a salad, and I ordered a steak that came with a salad, and I stopped the waiter. I said “don’t worry about her salad, she can just eat my salad.” My mom was like you did what? Because I had told them my mom prepped me for this date. And so you self-sacrifice, right? And by self-sacrificing you agreed that they can throw judgment at you that feels safe. And

it's teasing and that builds the relationship but also generates conversation, and then you pull that back towards the content of the day. (p. 19)

In this way, he lowers the power differential between himself and his students. He, and his ideas, are subject to the same amount of scrutiny as all the participants. Moreover, although he “self-sacrifices,” he is also able to model a response that shows that in his classroom it is safe to be flawed. Judgment of an idea or a story is not judgment about himself as a person, just as he hopes students will do the same for each other.

Another way he self-sacrifices is in modeling care during potentially triggering conversations. He spoke about how, during a lesson on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, he uses clips from the movie *Castaway* to show the different stages, and he tells them:

“Hey, I've been showing this movie for years, and it has had an emotional impact on me to see over and over again the plane crash. So I'm going to care for myself and step outside, and you're welcome to join me if that's not something you're comfortable with.” Nobody ever joins, but they're very respectful to me when they see me leave. Nobody's giggling or laughing at me. It's not a big deal, but it's an example of me modeling care for myself. That they see that they can do that as well if they need to. (p. 20)

Just like he uses embarrassing stories to show that, in his classroom, he shows students should not fear taking emotional care of themselves during heated moments.

Many of the participating teachers spoke of deliberately deflecting blame from the students to external factors when things were not going smoothly. For example, Sean “always blames the time. Right after lunch. Everybody's a little tired, so we're going to lower the vibe and chill out a little bit” (p. 32). In taking the heat off students, he allows them to save face and

preserve their standing within the social group. Knowing the importance of social status in secondary classrooms, these teachers are making sure to not create a condition in which a student's social standing is jeopardized, and they must choose between that and learning.

## **Conclusion**

The 11 findings that emerged from the collected data provide the contours of teacher experience and decision-making in facilitating dialogic talk. Many of the findings echo the conclusions present in the literature on the subject, but what was surprising for me was how similarly the participants approached talk, even from very different content areas and backgrounds. I use these findings in the next chapter to develop a potential framework for teacher decision-making.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this final chapter, I summarize the findings and propose a possible framework for teacher decision-making in their participation in and facilitation of dialogic talk. The proposed framework was developed from the data and analysis described in Chapter Five and supported by the literature discussed in Chapters One and Two. The findings from Chapter Five combine to provide a framework for teacher decision-making as teachers open spaces for student-led dialogic talk. The first part of the framework concerns why and how teachers are creating spaces for students to talk. The second part of the framework concerns the ways in which teachers move students into less controllable but more productive spaces for talk. The third part of the framework concerns how teachers use what they know of students to create enabling conditions for quality talk to occur. I then provide an illustration of how the decision-making framework can be used to design opportunities for dialogic talk. Finally, I discuss the implications for teacher practice and professional development and conclude with a discussion of directions for future research into considerations of dialogic talk.

#### **A Framework for Teacher Decision-Making for Facilitating Dialogic Talk**

The prevalence of low-quality talk in classrooms has been criticized by educational researchers now for several decades (Alexander, 2008; Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1998; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Teachers' over-reliance on "known information questions" (Mehan, 1998) and predictable patterns of communication in which they are in control of the flow of information impede student engagement and learning (Alexander, 2008; Galton, 2008; Nystrand, 1997). Dialogic talk, where "teachers and students act as inquirers, collaboratively engaging in a

generation and evaluation of new interpretations of texts” (Reznitskaya, 2012) is a highly advocated approach for the type of deep learning we want our students to engage in. The proposed framework, grounded in the data collected from interviews with experienced teachers resisting “the failure of dialogue” (Burbules, 1992 p. 144) can provide guidance for those teachers wishing to open spaces for dialogic talk. It focuses on those aspects within teachers’ locus of control: their choices regarding how to organize student learning and to best use their limited class time to encourage high-quality student talk.

### ***Decisions to Open the Spaces for Dialogic Talk***

The data confirm that, for all participants, talk is a spectrum with monologic, teacher-centered talk, on the one end, and whole class student-led conversations on the other end (Reznitskaya, 2012). Understanding that most talk in the classroom will incorporate both types, this project was concerned with how teachers make decisions to push students further toward dialogic learning. The participants linked student success to ensuring the right fit and structure for the learning topic at hand. One consideration is the size of the student group for talk: whole-group learning emphasizes the “open, democratic principles of the educational world and the realities of life in a ‘survival of the fittest’ world” (Lou et al., 2000, p. 101) through a uniformity of experience and an emphasis of a single instructional focus. In facilitating talk as a whole group, teachers can monitor the emotional temperature and provide modeling moves, but when students are not ready for or interested in the task at hand, the conversation reverts to traditional patterns of monologic teaching. Pairs and small groups provide opportunities for students to practice the skills needed for whole group instruction. The size of the group matters: smaller groups allow for easier coordination and task-management (Lou et al., 2000) but provide fewer opportunities to hear and respond to multiple viewpoints. When the group is larger, students use

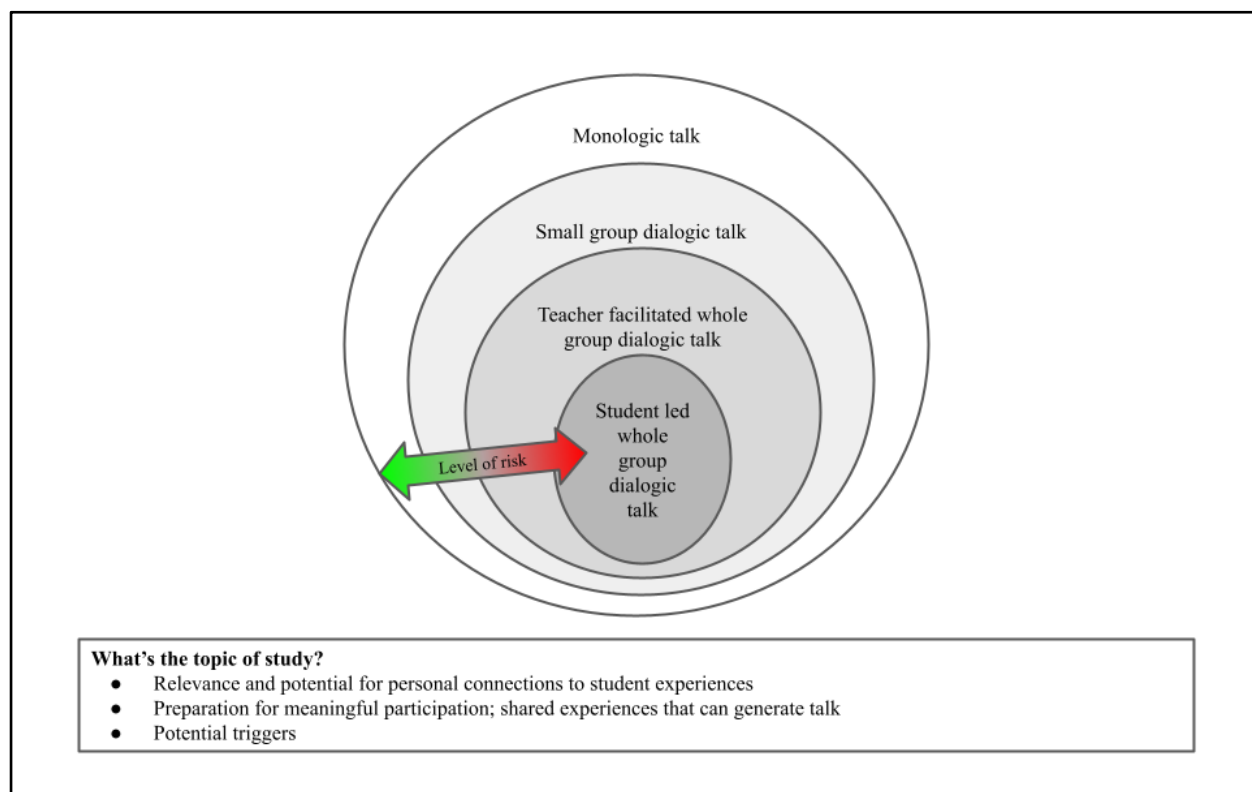


more complex language (Dobao, 2012) and have opportunities to share resources, but more students are affected if disruptive behavior pulls students' attention from their task (Lou et al., 2000).

Classroom talk can therefore be envisioned as carefully sequenced nested circles, as illustrated by Figure 1 below. The outer circle represents monologic talk, where the teacher has the most control over the dissemination of knowledge and uniformity of experience, and the inner circle represents student-led dialogic talk, where the teacher has very little control and can only create the conditions for the talk to occur. As students move toward the center of the circle, they may also take on higher social and emotional risk in that they need to interact with more people than just the teacher and be more active constructors of knowledge. However, moving students further toward the center of the circle has higher potential cognitive and social payoffs (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Reznitskaya et al., 2009). Teachers therefore make decisions about starting points for student talk based on their perceptions of student readiness for talking about the topic at hand. Teachers who are new to opening spaces for student-to-student talk, or who have tried other forms with little success, should provide students opportunities to practice discrete talk skills in pairs and small groups before attempting riskier conversational spaces.

**Figure 1**

*Finding the Best Fit for Starting Dialogic Talk*



Student readiness for dialogic talk includes the relevancy of the learning topic to their lives (Ladson-Billings, 2014). If the connection is not immediately obvious, teachers have an opportunity to open the space for talk with invitations to share related experiences, as when Jen asked her students to share about the times they rode on a roller coaster before discussing math involving roller coasters. The participating teachers' discussions suggest that storytelling for many students is the first way in which they engage in a learning topic, confirming the research that narration and social talk as rhetorical spaces oftentimes preclude the argumentative one (Dutro, 2009, 2011; Ellsworth, 1989; Fisher, 1984; Wegerif, 2020). Additionally, the data suggest, when this relevancy does not exist, experienced teachers are creating shared experiences through arts integration or hands-on learning to generate and prompt later discussions. Finding

an appropriate entry to move toward student-led dialogic student talk also depends on the potential for students' emotional triggers and their existing self-regulation skills: a topic that has the potential to be emotionally loaded is likely not the time for students' first exposure to a riskier dialogic space.

### ***Decisions to Mediate and Guide the Spaces for Dialogic Talk***

Much has been written about the use of cognitive scaffolding and tools to mediate student learning and open up more advanced zones of proximal development (Bruner, 1966; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Wells, 2020). Vygotsky (1978) suggested talk itself is externally mediated cognition, but, in this study, quality talk itself is sometimes the object of learning. In those cases, the data show teachers can move their students into more risky and complex spaces for dialogic talk using two kinds of scaffolding: linguistic modeling and tools. As previously discussed, when the spaces for student talk are new or unfamiliar, these supports will allow students to build their confidence in new talk environments and anticipate places where the talk may break down. Teachers can help guide student growth by intervening during discussions to model the different talk moves and by providing tactile or visual resources for students to use during discussion until they have internalized their purposes.

Although each class is unique, the participating teachers all shared that, generally, students are able to use responding moves, and they usually do not need scaffolding for that piece unless the topic or content is especially complex. This makes sense given Cazden's (2001) assertion that most classroom talk follows a pattern of teacher initiation to student response to teacher evaluation (IRE), so therefore students have had more practice responding to questions than any other talk move. This is also confirmed by the data in that teachers spoke of students using responding moves more than any other during discussion ( $n = 24$ ). The data show the

teachers' first priorities are to model and provide support in building moves and regulatory moves, respectively, because these are the talk moves that ask students to thread together and create meaning from each other's responses. Of all the outlined talk moves, the participants reported students struggling the most with invitation moves ( $n = 11$ ), in which they develop the questions to prove each other's thinking and guide the discussion. In the interviews, the teachers mentioned intervening to model invitation moves far more than any other ( $n = 35$ , more than double the discussion of using regulatory moves). Just as the students' comfort with responding moves is likely due to their experience with IRE patterns of classroom talk, their discomfort with inviting or initiating moves is likely due to teachers historically having a monopoly on the creation and use of questions to guide student talk. However, I was surprised to find teachers more frequently mentioned students using regulatory moves ( $n = 13$ ) than invitation moves ( $n = 11$ ) because both the literature and the data suggest the discussion facilitator's role is to use regulatory talk moves to intervene when discussions break down. I believe that, considering the importance the participating teachers placed on "taking the heat off students" (Sara, p. 35) in their classes, they intervene before students have the opportunity to address their peers' violations of norms. In truly student-led dialogic discourse, students will need to adopt this role, but this will only happen in classes where the social cohesion is strong enough.

Teacher modeling is one support for external mediation of the skills necessary for quality student talk. Participating teachers created the tools to help students internalize the following aspects of talk:

- The temporal dimension: the use of timers, clocks, and audio cues help students begin to internalize when a topic has had enough converge to exhaust a potential line of inquiry.

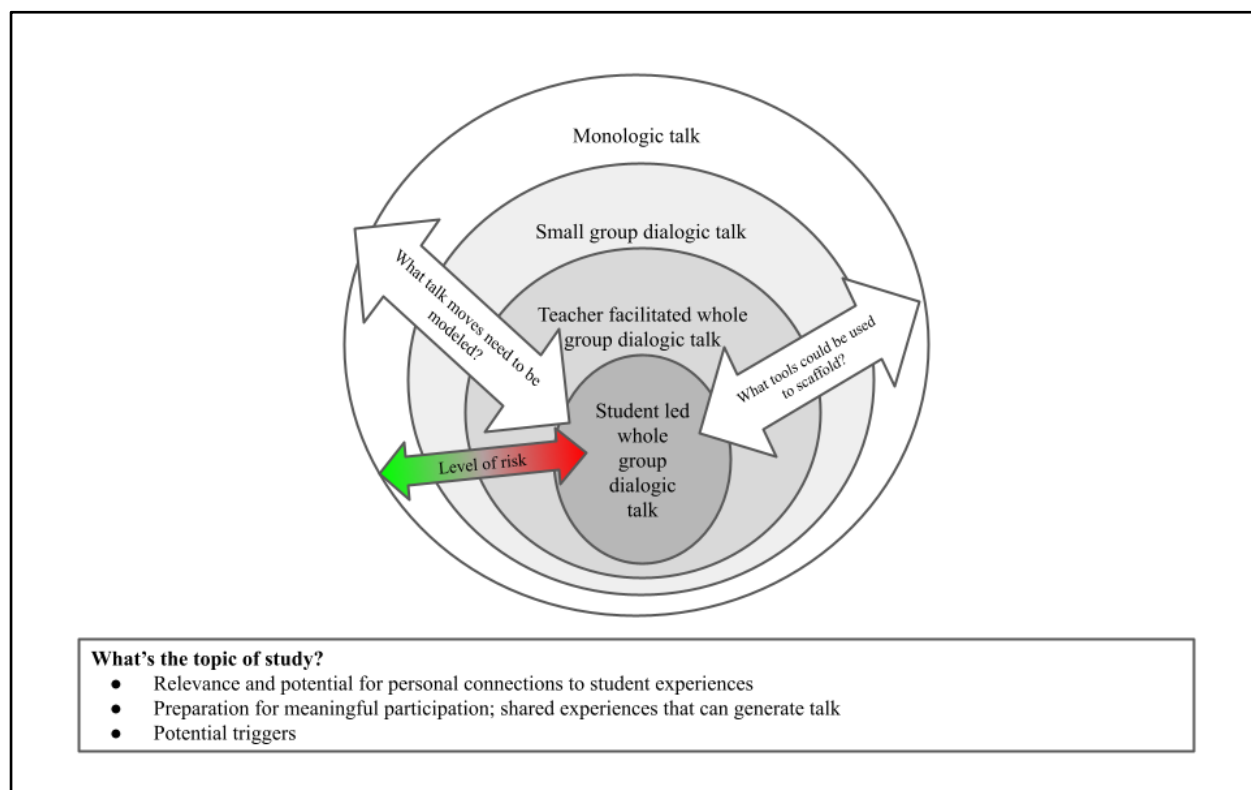
- Turn-taking: the use of talking pieces like balls, popsicle sticks, or poker chips help students internalize norms about participation, such as allowing students to finish talking before jumping in or ensuring everyone has had opportunities to speak before continuing with a discussion.
- Linguistic moves: the use of sentence starters and frames gave students language to share and thread together their ideas. Teacher modeling, as previously discussed, encourages this, but ultimately students must do it independently for student-led talk to occur.

Having a handout for students to reference was helpful.

Figure 2 below illustrates the concept that mediating talk with these types of tools can provide the support to push students toward more complex discussions.

**Figure 2**

*Mediating Dialogic Talk With Modeling and Scaffolding*



***Decisions to Create Conditional and Enabling Factors***

Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Bakhtin et al., (1978), Dewey (1913, 1916), Freire (1970, 1986), Noddings (1984, 2015), and Vygotsky (1962, 1978) remind us that learning is not separate from student identity, nor is it separate from the social situations in which learning occurs or the power dynamics and degree of care within the social relationships present in the classroom. The participating teachers use talk to not only shape these dimensions but also elicit the feedback necessary to better create future opportunities to do the same. In this way, classroom talk becomes a feedback loop: it provides the space for teachers to make decisions about the best way to guide their students but then also influences the identities and social contexts that allow that quality talk to occur. The data show four key areas where teachers make decisions to enable

student talk: (a) knowing their students and using that knowledge to plan talk; (b) developing student orientations conducive to quality talk; (c) creating a classroom culture conducive to dialogue, and (d) building task expectations to internalize norms of quality talk.

The participating teachers know their students well, and they regularly use both formal and informal opportunities for talk to deepen that understanding. They are deeply observant of their students' behaviors and assess when students may need more support to meaningfully engage in quality talk. Knowing their students' backgrounds and experiences allows them to not only design relevant instruction but also prepare for potential emotional triggers. The teachers take a stance of becoming students of their students, a positionality necessary for developing an ethic of caring-for instead of caring-about (Noddings, 2015). The participating teachers prioritize their students' cognitive, social, and emotional needs as they design and facilitate classroom talk, which sometimes means making themselves open to ridicule or the target of student anger. For many teachers wanting to strengthen their facilitation skills, the dismantling of a professional identity of being the smooth, cool, or friendly teacher may be deeply uncomfortable. In this way, though, teacher authenticity helps pave the way for the student authenticity necessary for quality talk to occur.

Miller (2013), in his action research to develop a model for dialogic talk, speaks of his students' need to learn to stop viewing him, the teacher, as being the source of answers, but instead "[seeing] their peers as being an essential source of their learning" (p. 125). Data from this study suggest that, for this to happen, teachers must create conditions to build student confidence levels to a degree where they can view themselves as resources for their peers, which teachers can do by complicating their understanding of what good thinkers say and do. This resonates with Gee's (2010) assertion that the notion of what makes a "good" student is

changing, just as the aim and focus of schooling is. One of the themes of the study is that good thinkers are knowledge seekers who allow themselves to feel uncomfortable and confused as they interact with new and complex information because negotiating that confusion is what drives their learning. Quality talk can enable this shift to occur, and when it does it can lead to deeper conversations. However, teachers need to know their students' self-concepts well enough to be able to build confidence and spend time validating and honoring that discomfort as a productive tool.

Participating teachers talk about the necessity of having consistent routines for talk to develop a class culture that honors students' ideas and experiences and opens opportunities for students to create an environment of intellectual safety, respect, and trust. For me, this is one of the most important findings. For every topic of learning, participating teachers were designing multiple opportunities for students to talk in different configurations and for different durations. They also all viewed downtime in their classes as a further opportunity to talk to students or facilitate peer-to-peer talk. They tried to interject humor and joy and to point out connections between students to develop peer-to-peer relationships. Their classes were always infused with talk, which counteracts the impression that classroom dialogues are only about "the circle," as Molly (p. 7) explained in describing her colleagues' pushback to integrating more student talk. Another important finding was that teachers viewed the intellectual safety of their space as paramount: as soon as student behaviors jeopardized that safety, teachers transitioned to more independent activities such as writing.

Finally, the participating teachers ensure their students have internalized the norms and expectations for participating in talk. Most of them did not feel the need to be explicit for each talk task because many of their students had previously internalized what was expected of them.

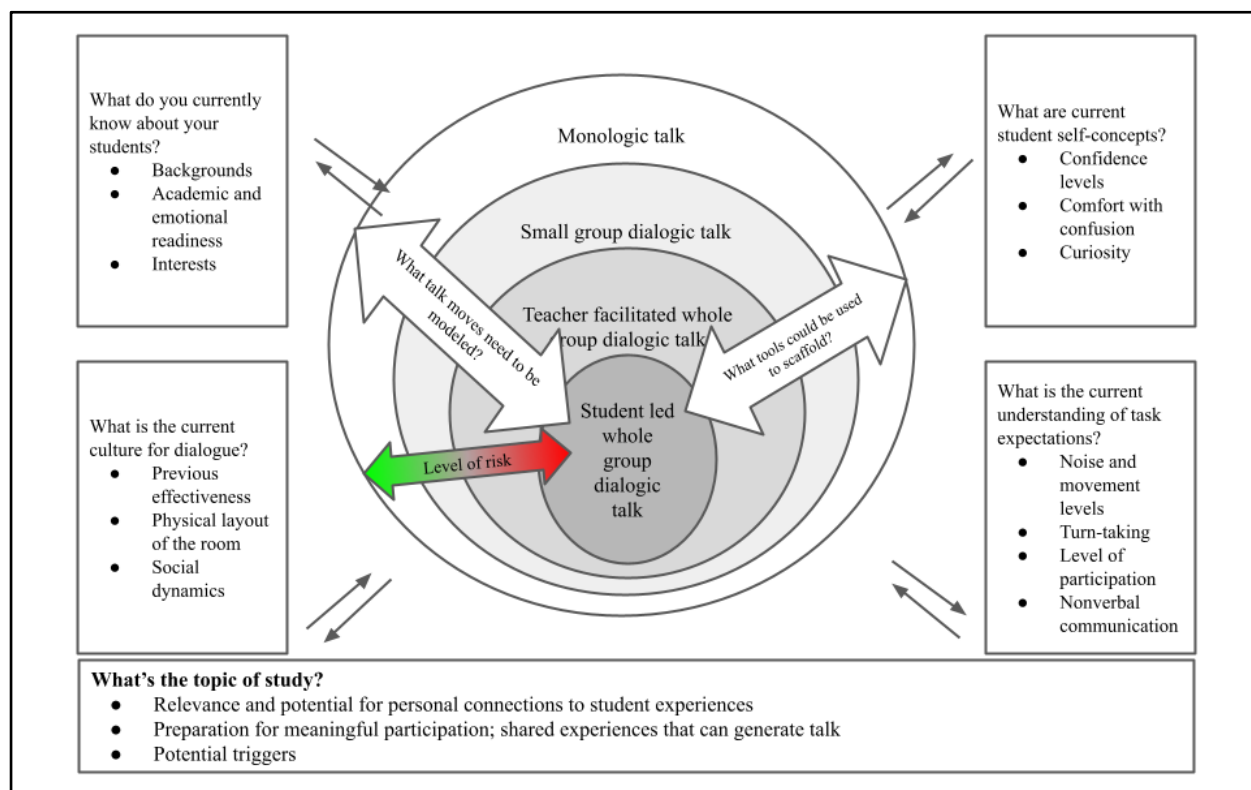


However, several teachers discussed how time out of school for COVID-19 lockdowns and subsequent challenges with student absenteeism have brought a renewed focus to the need for this piece. For many students, academic dialogic talk has a different aim and norms than the talk used at home and with friends (Cummins, 2008; Flores & Rosa, 2022), and more time out of school means they may be out of practice regarding the skills necessary for dialogic talk to occur. Teachers, therefore, may need to be more explicit about those expectations than in the past for those students to be successful.

These conditional factors, which exist outside of the dialogic talk activities themselves, can be summarized in Figure 2 below. Including these factors allows for a comprehensiveness of the range of different decisions teachers made to encourage quality talk in their classrooms. This framework can be used for teachers in their planning of student talk, as well to prioritize the development of different aspects to gradually grow students' skills. Figure 3 summarizes the final conclusions that arose from the findings in order to generate a theory connected to the central question of how teachers are negotiating tensions inherent in dialogic talk to make decisions that optimize the chance for student success.

**Figure 3**

*Creating the Conditions for Dialogic Talk*



**Using the Framework to Make Decisions for and During Dialogic Talk: A Personal Reflection**

I recently was given the opportunity to step in and teach a 9th grade U.S. History class after a teacher left mid-year. While the school looked for a replacement, I wrote and implemented lesson plans based on the district guidelines, which dictated the essential questions, topics of study, the pacing, and the summative assessments—but not the lesson plans themselves. I have provided an account of how I used the framework developed from the interview data to make decisions about the structures, expectations, supports, and real-time interventions for the unit of study.

The planned topic of study was the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, with the essential question *Should freedom be sacrificed for security?* I knew from their experiences during the COVID-19 lockdowns that many students would connect with the idea of their lives being disrupted and trying to maintain normalcy in the face of surreal challenges, and so I created a few class openers asking students to reflect on and share those stories.

Although I had only been with the class as a community for a few weeks before designing the topic, I already knew many of the students or their families from other classes I taught and programs I was involved with in school. Regarding their family histories, I knew that at least two students had incarcerated parents. I knew one student identified as Japanese American. I also knew many students had a family member in the military and were brought up with a strong sense of national pride. Knowing the topic of Japanese internment could trigger strong emotions with these students especially, I did not want to create a space where students would take on too much emotional and intellectual risk until I had evidence that they had the strategies necessary to self-regulate. Because it was an honors level class, I knew that, cognitively, they would be able to build on their knowledge of internment from exposure to testimony from Holocaust and Russian Gulag survivors in previous units of study. I also knew many of them were interested in WWII history and learning about social justice, so that could help build on that student interest.

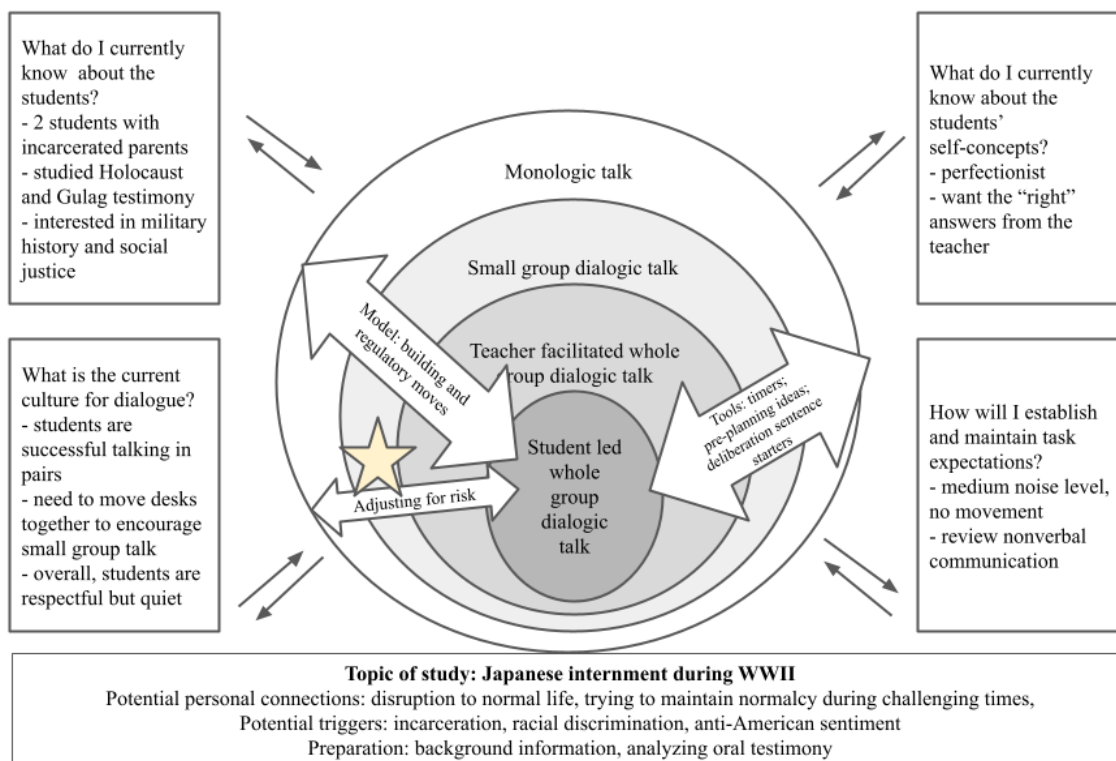
In the previous week, I had seen students were successful, on-task, and respectful when talking in pairs, especially when they were given the opportunity to choose their partners. As honors students, many of the students were self-proclaimed perfectionists who often wanted to know what the “right” answer was, so I wanted to place students in a situation where there could be no right answer or winner (e.g., a debate or presentation). So, to push them toward more

student-led dialogic learning while recognizing I did not yet know if they were ready to “jump into the conversation” (Jen, p. 11), I decided they should be in small groups. I settled on a Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) as the best strategy for what I was trying to accomplish. This approach asks participants to debate in groups of four, with both teams building an understanding of both sides of the issue before shifting to a deliberation to reach a group consensus. From what I knew about the students, I decided they needed tools to ensure they did not spend too much time in debate mode, and so I incorporated timers and sentence starters to encourage deliberation skills like summaries, synthesis, and concession.

During the discussion, the students had some successes during the first part: they were all well prepared with responses to the essential question on both sides of the debate, supported by evidence from primary sources we read in class. However, when it came time to provide rebuttals to the opposing side’s argument, I very rarely heard them using building moves to add to the line of reasoning or invitations to clarify a point or obtain more information. Moreover, when it came time for deliberation, I observed that most groups quickly settled on the opinion of the member who was the most assertive instead of testing the claims they developed in the first half together. I decided the most effective use of teacher intervention was to model invitations for clarification and building moves. Figure 4 summarizes the choices I made, based on the information I had.

**Figure 4**

## Application of Framework to Decision-Making Process



## Implications for School Design

The framework proposed in the beginning of this chapter can be a starting point for classroom teachers. However, as evidenced by both the literature and the data from participating teachers, institutional decisions affect teachers' ability to effectively facilitate quality student-led talks. First, class size matters, both in terms of the numbers of students and the physical space of the classroom. Crowded classrooms with large numbers of students may make it difficult for teachers to ensure all students have equal opportunities to share talking time. Second, school vision and priorities matter. Productive conversations take time to facilitate and do not allow as easily for measurements of individual student accountability. Teachers need administrative support to spend time on activities that may not always be as clearly applicable to state

standards, such as community and team building, and the space to compromise some content rigor for the low-floor entries discussed in Chapter 5. Finally, teachers either need clarity on what is or is not acceptable if they practice in a state with ambiguous legislation as to how to approach potentially controversial issues, or they need school and district-level administrative protection to exercise their professional judgment. Although this concern was not addressed in any of the interviews, I imagine a tenured, experienced teacher like those interviewed has a better understanding of how to navigate (and possibly push back on) ambiguous educational policies than someone earlier in their career.

### **Implications for Professional Development**

If we wish to produce more students who can engage in productive conversations in diverse settings, and more teachers who are better equipped to create the conditions for these to occur, then more teachers need tools to open up the dialogic space. Teacher preparation programs and professional development efforts should consistently model and integrate all aspects of dialogic decision-making instead of presenting student discussion as an activity or strategy, because, as the data suggests, dialogic talk is a pedagogy. Current professional development approaches can be strengthened by positioning their practice within a larger context of dialogism, ensuring they address the conditional facts described in the framework. Additionally, just as dialogic should not just be a one-off or isolated classroom activity, teacher professional development on dialogic talk should also be a responsive and progressive practice rooted in communities of inquiry. For this reason, I propose the ideal method for professional development in dialogic talk is through professional learning communities (PLCs).

### ***Contextualizing Talk Activities Within the Wider Practice of Dialogism***

One of the findings was that, for quality talk to occur, it needed to be done consistently and with routinely varying configurations of student sizes, groups, tasks, and modalities to gradually encourage students to take more intellectual and emotional risk. Anecdotally, I have attended several professional development sessions at the school and district levels meant to encourage student talk that focused on specific activities like Socratic seminars, philosopher's chairs, or structured academic controversies. The presenters shared student handouts and resources, but I never heard in those sessions about the work that needs to be done before those activities to support all students, improving their skills to the point where they can meaningfully participate in the activities. A more holistic approach would be to help teachers understand how these activities are contextualized into a wider practice of dialogic talk within their classrooms and use a framework like the one described in the beginning of this chapter to employ those activities effectively. For example, structured academic controversies is an extended discussion activity in which students engage in inquiry about a topic in small groups. Using the proposed framework, teachers would ideally employ this strategy if students have been successful in shorter opportunities for paired or small group talk, or if students need more practice with dialogic talk in an emotionally lower-risk environment than a whole group approach can afford. To employ the strategy before students are prepared for the intellectual, emotional, or linguistic risk is to jeopardize its intent. Professional development in talk strategies should attend to this consideration.

### ***Embedding Professional Development in Professional Learning Communities***

Another finding was that most of the teachers were empowered to adopt a pedagogy of quality student talk because of the professional networks in which they were embedded. This

implies professional development on student talk may be best suited for socially situated professional learning opportunities, such as professional learning communities. Professional learning communities (PLCs) have gained traction within the educational community as a crucial space for teacher development (DuFour, 2004; Grossman et al., 2001). PLCs rely primarily on collaborative talk as a way for teachers to build knowledge, prioritize values, clarify misconceptions, and negotiate differences in opinion within the group. However, Nelson et al. (2010) find that, when teachers focused merely on instruction, discourse in PLCs oftentimes would not move past polite conversation to the critical inquiry necessary for knowledge building. A focus on instructional *improvements* changed this paradigm (Slavit & Nelson, 2010), with the meeting focus being more influential on knowledge building than the frequency of meetings or deepened professional relationships of members. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) categorize PLCs where the focus remained on student outcomes to be the most advanced along the development of knowledge-building communities. PLCs, therefore, seem to be the ideal vehicle through which to build capacity in facilitating quality student talk—as opposed to the monological and expository presentations that characterize much teacher professional development.

### **Directions for Further Research**

One of my interests with this project was to examine facilitator thought processes and actions before, during, and after classroom dialogues and understand how these decisions affect the quality and flow of the talk. First, the small sample size limits the ability to generalize about the scope and focus of teacher decision-making around considerations of student talk. Further research widening the criteria (e.g., to elementary teachers or teachers in other locations) would strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, although the data gathered from the



participating teachers allowed for an understanding of teachers' perceptions of that talk, it did not allow for examination of the classroom talk itself, nor an understanding of how that talk changed over time in response to teacher decisions. Future research into the topic of teacher decision-making around dialogic talk would benefit from this application. A final consideration for future research would be the usability of the framework in making decisions around dialogic talk for teachers. All participants were experienced and had a reputation in professional communities as being strong, effective teachers. The question is whether less experienced teachers can strengthen their practice in making similar kinds of decisions or whether the experienced teachers' success was a result of other more intrinsic factors such as their perceived capabilities, extroversion, or general likability.

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, it feels like we are at a junction in education. The COVID-19 school closures illuminated and exacerbated already existing issues of the ways in which schools act as a critical safety net for students and families, the demands placed on teachers, and public conflicts over what students should be learning. Freedman and Ball (2015) write,

It is across these 21st century divides—between the haves and the have nots, between those with place and those who are displaced, between those with access to high speed travel and technology and those who have little access, and for those at all points along these continua—that we must find ways to communicate that establish bonds rather than create barriers. (p. 2)

Dialogic talk offers an antidote to the disconnectedness and isolation that many teachers and students are currently feeling. The results of this study show teachers can establish these bonds

through deliberate decision-making, rooted in an understanding of who their students are, with both a personal and professional payoff.

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## APPENDIX A

### COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SUBJECT APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY  
of HAWAII®  
MĀNOA

Office of Research Compliance  
Human Studies Program

**DATE:** April 16, 2019  
**TO:** Maaka, Margaret, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Curriculum Studies  
Halagao, Patricia, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Curriculum Studies, Whatley, Kristina,  
University of Hawaii at Manoa, Curriculum Studies  
**FROM:** Rivera, Victoria, Dir, Ofc of Rsch Compliance, Social&Behav Exempt  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** NEGOTIATION IN CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF TEACHER  
AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT  
**FUNDING SOURCE:**  
**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 2019-00295  
**APPROVAL DATE:** April 16, 2019

#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On April 16, 2019, the University of Hawaii (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b) 1, 2.

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at the OHRP Website [www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html).

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via the UH eProtocol application. The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program by phone at 956-5007 or

UH Human Studies Program, Office of Research Compliance  
Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation, University of Hawaii, System  
2425 Campus Road, Sinclair 10, Honolulu HI 96822  
Phone: 808.956.5007 • Email: [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu)  
<https://www.hawaii.edu/researchcompliance/human-studies>  
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## **APPENDIX B**

### **SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **Negotiating Teacher and Student Experiences**

- What activities do you use to get to know your students?
- How does your knowledge of your students guide you in your design of the educational activities?
- Describe a time when an activity changed what you thought you knew about your student.
- How do you resist stereotyping your students?
- How much of your own experiences do you share with your students? What is your rationale for sharing this information?
- How do you choose the topics for conversations in your classroom?
- Are there any topics you would consider taboo?

#### **Negotiating Common Ground**

- Describe a time when a classroom conversation went really well.
- Describe a time when a classroom conversation did not go well.
- What are the characteristics of a model conversationalist?
- Do you stress standard English use in classroom conversations?
- What strategies do you use to help your students access the conversation (e.g., sentence stems or frames, graphic organizers, turn-taking protocols).
- What are the similarities and differences between disruptive students and impassioned students?

- How do you establish a classroom environment that promotes positive classroom interactions—including providing opportunities for students to get to know and respect each other?
- What behavioral norms do you set for classroom conversations? Do you develop norms or do students have input?

### **Negotiating Communication Spaces**

- What strategies for inquiry and argumentation do you utilize in classroom conversations?
- What strategies for storytelling or personal connection do you utilize in classroom conversations?
- What strategies do you utilize for developing effective nonverbal communication?
- What role does silence play during classroom conversations?

### **Negotiating the Power Differential**

- What is the nature of interjection in classroom conversations?
- How do you intervene in classroom conversations? What is the nature of these interventions? Are there times when you wish you had intervened? Or when you wish you had not?

### **2020 Changes**

- How has teaching virtually changed your approach to classroom talk as a teaching tool?
- We know that, for many students, the last year has left them anxious and stressed, has your sensitivity around how you approach conversations with your students changed at all?