**Assignment 3: Inquiry**

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**Introduction**

For my inquiry project, I chose to research exploratory talk. In this paper, I will discuss the question, “what is exploratory talk and how can teachers implement it in the classroom?”. The use of exploratory talk in the classroom is present throughout the BC English language arts document. The grade 5 section states students should be able to use appropriate “oral language strategies” such as “focusing on the speaker, asking questions to clarify, listening for specifics, expressing opinions, speaking with expression, staying on topic, taking turns” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). Students must “Apply a variety of thinking skills to gain meaning from texts” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). This occurs by the class “exploring new ideas; determining the relative importance of ideas and information; considering alternative viewpoints; developing explanations; making and explaining connections” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). When the class “Exchange[s] ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding” teachers must create an environment where “identifying opinions and viewpoints, asking clarifying questions, collaborating in large- and small-group activities, building on others’ ideas, [and] disagreeing respectfully” are scaffolded to ensure exploratory talk (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). Students learn how to “Question what [they] hear, read, and view” in a dialogic classroom to “contribute to [their] ability to be educated and engaged citizens” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). It is important for students to be able to discuss new ideas with respect in the English language arts classroom writing explores self and texts encourage critical thinking of difficult topics for certain students. When students feel safe in the classroom their voices are empowered to express their ideas and share perspectives. Not only can they do this without fearing ridicule or judgement from others but positively receive encouragement and criticism.

**Annotations**

Gillies, R. M. (2016). Dialogic interactions in the cooperative classroom. *International Journal of Educational Research,76*, 178-189. http://doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2015.02.009

***Key Vocabulary:***

**Dialogic teaching:**a reciprocal teaching style where teachers work with students to address learning tasks by building on each other’s ideas and exploring alternative perspectives in powerful discussions guided by the teacher to ensure learning goals are met (Gillies, 2016)

**Exploratory talk:**students build on ideas critically and constructively using their pre-existing knowledge to explore alternative viewpoints (Gillies, 2016)

***Main Arguments:***

Modern classroom teaching is still largely done using the transmission model where students are talked at rather than talked with (Gillies, 2016). This style is one-sided, cognitively unchallenging, children might not learn as effectively and can inhibit or lower the development of student dialogic interactions (Gillies, 2016). While students have a natural desire to learn, they rarely pursue questions about their learning unless taught to (Gillies, 2016). A class is full of needs for different styles of learning and through a dialogic classroom, there are more opportunities for students to have a deeper understanding of the material (Gillies, 2016). When teachers engage a class in reciprocal dialogues, students will share thoughts, explore issues, question ideas, and discuss problems in a supportive cooperative environment (Gillies, 2016). With classroom dialogue, students learn how to respectfully engage with others, consider different perspectives, and engage critically with concepts by needing to use reasoning to justify their thoughts when working together (Gillies, 2016). Teachers can use questions to test a student’s knowledge, prompt students to be more explicit in telling their thoughts, reasons or understanding, model use of language that students can mirror, or provide an opportunity for students to express and clarify understanding (Gillies, 2016). This study examined three teaching situations where teachers actively listened to questions, challenged thinking, provided appropriate response time, directed attention to key points, and scaffolded thinking to guide students towards connections to previous knowledge (Gillies, 2016). Teachers craft a structured environment with clear learning goals identified to students and created a state of positive interdependence through cooperation, motivating them to achieve more than they would by working alone (Gillies, 2016).

***Significance to Topic and Question:***

This article shows that exploratory talk can take place in the classroom by creating a dialogic classroom environment (Gillies, 2016). Student learning and engagement can thrive when the teacher encourages healthy academic challenges and students feel empowered to address these challenges (Gillies, 2016). At the beginning of the year, teachers scaffold students through the process of having group discussions in a safe environment (Gillies, 2016).

Patterson, E. W. (2016). Exploratory talk in the early years: Analysing exploratory talk in collaborative group activities involving younger learners. *Education 3-13,* *46*(3), 264-276. http://doi:10.1080/03004279.2016.1243141

***Key Vocabulary:***

**Exploratory talk:** students build understanding as a group during a discussion by sharing personal ideas and reasoning (Patterson, 2016)

**Scaffolding:** a process where a more competent person supports a learner in the process of performing a new function until they can confidently replicate the function themselves (Patterson, 2016)

***Main Arguments:***

While there has been research done on increasing exploratory talk in group work, there have been minimal results due to the unauthentic classroom settings these studies take place in (Patterson, 2016). Students will struggle to participate in an effective exploratory dialogue when there is no clear understanding of the nature or purpose of the talk the teacher would like them to engage in (Patterson, 2016). This paper provides teachers with practical ways to implement exploratory talk by examining practical collaborative group work and forms of scaffolding that prompt exploratory talk, specifically in ages 7-8 (Patterson, 2016). For collaborative learning through dialogue to be effective, students must be presented with a new idea that challenges prior knowledge and questions their existing understanding (Patterson, 2016). Constructivism states that this learning process is active and that the learner must make sense of the new information and relate it to pre-existing knowledge (Patterson, 2016). Having group activities in a class does not guarantee students use exploratory talk to further their learning so teachers must structure through scaffolding (Patterson, 2016). At the beginning of discussions, the teacher should implement a set of ground rules, which are most effective when created along with students so they are seen as freeing rather than restrictive (Patterson, 2016). These ground rules should allow students to share ideas, listen and respect other opinions, argue and justify opinions, constructively criticize, and work to reach a consensus (Patterson, 2016). The study found students were more likely to participate in exploratory talk when teachers used activities that were interesting and had context students found engaging (Patterson, 2016).

***Significance to Topic and Question:***

This paper discusses the value of using exploratory talk in the classroom by scaffolding exploratory dialogue (Patterson, 2016). The research and findings provide a realistic approach to implementing exploratory talk in the classroom, starting at a young age (Patterson, 2016).

Šeďová, K., Šalamounová, Z., Švaříček, R., & Sedláček, M. (2020). Elements of Dialogic Teaching and How to Get Them into Classrooms. *Understanding Teaching-Learning Practice Getting Dialogic Teaching into Classrooms,* 17-36. http://doi:10.1007/978-981-15-9243-0\_2

***Key Vocabulary:***

**Dialogic Talk:**discussion, deliberation, argumentation, and dialogue (Šeďová, 2020)

**Discussion:** exchanging ideas by sharing information or contrasting views (Šeďová, 2020)

**Deliberation**: comparing the quality or advantages of certain ideas, opinions, or evidence (Šeďová, 2020)

**Argumentation:** the expression of the speakers reasoning by providing evidence (Šeďová, 2020)

**Dialogue or dialogic teaching:** when the teacher scaffolds student thinking by asking structured questions and student elaboration to develop understanding (Šeďová, 2020)

***Main Arguments:***

In the dialogic classroom**,**the entire class participates in discussions (Šeďová, 2020). Students are supported by teachers and peers to share their ideas, therefore as discussions happen, students respectfully listen to one another’s thoughts and opinions because they will soon be in the same role of speaker (Šeďová, 2020). The ideas shared compare or build on one another to understand the specific learning outcomes outlined in a curriculum (Šeďová, 2020). One strategy to implement dialogic teaching in more classrooms is through professional development programs (Šeďová, 2020). These programs, though structured similarly and supported with education theory, have largely unsuccessful results (Šeďová, 2020). Therefore, the issue is not with the professional development programs but the divide between dialogic teaching theory and practice (Šeďová, 2020). The necessity to keep classroom talk related to the curriculum and prepare students for testing prevents the in-depth development of student ideas (Šeďová, 2020). Teachers must also teach content within scheduled time and duration causing teachers to favour straight answers rather than student exploration (Šeďová, 2020). Allowing each student to meaningfully contribute to a discussion in a large class is unrealistic with the allotted time frame (Šeďová, 2020). These classrooms also have diverse backgrounds and learning abilities so while discussions should be within a student’s zone of proximal development, student zones can differ greatly (Šeďová, 2020). Many teachers can subconsciously doubt the critical thinking ability of certain students but for effective dialogic teaching they must genuinely commit to the value of all student ideas (Šeďová, 2020). All these issues lead to teachers implementing partial or superficial features of dialogic teaching (Šeďová, 2020).

***Significance to Topic and Question:***

This chapter explains that for a classroom to be successfully dialogic, teachers must completely commit to implementing dialogic teaching (Šeďová, 2020). Many factors restrict teachers from accomplishing this due to the curriculum (Šeďová, 2020). It is not enough to teach teachers the theories behind a dialogic classroom, they must also have the resources and support to do it (Šeďová, 2020).

**Main Points**

Exploratory talk creates an environment where students can actively learn from each other by building understanding through discussion as a class (Patterson, 2016). While the style of testing with questions and answers can humiliate children, with exploratory talk one student does not have to have the complete answer (Patterson, 2016). By themselves a student may only have a piece of knowledge but together as a class, guided by the teacher, students can have discussions that interact with their previous knowledge and build new understanding as outlined in the socio-constructivist theory of learning (Patterson, 2016). This fulfills the curricular requirement that all students are capable of “[e]xchanging ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding” in the class (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016).

  Exploratory talk and the dialogic classroom are created at the beginning of the year by scaffolding students through the process of having group discussions in a safe environment. It is the teacher’s job to set an example for students to follow (Gillies, 2016) in all areas but specifically “oral language strategies” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). When the class works together to agree on a set of rules to follow, it gives them positive freedom during these discussions (Šeďová, 2020). When entering a classroom, the relationship between the students and teacher are on display (Šeďová, 2020). Though the classroom environment may grow and change throughout the year, in the first few months a foundation is laid (Šeďová, 2020). If done incorrectly the teacher will be building on unstable groundwork and will struggle to build on fundamental concepts (Šeďová, 2020).

  Student learning and engagement can thrive when the teacher encourages healthy academic challenges and students feel empowered to address these challenges (Gillies, 2016). The texts in an English language arts class might often discuss a topic of more serious subject matter. Encouraging students to think critically of these texts empowers them in discussions of real-world issues showing that “[q]uestioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). Teachers can challenge the class with advanced texts to “[a]pply a variety of thinking skills to gain meaning from [them]” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016), that maybe be difficult but can be empowering for students.

  The most notable point was that the many factors restricting teachers from fully implementing this teaching style due to the curriculum (Šeďová, 2020). While the theory of dialogic teaching is accepted by many, the requirements caused by curriculum and assessment limit this teaching style (Šeďová, 2020). While certain aspects of dialogic and exploratory talk happen in the classroom, it could not fully take place without unlimited time and funding (Šeďová, 2020).

**Connection to constructivism**

The constructivist theory is that learning is active, and students must connect new understanding with a piece of pre-existing knowledge to be effective (Barns, 2008). Socio-constructivism states that learning is a social process through experiences created by others in the environment (Barns, 2008). Exploratory talk is accomplished with constructivism because the student builds personal understanding as the group shares and challenges these ideas (Patterson, 2016). This process is also social because it is scaffolded by the teacher and also relies on the knowledge of other students (Patterson, 2016).

**Further questions**

If the most optimal form of learning takes place through dialogic teaching, how can educators make practical changes to the current school system without destroying it?

The new BC curriculum allows teachers the freedom to change teaching styles. As a teacher, there is a desire to provide students with a learning system that is effective and engaging. With limits to funding, time restraints, and academic testing it is difficult to implement a learning style for each student.

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