International Society of the Learning Sciences

Toward Dialogic Disciplinary Discourse in the Classroom: Teacher and Researcher Collaborative Reflection on Classroom Video

Allison H. Hall, Learning Sciences Research Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago, ahall33@uic.edu
Susan R. Goldman, Learning Sciences Research Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago, sgoldman@uic.edu

Abstract: This work presents a case study of teacher and researcher collaborative learning afforded by retrospective viewing of three years of classroom observation video from a prior design-based research project. We trace one strand of teacher-researcher learning through three retrospective viewing sessions to show how new understandings of the impact of teacher moves on dialogic classroom discourse and student disciplinary practices evolved through viewing and discussing the videos.

Rationale

Decades of classroom research studies have documented the preponderance of initiation-reply-evaluation (IRE) patterns of discourse in classrooms, a common result of teachers asking students known-answer questions (Mehan, 1979). Moving away from such predictable patterns in which the teachers are the ultimate authority towards more dialogic discussions with multiple authors and voices encourages students to become active contributors to meaning making in the classroom as they openly share ideas and perspectives (Alexander, 2018; Howe et al., 2019; Resnick et al., 2015). Dialogic teaching assumes that student ideas are valued and the center of classroom discussions, thereby shifting authority in the classroom from teachers to students (Nystrand et al., 2003). Making this shift has remained difficult for teachers and progress towards more dialogic classrooms is painstakingly gradual, if it happens at all (Resnitskaya & Gregory, 2013; Sedova, 2017; Wells & Arauz, 2006).

The potential for the lack of alignment between the speaker's intent and the listener's perceived intent problematizes the question of how teachers effect shifts from monologic to dialogic classroom discourse. That is, a natural way for teachers to encourage students to engage and contribute their ideas during class discussions might be to affirm their contributions with short words or phrases such as "good idea" or "nice." However, because of the ubiquity of IRE in classrooms, where students have years of experience, this reassuring proclamation could easily be mistaken for the "E" in IRE. That is, students might interpret the teacher's words as evaluative despite her intent to affirm and encourage student talk. Thus, there exists a tension between intended encouragement versus evaluation in teachers' efforts to move to dialogic discourse.

The case study that is the focus of this paper explores the tension between valuing student contributions and perpetuating the notion that there is one right answer, and the teacher has it. This exploration occurred in the context of teacher-research discussions during collaborative viewing of videos from lessons observed by the researcher in the teacher's classroom over a 3-year period. The videos served as boundary objects (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) across time and contexts, allowing the teacher and researcher to focus their joint attention on how the classroom dynamics changed over time and what factors may have impacted those changes. In this case, the co-viewing was done retrospectively, three years after the end of the design-based research (DBR) project that was the context for the classroom observations. The videos thus enabled a distal vantage point on the classroom giving the pair a perspective that could not have existed while the teacher and researcher were engaged in the DBR project and therefore were focused on "in the moment" design and enactment issues (see Ko et al., 2022).

Context and methods

The classroom video that was the focus of the collaborative reflections was from three years of co-design work in which the teacher and researcher (first author) iteratively designed and enacted instructional modules to support students engaging in the disciplinary practices of literary reading. Literary reading as a discipline highly values multiple perspectives on literary texts (Goldman et al., 2016). In other words, there is an assumption in literary reading that there is no one right answer, and so the design and enactment work was based on the principle that disciplinary discussion would reflect multiple ideas about and perspectives on the literary texts that student read, thereby making the discussions dialogic in nature. This context allowed us to address our overarching research question: In what ways can collaboratively viewing and reflecting on classroom video help teachers and researchers better understand classroom dynamics and their impact on dialogic disciplinary discourse?

The video was of the teacher's 11th grade literature class. She taught in a large urban high school serving a diverse student population (47.9% Black, 43.1% Hispanic, 3.8% White, 1.9% Asian, and 3.3% mixed race; 87% free and reduced lunch). She is white and had been teaching for two years when she volunteered to participate in the DBR project as part of the literature design team (Goldman et al., 2016). She left teaching to become a literacy

coach the year after finishing her work on the project and so brought her knowledge and experience as a coach to the retrospective video viewing. The researcher is white and was a doctoral student researcher in learning sciences during her work with the teacher on the DBR project. Her dissertation work focused on student learning and engagement in literary reasoning practices during the third and final iteration in the teacher's classroom. The researcher brought insights from her analysis of the data to the retrospective video-viewing.

Data sources for this study are audio and transcripts of eight teacher-researcher meetings in which they collaboratively reflected on and discussed video from classroom observations across three years. These reflections focused on identifying shifts in teacher practices over successive iterations of DBR work, the impact of those shifts on student practices, and experiences that may have contributed to these shifts. See Table 1 for the timeline and brief descriptions of the videos viewed in each meeting.

Table 1: Teacher and researcher collaborative reflections

Meeting	Date	Videos viewed
1	2/14/2018	Year 1: T-led discussion of short literary text
2	3/12/2018	Year 3: T-led discussion at beginning of novel
3	5/8/2018	Year 3: 2 T-led discussions of novels at beginning and end of academic year
4	5/21/2018	Year 3: 2 S-led discussions of novels at beginning and end of academic year
5	8/27/2018	Years 2 & 3: T-led discussion of same passage in novel from 2 different years
6	10/23/2018	Year 1: T-led discussion of short story in the middle of the module
7	12/17/2018	Year 2: T-led discussion from end of novel at the end of the academic year
8	2/12/2019	Years 2 & 3: T-led discussions of same passage in novel from 2 different years

The first phase of analysis included repeated readings of the transcripts to identify extended interactions around a noticing in the video. These segments begin with either the teacher or researcher noticing something in the video (e.g., student reasoning, a teacher move, participation patterns, oddities in the task or activity structure). The end of the segment was marked where there was a different noticing or a change in topic. Across the eight meetings, we identified 22 extended interactions ranging from 17 to 114 turns. We wrote summary memos for each extended interaction describing the interactions, including what was noticed in the video, who noticed it, and what questions or understandings emerged through the interactions. Various recurrent themes related to design and enactment of instruction emerged from these memos, such as framing of tasks, validating student responses, space for multiple perspectives, and leveraging everyday knowledge. For this analysis, we examine the conversations around validating student responses as this was one of the teacher's first noticings about her own moves during classroom discussion and was revisited in two later meetings. Our findings trace the evolution of the teacher and researcher's understanding of the impact of validating student responses during discussions on the classroom dynamics and student engagement in disciplinary practices. We also discuss how the teacher and researcher's different perspectives contributed to their collaborative insights.

Findings

In the teacher and researcher's first meeting, after watching a video clip of a whole class discussion from the beginning of enacting her first module, the teacher noticed something that bothered her particularly because of her current position as a literacy coach. As she put it, "it's something that I'm really working with my teachers on now." She was referring to her tendency to validate what the students say: "I kind of validate and move on." She pointed out that this was in opposition to what she should have done, which was to ask students, "What can we add to that? What else do we think about that?" The validating she refers to in the video was when she made affirmative statements after students spoke, such as "good" or "I like that." The researcher had not noticed this in particular and responded by wondering if the teacher validated student responses during discussions in later iterations, suggesting that it would be "a good thing to look at, to see if we see that, see if it changed … in your practice in those years." This interaction was not long and left the pair with an open question as to whether these teacher validating moves continued or changed in the teacher's practice across time.

Two meetings later (Meeting 3) the issue of validating the student responses came up again in response to a video clip from a whole class discussion from the beginning of the teacher's third year on the project. This time the researcher brought it up, admitting that when the teacher had first mentioned noticing it, she wasn't sure what the teacher meant: "You mentioned [validating] when we looked at [year 1 video], and I didn't know if I understood exactly what you were talking about, but you talked about how evaluative you were because every time the students talk, you go, 'Oh, I like that.' 'Oh, good.' And I realized that in all these videos from this year [year 3], you never do that." The teacher commented that was fascinating, and the researcher, trying to get at mechanisms of teacher learning, asked if the teacher had any idea why she changed or what made her change.

The teacher responded: "I think I was trying to move them from reliance on me as the right reading. And I think every time that I say something like, 'good' or 'That's right' or 'I like that,' that that builds this, like, I have the right answer and you don't type of thing. … We know that reading literature, it's not even a thing that I could have the right answer, but moving from, 'I am the holder of knowledge, and you're trying to guess what's in my brain' to 'how are we interpreting this as a collective?'" In this year 3 video, students had been freely sharing ideas and the teacher had not commented once on the quality of the ideas, illustrating classroom discourse that was both more dialogic and more disciplinary in nature than that in the year 1 video. The teacher's expressing these thoughts led to a discussion about teachers validating student answers as encouragement to speak and how many students want and expect to have their ideas validated in classrooms. The teacher pointed out, "I think, especially with students who aren't comfortable sharing, not to get that validation might also be kind of scary." This led to an open question about what teachers can do to encourage students to contribute to discussions and value their ideas without making it seem like there is a "right" interpretation.

Later in the same meeting, after watching a clip from the end of year 3, the researcher noticed "a lot more student to student talk than there was even earlier in the year and definitely more than the couple of years before." She also commented on the usefulness of the teacher keeping track of student ideas during discussion by writing each student contribution on the board using the student's own words. In response, the teacher connected this to the idea of validating: "I think that's part of the validating, right? I might not say 'nice,' 'good,' but your words do get published." This addressed their earlier wondering about what teachers can do to validate student answers without implying that the answer is the "right" one. Pulling on her familiarity with the year 3 data, the researcher pointed out that during that time, students "were mostly engaged in most things, and they did seem to care. And maybe part of it is the fact that their ideas are valid, and that they have a voice … maybe part of it is that they're not looking for a right answer. And they really are given the space to make sense of it, over and over and over again, you know what I mean? That's like, that is the norm of the classroom. And that's not normal in school. Not really." The teacher added: "Yeah, if I'm always searching for the right answer, then I have it or I don't." In other words, they both recognized that classroom discussions typically end up with students trying to guess what the teacher wants them to say rather than feeling valued in expressing their real thoughts and reactions. Watching the classroom videos from different time points allowed the teacher and researcher to "see" the change in teacher moves as well as hypothesize why her moves had changed. We have no evidence that either the researcher or teacher had noticed those moves (or the change in them) during their time of the initial project, yet, in watching these videos, the change, although small, seemed to have had a dramatic impact on the way the discussion looked and the disciplinary practices and values that these moves were encouraging in the students.

Three meetings later (Meeting 6), the pair watched videos from year 1 again, having watched several more videos from years 2 and 3 in the intervening meetings. Watching these early videos resurfaced the issue of validating student responses during discussions. This time the teacher brought it up, reiterating her surprise at how differently she responded to students in these early videos compared to the later ones: "The validation is really sticking out to me. It's like, whoa, that's different." She also added that she could not "point to a learning moment where I decided not to do that anymore, or like where it shifted." After watching several more clips from discussions in year 1, the researcher summarized and expanded on their understandings around validation, including hypothesizing as to why her practice changed:

> You had come to emphasize the idea that there are multiple interpretations, and you wanted that on the floor. I don't know that you ever recognized that you did the validating thing [at the time], I don't think you would have needed to. But if you start thinking about wanting students to have multiple interpretations on the floor, you would naturally hold back saying it … it seems an extension of a change in epistemology, like where you're thinking about what it means in the discipline, to do, to have all these multiple interpretations. And so, you would recognize that if you're saying somebody's contribution is good, that you're kind of implying [they are right] and then, not that you ever thought this explicitly, but it seems like it could be an extension of a change in thinking about what you were wanting them to do in the class.

The teacher thought this explanation made a lot of sense and reiterated her surprise at the extent to which she used validating word and phrases in these first-year videos: "I don't think I realized I did it so much… I did that, every student was like, 'nice.' That's really fascinating." In her explanation, the researcher connected the shift in this particular teacher move in the classroom with other things that had surfaced during their ongoing meetings reflecting on video—specifically, that she thought it likely that there was a change in the teacher's understanding of what it meant to engage in literary reading, which led to change in what and how she enacted instruction in the classroom. Discussions that the teacher and researcher were having around other video and artifacts from the DBR work contributed to the teacher and researcher's hypothesis that a significant impetus of change for the teacher

was a growing understanding of the discipline of literary reading and how she wanted students to engage in it. What started as the teacher noticing a small, potentially inconsequential teacher move—using short affirming statements after students contribute ideas in discussions—in videos from her 1st year led to the pair's evolving understanding of the profound impact that move had on both the disciplinary nature of the discussions and on student dialogic discourse during those discussions.

Discussion

Using classroom video as a boundary object bridging place and time allowed the teacher and researcher to examine and reflect on classroom discourse outside of the original performance context and in collaboration with a thought partner. After six meetings watching classroom videos together and thinking about what was happening in these videos and why, the teacher and researcher came to a deeper understanding of the relationship among teacher moves, disciplinary values, and student engagement in dialogic discussions. They also understood that the teacher's shift to no longer responding to student contributions with short affirming statements was likely a result of a shift in her underlying understanding of the disciplinary practices and values of literary reading. Coming to this understanding was afforded by access to several years of classroom observation video and informed by the different perspectives and experiences that each participant brought to the co-viewing. In addition, the insights gained through this collaboration shed light on how an underlying change in the teacher's knowledge and beliefs about the discipline, what she wanted students to do, and what she believed they could do led to a change in behavior in the classroom that had profound implications for what students were willing and encouraged to do as they discussed and made sense of literary texts. At the same time, the researcher gained new insights into the complexities and nuances of supporting teachers' efforts to move from monologic to dialogic discourse. The case study points to the value of teacher-researcher discussions of artifacts that are based in teachers' classrooms and their usefulness in bridging the practice and research worlds. Speculatively, had video viewing been closer in time to the original DBR work, movement toward productive disciplinary discourse might have been facilitated. The case study suggests the importance of co-viewing at multiple scales of time for understanding teacher trajectories in moving from monologic to dialogic disciplinary discussions.

References

Akkerman, S. F., & Bakker, A. (2011). Boundary crossing and boundary objects. *Review of Educational Research*, *81*(2), 132-169.

Alexander, R. (2018b). *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk* (5th ed.). Dialogos.

Goldman, S. R., Britt, M. A., Brown, W., Cribb, G., George, M., Greenleaf, C., Lee, C. D., Shanahan, C., & READI, P. (2016). Disciplinary literacies and learning to read for understanding: A conceptual framework for disciplinary literacy. *Educational Psychologist*, *51*(2), 219–246.

Howe, C., Hennessy, S., Mercer, N., Vrikki, M., & Wheatley, L. (2019). Teacher–student dialogue during classroom teaching: Does it really impact on student outcomes? *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *28*(4-5), 462-512.

Ko, M.LM., Hall, A.H. & Goldman, S.R. (2022) Making Teacher and researcher learning visible: Collaborative design as a context for professional growth. *Cognition and Instruction, 40*(1), 27-54.

Mehan, H. (1979). 'What time is it, Denise?': Asking known information questions in classroom discourse. *Theory Into Practice*, *18*(4), 285-294.

Nystrand, M., Wu, L. L., Gamoran, A., Zeiser, S., & Long, D.A. (2003). Questions in time: Investigating the structure and dynamics of unfolding classroom dis- course. *Discourse Processes, 35*(2), 135–198.

Resnick, L. B., Asterhan, C.S.C., & Clarke, S.N. (Eds.). (2015). *Socializing intelligence through academic talk and dialogue*. American Educational Research Association.

Reznitskaya, A., & Gregory, M. (2013). Student thought and classroom language: Examining the mechanisms of change in dialogic teaching. *Educational Psychologist, 48*(2), 114-133.

Sedova, K. (2017). A case study of a transition to dialogic teaching as a process of gradual change. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *67*, 278-290.

Wells, G., & Arauz, R. M. (2006). Dialogue in the classroom. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *15*(3), 379–428.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by James S. McDonnell Foundation Understanding Teacher Change and Teachers as Learners grant #220020517; Reading for Understanding (RFU) initiative of the Institute for Education Sciences, U. S. Department of Education through Grant R305F100007. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the funding agencies.