Doc #4: Note: This article starts in the same way as Doc #3 but after the first two paragraphs is different.

CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: THE PROMISE AND COMPLEXITY OF DIALOGIC PRACTICE[1]

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We estimate that the average English primary teacher poses over 60,000 questions and follows up pupil responses with over 30,000 evaluations in every year of classroom lessons. This talk is shaped by deeply ingrained habits, resulting in part from an estimated 13,000 hours spent as a pupil watching others' teaching practice (Lortie, 1975). However, a recent resurgence of interest in classroom discourse among educational researchers and policy-makers is focussing attention on patterns of teacher talk. This attention, in turn, is placing demands upon teachers that they transform their talk, making conscious and informed choices about what had heretofore normally been second nature.

How should teachers and teacher educators respond to these demands? What do they need to know and understand about classroom discourse? In addressing these questions we review a broad consensus emerging from three decades of research on the topic, according to which (i) the way teachers and pupils talk in the classroom is crucially important, but (ii) the dominant pattern of classroom discourse is problematically monologic, so (iii) it should be replaced with more dialogic models.

Dialogic alternatives

Researchers and educators from a range of disciplinary and practical contexts have sought to transform conventional classroom discourse patterns, recommending in their stead alternative models of talk and interaction. "Dialogue" is often invoked in discussions of preferred modes of classroom talk: for example, relevant book titles include *Dialogue in teaching* (Burbules, 1993) *Opening Dialogue* (Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur & Prendergast, 1997), *Dialogic Inquiry* (Wells, 1999), *Towards Dialogic Teaching* (Alexander, 2005) and *Educational Dialogues* (Howe & Littleton, in press). Likewise, the UK government has recently begun to champion "dialogic" practice (DfES, 2003; QCA, 2005), though this official adoption of the term has been severely criticised. In this regard, Alexander (2004) warns of the danger "that a powerful idea will be

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jargonised before it is even understood, let alone implemented, and that practice claiming to be 'dialogic' will be little more than re-branded chalk and talk or ill-focused discussion."

A wide variety of ideas are attached to dialogue, owing to the concept's rich and long history, which includes uses across a broad range of disciplines, including philosophy (e.g. Plato, Buber), literary theory (e.g. Bakhtin), critical pedagogy (e.g. Freire) and psychology (e.g. Rommetveit). The various dialogic approaches differ in many respects, depending on their educational and social aims, and the dimensions of talk and social interaction upon which they focus. In what follows we briefly review five of the key dimensions addressed, noting with regard to each dimension the relevant critique of traditional classroom practice and examples of alternative, dialogic practices proposed.

Structural dimension: many dialogic models seek to replace teacher-dominated IRE with more equitable interactional structures, in which participants freely exchange ideas (rather than all communication being mediated by the teacher), discursive rights and responsibilities are more evenly distributed, and all voices are given an opportunity to be heard. For example, the "Teacher Talk" section in a government handbook (DfES, 2003: 22) includes a list of dos and don'ts, excerpts of which are reproduced in Figure 16.2:

DO	DON'T
• choose questions and topics that are likely to challenge children cognitively	• merely ask children to guess what you are thinking or to recall simple and predictable facts
• expect children to provide extended answers which will interest others in the class	• tolerate limited, short answers which are of little interest to other children
• expect children to speak for all to hear	• routinely repeat or reformulate what children have said
• signal whether you want children to **offer** to answer (hands up) or to **prepare** an answer in case you invite them to speak	• habitually use the competitive 'hands up' model of question and answer work
• when children give wrong answers ask them to explain their thinking and then resolve misunderstandings	• praise every answer whether it is right or wrong

Figure 16.2: Excerpts from the DfES 2003 advice on Teacher Talk

Epistemic dimension: many dialogic models seek to replace traditional reliance on teacher and textbook with a more critical stance toward knowledge. In such a stance, pupils and teachers take an active role in meaning-making, are authorised to contribute perspectives (and their perspectives are deemed worthy of being taken seriously), and focus on questions that are open to genuine inquiry. Scott, Mortimer and Aguiar (2006) capture this idea well in their contrast of *authoritative* and *dialogic* facets of discourse: in the former "the teacher's purpose is to focus the students' full attention on just one meaning", while in the latter "the teacher recognizes and attempts to take into account a range of students', and others', ideas" (p. 610).

Interpersonal dimension: many dialogic models seek to develop a collaborative and supportive learning community instead of the individualistic, competitive and impersonal environment commonly found in contemporary classrooms. Relationships are seen as key to building and maintaining such a community:

> [D]ialogue is not fundamentally a specific communicative form of question and response, but at heart a kind of social relation that engages its participants. A successful dialogue involves a willing partnership and cooperation in the face of likely disagreements, confusions, failures, and misunderstandings. Persisting in this process requires a relation of mutual respect, trust, and concern – and part of the dialogical interchange often must relate to the establishment and maintenance of these bonds. (Burbules, 1993: 19-20).

This interpersonal dimension is also emphasised, for example, in Alexander's (2005) notion of dialogue as *supportive*: "children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings" (p. 34). Similarly, interpersonal concerns are central to Mercer's (2000) distinction between disputational, cumulative and exploratory forms of talk. *Disputational talk* is characterised by high levels of competitiveness and criticality as participants defend their own positions; *cumulative talk* is characterised by high levels of solidarity as participants desist from criticising one another; only in *exploratory talk* are relationships conducive to participants' critical yet constructive engagement with each other's ideas.

Substantive dimension: dialogic models seek to replace the often disjointed nature of classroom discourse, in which the teacher leads the class through a series of unrelated IRE cycles, to discussions characterised by what Alexander (2005) refers to as dialogic teaching's *cumulative* feature: "teachers and children build on their own and each others' ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry" (p. 34). Similarly, this dimension is central to Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick's (2008) *Accountable Talk* framework, which guides pupils and teachers to talk in ways that are accountable to the learning community ("attending seriously to and building on the ideas of others"), to standards of reasoning ("emphasizing logical connections and the drawing of reasonable conclusions") and to knowledge ("making an effort to get their facts right and making explicit the evidence behind their claims or explanations").