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Dialogic Teaching in a Detracked High School ELA Class: "We Talk Here"

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DIALOGIC TEACHING IN A DETRACKED ELA CLASS

Dedicated to Ruth Emler

ABSTRACT

Dialogic Teaching in a Detracked High School ELA Class: "We Talk Here"

Signy Emler

This dissertation combines the two fields of dialogic teaching and detracking in a study of one teacher's English Language Arts high school classroom. The policy of tracking students into separate academic classes perpetuates segregation and is antithetical to the principles of democracy. Dialogic teaching is where students and the teacher engage in inquiry and exploratory talk to co-construct knowledge, and all students are provided with frequent opportunities to express their voices.

Grounded in theory that views language and identity as socially constructed and situated, this qualitative case study examined how students from different racial, socio-economic, political and cultural backgrounds worked together to co-construct meaning through academic discussions based on a variety of texts and critical topics. It also explored the key elements of the focal dialogic classroom, the epistemological beliefs and instructional practices of the focal teacher, and the ways students made sense of the class. The purpose of this research was to determine whether dialogic teaching, coherently introduced, could help *all* students fundamentally shift their identity, develop confidence in their voice, and increase their agency as students and as citizens in a democracy.

To better understand the dialogic, detracked classroom and how students perceived dialogic teaching and its impact, I conducted fieldwork in the focal class during the 2018-19 school year. Data collection included 52, 40-minute observations, eight interviews with the focal

teacher, and interviews with the 23 students. This data was triangulated with student demographic data; student writer's notebooks; student reflections; and the focal teacher's plan books, reflections, and academic writing.

The findings illuminate the ways that the focal teacher used *intentional* listening and explicit instruction of student talk skills to level the playing field for all students. The teacher also promoted the idea that ability and intelligence are not fixed and that students learn best when learning is socially constructed. Students reported that the class had an impact on transforming their identity, developing confidence in their voices, and activating their agency as students and citizens. Dialogic instruction was shown to be an effective method for detracking, while maintaining academic rigor that benefited all students. Further, detracking allowed students to widen their conceptual understandings of the material through the benefit of working in small heterogeneous groups with students from other tracks. Implications of this study point to the potential for dialogic teaching to facilitate detracking, to change the trajectory of students' academic identities, and to fulfill the mission of public schools in educating future citizens in an increasingly diverse society.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Maria[1], a student historically placed in low-track classes reported:

I feel like the people that come out from honors and A.P. classes and all the top classes, I

feel like they're more talkative. They know what they're doing. They're not afraid to say

what they feel or what they think the answer is. Me ... I'm just like, I'm not sure about my

stuff and what I think.

Tracking is the systematic sorting of students in a school or district based on perceived

academic ability (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005). Despite decades of research on tracking,

systematic institutional tracking in American middle and high schools serves to privilege those

placed in high tracks and continues to confer an inferior status for those placed in lower tracks

(Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Guiton, 1985). There is clear evidence (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001;

Mayer, LeChasseur, & Donaldson, 2018) that students in low-track classes receive instruction

that is predominately monologic—or teacher-centered— with a focus on test preparation and rote

learning rather than critical thinking. In contrast, students placed in the highest tracks, according

to researchers, generally have access to more rigorous curriculum, more experienced teachers,

and more higher-order thinking tasks (Burris, 2014; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Mayer et al.,

2018; Oakes & Guiton, 1985). While clearly students in the high tack accrue educational

advantages over those in the low track, these benefits do not necessarily include access to

discussion; research shows only marginally more student talk occurs in high-track classes. The

prevalence of monologic pedagogy in schools is exacerbated by the neoliberal agenda of

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[1] All participant names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

education reformers who promote standardized testing as a path to educational excellence (Ravitch, 2013).

This dissertation study examined dialogic teaching in a detracked 12th-grade English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. It argues that (a) tracking students is antithetical to educating citizens of a democracy and often leads to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic segregation (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005) and (b) dialogic teaching provides a way for public school students to experience the benefits of a pluralistic society in which multiple perspectives are valued (Parker, 2010). Unfortunately, monologic teaching is ubiquitous in American schools and successful detracking efforts have not been scaled up despite evidence of their benefit to all students (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Rubin & Noguera, 2004).

Detracking began in the 1990s for the purpose of closing achievement and opportunity gaps, fostering inclusive classroom environments, and creating spaces where all students can work together (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Oakes, 2016; Rubin & Noguera, 2004; Wheelock, 1992). Research has consistently shown that detracked classrooms benefit all students academically and socio-emotionally, particularly students in the low track (Burris, 2014; Carter & Welner, 2013; Gamoran, 2009; Snell & Lefstein, 2018). After a decline in the 1990s of tracking in high schools, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) statistics show that the practice is now on the rise and the proliferation of Advanced Placement (AP) courses contributes to this trend ("Challenge Success," 2013; Hallinan, 2005). Between 2003 and 2013, the number of students in the U.S. taking AP exams almost doubled (Kolluri, 2018), raising the possibility that high-track classes, when driven by tests, tend to be as monologic as low-track classes. This case study provides qualitative data to support the argument that all students benefit from dialogic teaching.

Dialogic teaching as an educational practice can be traced back as far as Socrates, but contemporaneously, its roots are in the work of Bakhtin (1981) who introduced the terms *dialogic* and *monologic*, and Freire (2000), whose seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, applied the terms to educational theory. Dialogic teaching is defined in this study as teaching and learning in which: (a) students and the teacher engage in inquiry and exploratory talk to co-construct knowledge; (b) all students are provided with frequent opportunities to express their voices; (c) students and the teacher adopt a critical stance; and (d) the classroom becomes a community of practice created through "respectful, supportive, caring relationships and inclusive and reciprocal participation norms" (Snell & Lefstein, 2018, p. 42). This definition best reflects the teaching implemented in the focal detracked class.

The opening quote of this chapter expresses the experience of one 12th-grade girl, Maria, who was placed in low-track classes throughout high school. Maria's comment reflects the central problem this work examined: students in low-track classes experience predominately monologic pedagogy, which forecloses their access to social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and therefore reproduces social inequality (Bernstein, 1990). When the teacher functions merely as a transmitter of knowledge, students do not have an opportunity to *come to voice* (hooks, 2009), and too many students become passive and silent. On the other hand, Lyle (2008) explained, "Dialogical talk creates a space for multiple voices and discourses that challenge the asymmetrical power relations constructed by monologic pedagogies" (p. 225). While there has been substantial research on the adverse effects of monologic pedagogy on low-track classrooms (Gamoran, 2009; Nystrand, 2006; Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Guiton, 1985), and an expanding body of research on dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2010; Cazden, 1988; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001;

Nystrand, 2006; Snell & Lefstein, 2008; Wells, 2007), this study's significance lies in combining

the two fields of dialogic teaching and detracking.

Research is emerging about the quality of instruction across tracks (Mayer et al., 2018;

Snell & Lefstein, 2018) and about dialogic teaching's effects on low-track classes (Hardman,

Alexander, & Hardman, 2018), yet there is a gap in the literature about dialogic teaching's use in

a detracked classroom setting. Further, since the practice of monologic pedagogy is anathema to

students' critical thinking, this study embraces social learning theory that views knowledge as

socially constructed (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). In particular, this study uses the

theoretical framework of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It also explores how dialogic

teaching in a detracked class provided an opportunity for students from high-track classes to

assist students from low-track classes as the teacher, and all students developed a community of

practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Specifically, this research sought to understand, through a methodically designed

qualitative case study, what impact dialogic teaching in a detracked class had on transforming

students' academic identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating agency as

learners and citizens in a democracy. Dialogic teaching in a detracked class was interpreted

through the interdisciplinary lenses of situated learning (Lave, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991) and

the sociology of pedagogy (Bernstein, 1990), which will be explained in more detail below.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

Concerning this study's theoretical contribution, two bodies of research that are typically

examined in isolation—dialogic teaching and detracking were woven together. Because the

scope of this research included a complex interplay between discussion pedagogy, student

identity, and critical pedagogy, it drew upon a framework that blended Bernstein's (1990)

sociology of pedagogy and Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning.

Sociology of Pedagogy

Bernstein's (1990) theory of pedagogic practice examined the ways that social class and

power affect pedagogy and how communication is the vehicle through which social inequality is

perpetuated. To further contextualize the elements of dialogic teaching, the study draws from the

work of Bourdieu (1984), who coined the phrases "linguistic capital" and "linguistic

competence" to illustrate the value of language fluency in garnering social capital. In a recent

study, Clarke (2015) found that students perceived their answers to be more valuable when they

were *correct* or, in the parlance of Bourdieu (1984), they did not consider themselves legitimate

speakers if they did not have the right answers. For students to develop increased agency as

students and citizens, or more accurately within Bourdieu's theory, to have increased *legitimacy*,

it is essential that students perceive their ideas as valued. More research is called for to

investigate how dialogic teaching can interrupt the reproduction of inequality within schools and

within society through shifting student identity and empowering them with agency as learners

and citizens.

Situated Learning

A second theoretical framework, which intersects with the sociology of pedagogy and

brings a rich interdisciplinary understanding to this study, is Lave and Wenger's (1991)

framework of situated learning. Building on the work of these researchers, this qualitative case

study examined the dialectical relationship among students and the focal teacher, in which

communities of practice created the conditions for authentic, situated learning through dialogic

teaching. The community of practice (Lave, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991) is an integral

theoretical construct that underpins this study. Lave and Wenger described communities of practice as groups in which novices interact with experts, learn from each other, enter the learning community, and gradually take up its practices.

As students previously educated in low and high tracks worked together, situated learning provided a useful framework to understand the process of constructing knowledge through dialogic teaching. The expertise that students from the low track or *apprentice learners* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) developed within the community of practice in this study led to a transformation of student identity, confidence in their voice, and emerging agency as students and citizens. The process of implementing dialogic teaching was examined from the student and teacher perspective.

By studying dialogic teaching in a detracked class through the dual lenses of the sociology of pedagogy and situated learning, this study illuminates the power of detracking to create authentic, racially, ethnically, socio-economically and academically diverse communities of practice in which students co-construct meaning. Talking is thinking (Vygotsky, 1978); power is socially reproduced through language (Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1984); and meaning is co-constructed through dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981). To illustrate this process, when asked to describe Ms. L.,, the focal teacher's class, Maria, a student from the low track, said:

> It's not just teaching. The teacher doesn't just get up there and teach and teach for the whole period. She lets you talk. She lets you discuss. Discussion is a very big thing. Yeah, she teaches, but she teaches you in a way that you're allowed to talk. You're allowed to give your voice. That compared to my other classes? Ten times different. I saw everybody's different point of views. I realized that I have a voice. My opinion matters.

By creating a dialogic community of practice in a public school, teachers have the power to disrupt the forces of social inequality through the instructional design choices they make. This study found that the teacher set up the structure of the community of practice by (a) creating diverse groups, (b) establishing participation norms, and (c) providing scaffolds for students who either struggled to speak or were left out of the conversation. Entering the classroom community of practice allowed students the support needed to develop linguistic capital and to grapple with diverse perspectives, thereby transforming their identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating their agency as learners and as citizens.

Statement of the Problem

As our current political and social discourse turns increasingly rancorous, and citizens are subjected to a variety of media manipulation, it is critical that public schools, charged with educating *all* students, seize the opportunity to encourage the exchange of ideas through civil discourse. Schools should be a place where all students have a voice, not just those labeled, by teachers and students, as the *smartest,* the *best,* or the *good* kids.

Researchers have found that almost no discussion occurs in low-track classes (Burris, 2014; Gamoran, 2009; Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 2005; Wheelock, 1992; Worthy, 2009). While tracking itself is an impediment to student achievement and positive student identity, the monologic*,* or rote, remedial pedagogies most often employed in these classes can lead to a further backsliding in both (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Burris et al., 2008; Oakes, 2005; Wells et al., 2009; Wheelock, 1992). Most recently, Mayer et al. (2018) studied instructional quality across mathematics and ELA tracks, concluding, "the instruction experienced by students in low-tracks is of lower quality than that experienced by their peers in higher tracks" (p. 201). The authors called for further research on "what is expected of students and what is denied them in high

school classrooms" (p. 203). This study explored the impact of one teacher's attempt to shift the

dominant paradigm from monologic practice to dialogic instruction in a detracked class.

An emerging body of research points toward dialogue's efficacy in facilitating higher

order thinking (Alexander, 2010; Newmann, 2006; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast,

1997; Parker, 2010; Reisman, 2015). Wells (2009) elaborated, making the connection between

dialogic pedagogy and citizenship:

> Dialogue within a classroom helps to create community while simultaneously building a
>
> bridge between individuals and the society of which they are members. While particular
>
> individuals voice the knowledge and opinions expressed, they are, in the moment,
>
> reproducing the variety of those held in the broader society. In this way, the class
>
> discussion both enacts societal values and creates a forum in which those values can be
>
> considered, evaluated, revised, or rejected. (p. 300)

This case study research shows that obstacles to implementing dialogic teaching in American

classrooms are not insurmountable. While standards requiring coverage of vast amounts of

material coupled with high stakes standardized tests have complicated the introduction of

dialogic teaching in secondary classrooms, professional development and organizational support

can produce paradigm shifts. There has been a systemic application and study of dialogic

teaching in public schools in Great Britain (Alexander, 2010; Hardman et al., 2018) and work

with accountable talk (Resnick, Asterhan, & Clarke, 2015; Resnick & Schantz, 2015) in the

United States, indicating that a shift toward dialogic teaching has the potential to increase

student-learning outcomes. However, the majority of research on dialogic teaching has been

analyzed through quantitative discourse analysis with a few notable exceptions that have used a

qualitative design (Hardman et al., 2018). This research adds to this work by utilizing qualitative

data and exploring the student and teacher experiences with dialogic teaching in one detracked class. Findings show that the teacher's implementation of dialogic teaching created a community of practice in which all voices were valued, and students made meaning through social interaction (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). When students from all ability groups come together and engage in dialogue, we simulate the diversity of the larger body politic (Alexander, 2010; Chilcoat & Ligon, 1998; Parker, 2010; Parker & Hess, 2001) and provide access to social and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) for all students.

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation study provides a methodical in-depth examination of a classroom that employed the practices required for authentic dialogic teaching for a diverse, detracked group of students. This type of dialogic pedagogy can interrupt the reproduction of social and economic inequality (Bernstein, 1990) that has accompanied the tradition of tracking in American schools. This research shined a light on one teacher who is immersed in the work of helping students to *come to voice* (hooks, 2009) through dialogic teaching, and how she and her students made sense of the process.

The relevance of this study goes beyond a single classroom; the dialogic teaching, as Alexander (2010) wrote, "is about cultural and civic interaction, not just classroom interaction" (p. 105). American education has turned toward monologic, remediation pedagogies tailored to the demands of high-stakes tests, even as research suggests that when students engage in meaningful dialogue, academic achievement and student engagement rise (Alexander, 2006; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Nystrand et al., 1997). This study adds to the literature, arguing that dialogic teaching can be a tool for social justice, particularly when teachers practice it in detracked settings.

A critical case study approach was chosen because the focal teacher, Ms. L., has constructed a teaching practice that is rare, if not absent, in the context of the Rockford School District. Rockford High School is located in a suburban district in the Northeastern United States, where the monologic model of teaching in tracked classrooms is the norm. Yin (2012) suggested that the rationale for a critical case study is to "determine whether the propositions of a [particular theory] are true" (p. 51). This case investigated how and why dialogic teaching impacted students in a detracked class using the frameworks of situated learning and the sociology of pedagogy. Focusing this dissertation research on the focal teacher was possible because of my positionality; I taught in the district for 18 years. Prior to entering the doctoral program in 2015, I conducted several observation cycles with Ms. L. in 2013 as part of an administrative internship project. The data collected in 2013 are not part of this dissertation but did shape my understanding of Ms. L.'s pedagogy and informed the research questions and methodology of the study that emerged.

This dissertation includes data from a multi-year case study of Ms. L's dialogic classroom. It builds on a pilot study in the 2017-18 school year I conducted under faculty supervision. The observation data from the pilot study was then triangulated with the dissertation phase of the study in 2018. The data collected during the dissertation phase included the interview data with Ms. L and 23 of the 29 students enrolled in the class. I also conducted 10 additional observations in the classroom during the fall of 2018.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What does dialogic teaching look like in a detracked 12th-grade ELA course?

2. How does the focal teacher describe the process of dialogic teaching?

2a. What instructional methods has the focal teacher developed to support dialogic

teaching for all levels of students?

2b. According to the focal teacher, which elements of dialogic teaching are critical to

transforming student identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating

increased agency as students and citizens in a democracy in a detracked 12th-grade ELA

course?

3. How do students make sense of using dialogue in the classroom (e.g., dialogic teaching) and

its impact on transforming their identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating

agency as students and as citizens in a democracy?

3a. How do they compare dialogic teaching in the focal ELA course to their other high

school courses that use monologic pedagogy?

Research Methods and Design

To examine how students and the teacher made sense of dialogic teaching in a detracked

12th grade ELA class, and what benefits accrued to students, a qualitative case study was

designed, using a constructivist worldview. The data collection for this study occurred in three

phases: first a Pilot Study Phase between November 2017 and May 2018, a Dissertation Phase

between June 2018 and October 2018, and an Analysis Phase between November 2018 and April

2019. Phase One entailed compiling (a) forty, 40-minute classroom observations; (b) a selection

of 15 purposefully sampled student writer's notebooks; (c) documents detailing ELA placements

and grades for students in the focal class between grades 9 and 12; (d) one formal and six

informal interviews with the focal teacher; and (d) demographic data of the students obtained

with permission of the school district. A database was created on Dropbox to store the data

securely. During Phase Two, I conducted (a) 23 audiotaped student interviews, between 30-40

minutes long; (b) four formal audiotaped teacher interviews; and 30 informal conversations. I

returned to Ms. L.'s classroom in September 2018 and conducted 10 additional 40-minute

observations designed to capture the teacher and students' orientation to the pedagogy and its

initial implementation, even though it was with a different group of students. One additional

formal interview and four informal interviews were conducted with Ms. L. in October 2018 as

member checks, part of the qualitative research process of discussing findings for clarification,

confirmation, or correction (Stake, 1995). Finally, throughout the data analysis phase, between

November 2018 and March 2019, 15 informal interviews were conducted with the focal teacher

using a modified critical friends model (Quate, 2004) to make sense of the interview transcripts

and emergent themes.

Analyzing the Data

Interviews with students and the teacher were transcribed verbatim, and then coded to

discover categories, themes, and findings. Field notes were written during and after observations,

and as interviews were transcribed. Throughout the data collection process, emergent themes and

codes were noted. This was an essential element of qualitative research; as the analysis unfolded,

changes were made in the interview questions to include emergent themes. Student interviews

were triangulated with teacher interviews, writers' notebooks, and observations. Yin (2012)

wrote, "any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is

based on several different sources of information, following a similar convergence" (p. 120).

Teacher interviews were triangulated as well, creating a dialectical relationship between

teacher interviews, observations, student interviews, and writers' notebooks. I looked carefully

for overlapping patterns between student interviews and observations, as well as between teacher

interviews and student interviews. In this manner, various sources of evidence were used to

"provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 2012, p. 121).

As themes across interview transcripts were developed and categorized, it was essential to check for diverging viewpoints and to be aware of inconsistencies between what students perceived and what was observed in the field. Vigilance about recognizing data that did not conform to preconceived notions was necessary as multiple perspectives emerged from student interviews. Disconfirming data that contradicted theory and emerging themes were not dismissed. All observational episodes and interview transcripts were methodically coded and examined repeatedly throughout the analysis phase of the research that included, "reflecting, triangulating, [and] being skeptical about first impressions" (Stake, 1995, p. 78).

Transcripts, field notes, and memos were uploaded to the database created for organizing data, and the computer software Dedoose was used to facilitate the coding of data. After I analyzed the transcripts and field notes, Ms. L. member-checked the results using the modified Critical Friends model referenced above. Throughout the analysis, several other researchers were invited to participate in member checking and the triangulation process. Merriam (1988) described methods to ensure internal validity of qualitative research: (a) triangulation; (b) member checks; (c) long-term observation at the research site; (d) gathering data over a period of time in order to create increased validity of the findings; and (e) identification of the researcher's worldview, theoretical orientation, and biases. These systematic procedures were established and maintained throughout the research process.

Limitations

Yin (2012) and Merriam (1988) identified establishing validity, reliability, and generalizability as limits of case study research. However, the reliability and validity of this study was ensured through extensive triangulation of data, member checking, and long-term

observation at the classroom site, providing thick, rich descriptive detail. While this single case

study research cannot be generalized to provide a roadmap for dialogic pedagogy or detracking,

it is hoped that practitioners may take away useful lessons that can enrich their teaching. Without

quantitative measures, it is impossible to prove causation. This study seeks to add a deeper

understanding of the process of dialogic teaching and how students and the teacher experience it

to the combined literature on tracking/detracking and dialogic pedagogy.

Critics of the case study method argue that the research is not generalizable and that a

single case study is less valuable than larger, multiple case studies (Merriam, 1988). However,

my unrestricted access to the site and established rapport with the focal teacher afforded me the

opportunity to provide thick descriptive detail that is complementary to quantitative studies of

tracking/detracking, and discourse analyses of dialogic pedagogy. While only examining one

case, Ms. L.'s detracked class was implicitly compared to the dominant monologic pedagogy in

the other, tracked classes, as revealed in student interviews.

Role of the Researcher

I studied the focal teacher's pedagogy for over six years prior to this dissertation study,

beginning with a teacher evaluation study that fulfilled the requirements of an administrative

internship in 2013. During the data collection for this study, I acted as an observer; while

occasionally joining student groups for access to conversations, I rarely participated, maintaining

objectivity and allowing discussions to unfold without disruption.

<div align="center">**Definition of Key Terms**</div>

The terms defined in this section are defined as intended to be understood in the context

of this study.

Monologic Teaching- Monologic teaching and learning propose that knowledge from the sender (teacher) is transmitted to the receiver (student). This model resembles a straightforward one-directional conduit or pipeline. The process asks the teacher to "break down and organize the facts, monitor whether the facts have been received, and try again if testing demonstrates that something was missed" (Oakes & Lipton, 1999, p. 62). Also referred to as transmission pedagogy (Freire, 2000), critical theorists argue that monologic pedagogy is a method of establishing control and obedience, and that, by transmitting facts the privileged class determined to be important, a state system of social and economic inequality is perpetuated (Bernstein, 1990).

Dialogic Teaching- Dialogic teaching is defined in this study as teaching and learning in which (a) students and the teacher engage in inquiry and exploratory talk to co-construct knowledge; (b) all students are provided with frequent opportunities to express their voices; (c) students and the teacher adopt a critical stance; and (d) the classroom becomes a community of practice created through "respectful, supportive, caring relationships and inclusive and reciprocal participation norms" (Snell & Lefstein, 2018, p. 42).

Tracking- "Tracking is the sorting of students within a school or district that results in different access to academic curriculum and the opportunity to learn" (Burris, 2014, p. 3). Research indicates that minorities and low SES students are overrepresented in low-track classes. Underlying tracking policies are beliefs that ability and intelligence are fixed, and these attitudes confer inferiority status on students in low tracks. Like monologic teaching, tracking tends to reproduce social and economic inequality (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Oakes, 2016; Rubin & Noguera, 2004; Wheelock, 1992).

Detracking- Detracking is defined by many scholars and practitioners as the process of replacing tracked course programs or so-called ability-grouped classrooms with mixed-ability classrooms, also termed heterogeneou*s* (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Wheelock, 1992).

Agency as Citizens in a Democracy- Parker (2010) wrote, "listening and speaking to strangers about powerful ideas and public problems…signals a citizen's coming of age" (p. 283). As students grapple with diverse perspectives, they will be equipped to contribute to the marketplace of ideas (Madison, 1787), a foundational concept of democracy.

Student Identity- The way a student recognizes himself/herself and is recognized by others as a "certain kind of person" (Gee, 2000, p. 99). In this paper, identity is viewed as co-constructed and socially situated. Snell and Lefstein (2018) wrote, "who a pupil *is* is a function of the particular situation, which is co-constructed by them and the others present" (p. 73).

Situated Learning- The theoretical stance that learning is a function of the context and culture in which it occurs (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Cultural capital –This refers to assets, competencies, and skills that afford individuals access to power in society (Bourdieu, 1984).

Summary

Through a strategically designed qualitative critical case study of one detracked 12th-grade ELA class in which the teacher implements dialogic pedagogy, themes were uncovered that fill a gap in the literature on dialogic teaching and detracking. The theoretical contribution to situated learning and the sociology of pedagogy suggest new ways of organizing classrooms to ground learning in the social context of heterogeneous groups. Promoting students' social construction of meaning while facilitating the expression of multiple voices and perspectives is an ultimately democratizing process (Parker, 2010). If the goal of public schools is to educate

citizens and to promote democratic ideals, it is essential that educators find strategies to interrupt the reproduction of inequality (Bernstein, 1990). As Dewey (1966) wrote in *Democracy and Education*, "Society determines its own future in determining that of the young" (p. 41). This dissertation addressed the urgent need in our society for more research into how dialogic teaching can become a transformative feature of public education, preparing future citizens to be open to diverse views and collaborative reasoning.

Resnick and Schantz (2015) reported, "many teachers avoid discussion methods because they believe basic information must first be taught 'directly' and because they believe only a few students are capable of [discussion]" (p. 448). Their study described how teachers' attitudes toward student ability perpetuate deficit student identities and maintain the status quo of monologic teaching. As a conclusion to their volume *Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue* (2015), they called for further research: "We need a larger empirical base for the claim that dialogic teaching is likely to be effective with all kinds of students in various settings" (p. 448). This dissertation study takes a step toward closing that gap by investigating whether dialogic teaching, coherently introduced, can help *all* students fundamentally shift their identity, develop confidence in their voice, and increase their agency as students and as citizens in a democracy.

The following chapters include a review of the literature, a detailed plan for data collection and analysis, an explanation of the research findings, the implications and significance of the findings, and appendices related to the collection of the data included in this dissertation. Chapter Two describes the literature on (a) tracking/ detracking; (b) dialogic teaching; (c) situated learning; and (d) the sociology of pedagogy, putting this study into the context of extant research and theory. Chapter Three details the methodology used to collect and analyze data for

the study, giving a detailed justification for the procedures selected. Chapter Four reports the

primary findings, supported by data from the field, and Chapter Five provides a conclusion

suggesting implications for practice and theory.

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of the Literature

Across the nation, students sit in low-track classes that reproduce failure and widen

opportunity gaps (Burris, 2014; Burris, Wiley, Welner, & Murphy, 2008; Carter & Welner,

2013; Worthy, 2009). Remediation fails to increase achievement by any standard measures

(Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2005) and causes students to fall further behind, leading to

internalization of deficit student identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Snell & Lefstein, 2018;

Wortham, 2004) and disenfranchisement from the institutions of power (Bernstein, 1990;

Bourdieu, 1984; Giroux, 1983). Loveless (1998) wrote, "Classroom studies indicate that low-

tracks continue to dwell on basic skills, featuring a dull curriculum and inordinate amounts of

drill and practice" (p. 24). Silenced by boredom (hooks, 2009), students enrolled in low-track

classrooms are the prey of a corporate culture that promises them success that is measured in

dollars (Giroux, 2012). These "disposable youth" (Giroux, 2012, p. 2) have been neglected by a

public school system charged with a legal and moral responsibility to educate them. Moreover,

even when teachers claim to believe in student-centered inquiry methods, their actual practice

tends to show little evidence of student talk (Gamoran, 2009; Goodlad, 1984; Mayer et al., 2018;

Newman, 1992; Reisman, 2015; Wilen, 2010).

However, before rushing to blame teachers, it is essential to note that these monologic

pedagogies (Bakhtin, 1981) are a response to stressful working conditions, in which teachers

need to maintain order, often with large groups of students. In this research, the term *monologic*

pedagogy, first employed by Bakhtin, will be used interchangeably with the term *transmission*

pedagogy, coined by Freire (2000). Both describe teacher-centered instruction in which students

are passive recipients of information. Worksheets and lecture are methods of control (Burris,

2014; hooks, 2009; Oakes, 2005); students in low-track classes will conform to dull pedagogies because rote strategies do not challenge their identities (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Giroux, 2013; Freire, 2000; Goodlad, 1984; hooks, 2009; Oakes, 2005). These strategies, at the same time, produce what Giroux (2012) called "dead zones of the imagination" (p. 12).

This is a problem that grows more urgent as the United States crosses into the *Trumpian* era of disinformation, in which long-respected media sources such as *The New York Times* are labeled *fake news* (Allbright, 2018; Leonhardt & Thompson, 2017; Morin, 2017). Dahl (2002) warned, "Silent citizens may be perfect subjects for an authoritarian ruler; they would be a disaster for a democracy" (p. 97). In the suburban school this case study examined, many students are asleep in class. A review of the literature shows little research of effective instruction in low-track classes. Gamoran (2009) concluded that "Ultimately, how students are arranged matters less than the instruction they encounter overall, so bringing together research on tracking with research on teaching offers the most useful way to shed light on this topic of continued interest" (p. 15). The significance of this dissertation study is that it is among the first qualitative studies to examine the role that dialogic teaching plays in meeting the academic and social needs of *all* students in a detracked, 12th-grade ELA class. Dialogic teaching is defined in this study as teaching and learning in which: (a) students and the teacher engage in inquiry and exploratory talk to co-construct knowledge; (b) all students are provided with frequent opportunities to express their voices; (c) students and the teacher adopts a critical stance; and (d) the classroom becomes a community of practice created through "respectful, supportive, caring relationships and inclusive and reciprocal participation norms" (Snell & Lefstein, 2018, p. 42).

This study examined how dialogic teaching effectively reduced the negative effects ability group tracking had on students. Hereafter the terms *low-track* will be used to describe

students placed in the lowest academic track and *high-track* to refer to students placed in Honors

or Advanced Placement (AP) tracks. This choice of terms derives from the wish to avoid value-

laden labels such as low ability and high ability that are often arbitrary at best and discriminatory

at worst. Also, the term *low-track* rather than *low ability* conveys the reality that depth and

breadth of curriculum, both taught and hidden, are measurably smaller in low-track classes.

High-track classes generally require mastery of more content and students are held to higher

expectations. In selecting the terms *low* and *high*, I attempt to use a descriptor that explains the

students' educational experience, while acknowledging that all students have academic ability.

Acknowledging the bias intrinsic in labeling tracks, Oakes and Lipton (1999) explained,

> The temptation is great to judge how smart students are at a particular moment and to
>
> rank and sort them accordingly. These judgments soon trap educators into seeing
>
> intelligence as placing a ceiling on what students can learn. A fair and more accurate
>
> view is for teachers and school policies to acknowledge that all students are smart as
>
> opposed to capable of being smart. (p. 42)

Introducing dialogic pedagogy to students historically placed in low-track and high-track

classes comes with challenges for teachers regarding implementation, coherent design, and

creating a classroom community of practice (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Burris, 2014; Rubin &

Noguera, 2004). This study documented the effective strategies of a focal teacher, her responses

to students, and her reflections on the process of dialogic pedagogy in a detracked class. I also

observed students from the high and low tracks engaged in small group discussions together and

conducted interviews to understand their reflections on the process over one school year. While

there is a growing body of research on dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2006, 2010; Cazden,

2001; Hardman et al., 2018; Resnick & Schantz, 2015; Resnick et al., 2015; Zwiers & Crawford,

2011), and persuasive research indicating that tracking confers an inferiority status on students

from the low track (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Burris et al., 2008; Oakes, 2005; Wells et al., 2010),

there remains a need to investigate how dialogic teaching, coherently introduced, can *awaken*

(Greene, 1974) students from the boredom of monologic pedagogy. Moreover, the findings of

this study suggest that dialogic teaching combined with non-judgmental teacher attitudes about

student ability can support detracked, democratic classrooms.

As suburban school demographics shift, within-school tracking systematically segregates

schools. Black, Latino, and low socio-economic status (SES) students are overrepresented in low

tracks, limiting students' access to opportunity (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Oakes & Guiton, 1985;

Oakes, 2005; Wells et al., 2009). This study investigated how dialogic pedagogy was effectively

introduced in a detracked class and how students from the low and high tracks and the teacher

made sense of this shift. It was through an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together the

literature of tracking, linguistics, sociology, critical pedagogy, the sociology of pedagogy, and

the anthropological research of situated learning, that the experience of students and a teacher

engaged in the work of dialogue in a detracked classroom were studied and analyzed.

Research Problem

A suburban high school in the Northeastern United States exemplified the problem of

monologic or transmission pedagogy creating student disengagement in low-track classes that

has been described for decades by researchers (Burris, 2014; Gamoran, 2009; Goodlad, 1984;

Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Wheelock, 1992). Rockford High School (a pseudonym)

has a student population of 2,000 students attending grades 9-12, with 30% eligible for free or

reduced lunch. Among the population, 15% are classified as students with disabilities. The

school is 8% Black, 20% Latinx, 6% Asian, and 60% White. In the Language Arts department,

there is a Regents track (low track) that includes remedial students who are assigned to a lab, an

Honors track (high track), and an Advanced Placement (AP) track (high track). I taught social

studies in this school for 15 years and have spent many hours conducting observations as part of

an administrative internship.

A general pattern emerged over several years: students in low-track classes often copy

notes from Smart Boards in social studies classes and listen (or sleep) with heads on desks in

English language arts (ELA) classes while teachers read aloud to them. These students complain

that they are bored but also express resentment and rebelliousness toward a system that has

labeled them inferior (Giroux, 2012; Snell & Lefstein, 2018; Wortham, 2004). As a White

teacher, I have experienced the frustration of teaching low-track students. In 2014, I was

assigned a low-track class of 31, disproportionately Latinx and African-American students. As

the year went on, the class became increasingly disengaged, disruptive, and unmanageable. After

11 years of teaching, I was overwhelmed and frustrated. I constantly tried to adjust strategies,

constructing individual improvement plans, and planning culturally sustaining units, but nothing

worked. If anything, the situation got worse and regrettably never did improve. Five years later,

two of these students are dead from drug overdoses and one is in jail for armed robbery. I

recognized myself in Burris's (2014) book *On the Same Track*, in which she related a personal

communication with Oakes (1985), a seminal scholar on tracking:

> No matter how hard she worked, or how well she planned, Oakes could not overcome the
>
> anti-school culture of the Basic English class. Students were apathetic on a good day and
>
> disruptive on a bad one….'I could not figure out how I could be so good in the morning
>
> and so bad in the afternoon.' (p. 11)

It is not just students from the low track who may be disadvantaged by their tracking placements, Meryl, a student from the focal class of this research, asked to describe her experience in high school, explained, "I took a majority of AP classes. So it's just the teacher standing in front and then everyone just sitting down taking notes for 40 minutes or two periods straight. It's exhausting." Students, from both the low and high-tracks, whose life trajectories are impacted by tracking status, were the subjects of this research. I studied a 12th-grade high school ELA class composed of students from the low track and the high track in order to understand how the teacher and students perceived dialogic pedagogy's impact on their identity, voice, and agency as students and citizens.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this critical case study was to describe a focal teacher's use of dialogic teaching in a detracked 12th-grade ELA class and to understand how the students and teacher made sense of its impact. I examined how students and the teacher constructed meaning through dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) and what impact this had on student identity, confidence in their voice, agency as students, and as citizens in a democracy.

Researchers have found that almost no discussion occurs in low-track classes (Burris, 2014; Gamoran, 2009; Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 2005; Wheelock, 1992; Worthy, 2009). While tracking itself impedes student achievement and shapes identity, the type of rote, remedial pedagogies most often employed in these classes can lead to a further backsliding in both. (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Burris et al., 2008; 2015; Oakes, 2005; Wells et al., 2009; Wheelock, 1992). A student from the high track, while generally exposed to broader and more in-depth curriculum, attend classes that are only marginally more dialogic, particularly if they are focused on a single summative test. I investigated whether dialogic teaching, coherently introduced using

culturally sustaining instruction (Paris & Alim, 2014), could help all students fundamentally shift their identity, gain confidence in their voice, and increase their agency as students and as citizens in a democracy. This research, demonstrates that (a) dialogic teaching in a detracked class has the power to transform student identity, voice, and agency, which are essential to participation in democracy; and (b) dialogic teaching and detracking benefit all students and can ensure that public school students experience the benefits of a pluralistic society in which understanding is co-constructed and multiple perspectives are valued.

Research Questions

1. What does dialogic teaching look like in a detracked 12th-grade ELA course?

2. How does the focal teacher describe the process of dialogic teaching?

> 2a. What instructional methods has the focal teacher developed to support dialogic
> teaching for all levels of students?
>
> 2b. According to the focal teacher, which elements of dialogic teaching are critical to
> transforming student identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating
> increased agency as students and citizens in a democracy in a detracked 12th-grade ELA
> course?

3. How do students make sense of using dialogue in the classroom (e.g., dialogic teaching) and its impact on transforming their identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating agency as students and as citizens in a democracy?

> 3a. How do they compare dialogic teaching in the focal ELA course to their other high
> school courses that use monologic pedagogy?

Organization

This literature review includes research from diverse fields, and to capture the complexity of the research topic, two theoretical frameworks are discussed: (a) the sociology of pedagogy and (b) situated learning. After describing the seminal research of Bernstein (1990) and of Lave and Wenger (1991), I organize the literature into the following sections: (a) tracking, which has been studied and written about widely; (b) dialogic teaching, which will examine classroom discourse through the lens of linguistics, philosophy, and education, and will explain the choice of the term dialogic teaching; and (c) critical pedagogy, which speaks to my positionality as a teacher, citizen, and researcher. Through investigating the work of scholars across these disciplines, this study attempts to understand the intersectionality of forces that leave students sitting in "silence at the margins" (Sutherland, 2010, p. 48).

The research shined a light on one teacher who is immersed in the difficult task of helping students to "come to voice" (hooks, 2009, p. 137) through dialogic teaching, and on how she and her students made sense of this process. The relevance of this goes beyond a single classroom;

dialogic teaching, Alexander (2010) asserted, "is about cultural and civic interaction, not just classroom interaction" (p. 105). American education has turned toward remediation pedagogies tailored to the demands of high-stakes tests, even as research suggests that when students engage in meaningful dialogue, academic achievement and student engagement rise (Alexander, 2006; Clarke, 2015; Nystrand, Gamoran, & Carbonaro, 1998; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). I add to this research, arguing that dialogic teaching can be a tool for social justice, as students develop the confidence and skill to give voice to their diverse experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This section of the literature review will describe the intersection of the sociology of pedagogy and situated learning, which provide a lens through which this research will be interpreted. This work attempts to clarify how shifts in pedagogy, from a *monologic* to a *dialogic* stance in which meaning is socially constructed, can interrupt the reproduction of social inequality and can transform identity, develop confidence in their voice, and activate agency as students and citizens.

Sociology of Pedagogy

Because the scope of this research includes a complex interplay between dialogic pedagogy, literacy, identity, and critical pedagogy, the theoretical framework is grounded in the sociology of pedagogy. Bernstein's (1990) theory of pedagogic practice examined the ways that social class and power affect pedagogy, arguing that neither traditional nor progressive models of education can eliminate the reproduction of social inequality. Bernstein's model described differences between *visible* and *invisible* pedagogic practice and of *transmitters* and *acquirers*. He described two essential types of power structures within schools, those in which rules or power hierarchies are explicitly stated (*Visible Pedagogies, VPs*) and made clear through communication, and those in which the rules are implicit, (*Invisible Pedagogies, IPs)* and the teacher is more of a facilitator. Bernstein claimed that while *VPs* reproduce social inequality, *IPs* favor the middle class and disadvantage the disadvantaged classes and ethnic groups. This is critical to consider in this discussion of dialogic pedagogy, suggesting that attention must be paid to balancing the communication styles and pacing within the classroom.

To explain this complexity, Bourdieu (1984) coined the phrase *linguistic capital* to describe socially situated language production. By this measure, the studies of student talk turns

and teacher talk turns (Newmann, 2006; Nystrand et al.,1998; Reisman, 2015) revealed the

power of what Chomsky (1965) called linguistic competence. Bourdieu (1984) differentiated

between relational competence and legitimate competence. The idea of legitimate talk has

implications for students' reluctance to speak in a discussion. For example, Clarke (2015)

conducted qualitative research to elicit narratives of student experiences in biology discussion,

finding that students perceived their comments to be more valuable when they were *correct,* or,

in the parlance of Bourdieu, they did not consider themselves legitimate speakers if they did not

have the right answers. The theories of Bernstein (1990), Chomsky (1965), and Bourdieu (1984)

all led to the necessity of carefully examining the methods that reproduce social inequality in the

classroom. For students to develop identities as competent students, or more accurately within

Bourdieu's theory, to have increased legitimacy, they must perceive their ideas as valued.

Research is needed to investigate how dialogic teaching can be refined to interrupt the

reproduction of inequality within schools and within society.

Situated Learning

A second theoretical framework, which intersects with the sociology of pedagogy and

brings a rich interdisciplinary understanding to this study, is Lave's (1988) framework of situated

learning, further expanded with Wenger (1991), and discussed by Brown, Collins, and Duguid

(1989), and Greeno (1997). Building on the work of these researchers, this case study examined

qualitatively the dialectical relationship among students and the teacher, in which communities

of practice created the conditions for authentic, situated learning.

The expertise that apprentice learners developed within the community of practice

created in this study was mastery of academic discourse through the application of dialogic

teaching, carefully designed by the focal teacher, Ms. L. This pedagogy included establishing

specific norms for academic discourse, including discussion prompts, but also reading and

individual writing assignments that prepared students for process discussions. These elements of

the pedagogy are interdependent, yet it was student talk and its impact on student identity and

agency that was of primary concern in this research.

Vygotsky (1978) posited that talking is thinking; Bernstein (1990) and Bourdieu (1984)

extended socio-linguistic theory to claim that power is socially reproduced through language and

meaning is co-constructed through dialogue. Creating a community of practice in a public school

is a political act; teachers have the power to disrupt the forces of social inequality through the

design choices they make. Tracking policies determine who gets access to resources and how

students will be sorted (Bernhardt, 2014; Burris et al., 2008; Worthy, 2009). Even as these

predetermined boundaries constrain them, teachers can create smaller communities, or groups,

which were considered for this study, communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This

study focused on a class of 28 students, 12 from the low track, 16 from the high track, and the

teacher. Ms. L. functioned as an expert but was very much a member of the community. It was

the teacher's task to facilitate students' entry from the periphery of the community into the

authentic learning space. This required attention to who was excluded and to giving

reinforcement and an entry ramp to those left out of the conversation. To activate their identity as

learners and as citizens, all students needed to become a part of this community of practice. The

purpose of the community was to allow all students to stumble, get support, express themselves

through language, and to grapple with ideas.

Situated learning suggests that cognitive science should shift in focus from the individual

to the social. Greeno (1997) stated, "By choosing individual mental processing as the basic

conceptual level, the cognitive research strategy is committed to a factoring assumption that is

questionable, and that is not a commitment to the situated perspective" (p. 7). This focus on the

individual student's entrance into the community of practice is the substantive conceptual

difference between the perspective of many cognitive researchers and the situated learning

theory proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Indeed, the chasm between learning as an

individual mental process and learning as situated in context and as a social process is so deep

that it elucidates a binary split that encompasses not just learning theory but research

methodology. This chasm in ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004) is illustrated in what

Vosniadou (2007) called the *situative-cognitive divide*. The theoretical framework for this study

will proceed with an acknowledgment of the situated-cognitive divide but an ultimate rejection

of the cognitive position in favor of the critical stance, which Lave (2012) continues to explore.

As a qualitative researcher, my allegiance is to the critical theories of social scientists who value

focus on meaning that is socially, rather than individually constructed.

Accepting that learning is socially constructed, knowing and learning must be viewed as

situated within a social context. Wenger (1998) argued,

When we moved learning from between the ears and placed it in a relationship that a

person is establishing with the world, we started to think of learning not simply as the

acquisition of information, but learning also as a configuration of who you are, and in the

same process the configuration of the social world as a place to make meaning. (p. 75)

Wenger (1998) tied situated learning to identity, which is where this research connects. This

study observed students exposed to dialogic teaching in small groups for several months and

described transformations in their identities. In an environment that resembled the apprenticeship

model of Lave's (1991) early work, students from the high track sometimes acted as masters,

inviting students from the low track into the community of practice as they become more

experienced. Adding this theoretical framework as a foundation for the interpretation of data

collected during this research process helped to shape the analysis and clarity of this study. It

was useful to consider Wenger's (2013) remarks: "When people learn together all the time, they

configure a social system around the practice they have developed, and social system is almost

like a local social definition of what counts as competence" (p. 17). The emergence of a social

system of dialogic learning was essential to this study since its goal was to discover how dialogic

teaching facilitated the entry of students from the low track into the community of what

Chomsky (1965) called legitimate competence.

This multi-disciplinary theoretical framework shaped both the collection of data and their

analysis. Both situated learning and the sociology of pedagogy frameworks are intertwined with

linguistic theory, which, while not explicitly included in this theoretical framework, informed my

investigation. In the next section, I discuss the literature that has shaped my thinking and

influenced the design of this research.

A Review of the Literature

This section provides some detail the literature pertaining to (a) tracking and detracking,

including the selection process, its relationship to curriculum and instruction, and the views of its

opponents and proponents; (b) dialogic teaching, including what it is and is not, and its scarcity,

particularly in low-track classes; and (c) critical pedagogy and multicultural education and the

structural inequities that must be addressed to implement dialogic teaching.

Tracking and Detracking

Until the 1970s, high school students were typically tracked into vocational, general, and

college-preparatory pathways (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Guiton, 1985;

Wells & Serna, 1996). This structure has since been relaxed, with the vocational track replaced

with a career and technical pathway, and with elements of choice introduced into remaining low-tracks and high tracks. However, as public schools face demographic shifts and an uncertain political climate, education is becoming increasingly segregated, both between schools and within schools (Bernhardt, 2014; Burris et al., 2008; Oakes, 2016; Wells et al., 2009; Worthy, 2009).

Selection criteria. Schools generally use a variety of selection criteria for tracking students, including standardized achievement test scores, grades, and teacher recommendations. Burris et al. (2008) argued that while the purpose of tracking is purported to be to tailor the curriculum to students' needs, "students' assignments to tracks is anything but strategic" (p. 126). It is widely agreed, even by proponents of tracking, that disproportionate numbers of minorities, low socioeconomic status (SES) students, and English language learners (ELLs) are placed in low-track classes and that this creates a widening opportunity gap (Burris et al., 2008; Gamoran, 2009; Loveless, 1998; Slavin, 1990; Wortham, 2004).

Bernhardt (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of the research on selection criteria for tracking and concluded that teachers rely on *non-meritorious methods* for determining student placement in tracks. Oakes and Lipton (1999), while studying tracking in math and science, noted that teachers often used "highly subjective judgments about students' personalities, behavior, and motivation" (p. 65). Further evidence of nefarious student sorting was found by Wells et al. (2009), who discussed how tracking segregates students within diverse schools. The authors described one middle school where low-track and high-track classes were racially disproportionate. According to the assistant superintendent of curriculum in this district, "You'd walk into a class, you looked at the students, you knew exactly what kind of class it was based on the race of the students" (p. 71).

There is a growing body of research that reveals the disproportionately high number of low SES students represented in low-track classes. Hallinan (1996) analyzed longitudinal data from 1,669 students in several middle schools, finding that the most substantial background influence on tracking placement was SES. She wrote, "Regardless of prior academic achievement, lower SES students were more likely to be assigned to lower tracks" (p. 126). This is relevant to my research since the school where my study was conducted reflects that low SES students are disproportionately placed in low-track classes.

Investigation of discriminatory tracking practices has also been under government investigation. The U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Office was, under the Obama administration, investigating at least 40 cases in which unequal racial representation was identified in gifted and talented advanced placement and other upper-level classes (Kohli, 2014). In 2016, the Department of Education released a statement clarifying its position on tracking and Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, "Ability grouping and tracking sometimes result in courses with substantially disproportionate enrollments of minority students When that happens, the ability group or tracking may violate Title VI" (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016, para. 9). Since the Trump administration took office in 2016, the U.S. Department of Education has severely cut funding for the Civil Rights Office and has reversed the position of the Obama administration (Civil Rights Roundtable, 2018).

Proponents and opponents. Tracking has been studied extensively, using a variety of methodologies, and it is widely recognized that if there are any benefits to tracking, they accrue primarily to those placed in the high tracks (Burris, 2014; Carter & Welner, 2013; Gamoran, 2009; Oakes, 2005). After studying the issue for over 20 years, Gamoran (2009) concluded that tracking has no effect on achievement productivity yet produces significant increases in

inequality. Measurements of tracking effects have yielded results that have been dismissed by critics on both sides of the issue. Slavin (1990), Loveless (1998), and other tracking proponents claim that detracking has adverse effects on the low track and effects of close to zero on the high track. Loveless used data from national surveys from the High School and Beyond (HSB) and National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) to make the following claims:

> Assigning students to separate classes by ability and *providing them with the same curriculum* [*emphasis added*] has no effect on achievement, positive or negative, and the neutral effect holds for high, middle, and low achievers. When the curriculum is altered, tracking appears to benefit high ability students. Heterogeneous classes appear to benefit low ability students but depress the achievement of average or high achieving students. (p. 22)

This study provides qualitative data to the literature that suggest, contrary to Loveless' conclusion, that the effects of dialogic teaching on a detracked ELA class adds benefits to students from the high track and the low track.

In a meta-analysis that "synthesized approximately 100 years of research on the effects of ability grouping" (Steenbergen-Hu, Makel, & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016, p. 849), the authors, while critiquing the studies analyzed, argued that all students benefited from ability grouping to some extent. They also claimed that there is a substantial body of new research from 2000 on which warrants analysis. While the authors admit to the limitations of their study, including the fact that all data were over two decades old, their argument is further diluted by including a discussion on *accelerated intervention*, a model meant to be applied to all students (Levin & Calcagno, 2008), but used here as relating to the highest ability group. It is also important to note that as the demographics of schools have changed, new patterns of inequality have appeared

(Gamoran, 2009; Wells et al., 2009). While there is clearly, as Steenbergen-Hu et al. (2016) admit, a continued need for additional research on this matter, compelling critiques from tracking opponents are available.

For example, Burris (2014), Oakes (2005), Tyson (2013), and Wheelock (1992) argued that the methodologies used by tracking proponents compare achievement without regard for different styles of teaching across the tracks. Careful study reveals that the quality of instruction, resources allocated, and teacher quality in low-track and high-track classes, is anything but equal. As previously stated, the prevalence of monologic pedagogy in low-track classes perpetuates an opportunity gap (Tyson, 2013). Thus, when Loveless (1998) stated that there is no achievement differential between tracks when students are taught the same curriculum, he described a scenario that does not reflect the reality of public schools in the United States today. A central purpose of this study was to identify a curriculum that can have a democratizing influence on schools by introducing dialogic pedagogy to students in a detracked setting.

Curriculum and instruction. The distribution of excellent teachers and curriculum across the tracks is both undemocratic and significant. As Gamoran (2009) pointed out, "There are few examples of effective instruction in low-track classes" (p. 13). In a study of 64 middle and high school ELA classes, Applebee et al. (2003) found more significant use of discussion and more engagement with challenging texts in the higher tracks, with more emphasis on test preparation in the lower tracks. Additionally, comparing instructional opportunity across schools in wealthy, middle-class and high-poverty districts, Wells et al. (2009) noted that not only did students' access to resources vary widely between affluent and low SES schools but in diverse schools, the high-track classes resemble the affluent schools and the low tracks resemble poor schools.

Detracking. After Oakes (2016) first published *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* in 1985, she went on to conduct longitudinal case studies of schools that experimented with detracking. She studied schools that sought to do the following:

> replace tracked classes with heterogeneous classes and support them with complementary practices such as interdisciplinary curriculum, team teaching, block scheduling, and project-based instruction. (Oakes, 2016, p. 95)

Studies of schools that committed to serious detracking policy showed several common themes—innovative teachers and administrators were essential, all students thrived, and racial opportunity gaps were reduced (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2016; Rubin, 2003; Wells & Serna, 1996). However, research on detracking has revealed as many problems as successes. Rubin and Noguera (2004) described that many studies of detracking investigated programs that lacked planning, limited detracking to one subject, or failed to provide support for students' academic gaps. In a study that surveyed teachers of detracked classes, one teacher perceived the program successful because "the students 'appeared to get along' with each other" (Rubin & Noguera, 2004, p. 94). Other studies showed students being essentially "retracked" within the class as students from the low track were given work that was significantly easier (Cohen & Lotan, 1997; Wheelock, 1992). The most common instructional design described in the detracking literature is cooperative learning (Cohen & Lotan, 1997; Wheelock, 1992). While the small groups used in Ms. L.'s detracked class can be classified under this loose term, Ms. L. maintained, "I hate the term cooperative learning." She explained her frustration with what researchers observed—if not implemented with careful planning and supported by a teacher who maintains high expectations for all students, cooperative learning often assigns low-status roles to less

experienced students within the group. Again, teacher mindset toward student ability and epistemological understandings of learning are critical to the effectiveness of detracking.

Rubin (2003), in an overview of detracking research, reported that quantitative studies have been conducted by "both detracking advocates and critics [who] used test scores and other sources to support opposite stances" (p. 543). Rubin (2003) studied two detracked classrooms, conducting observations and interviews with students and teachers. While the goal of detracking is to "contest race and class-based inequalities in school" (p. 566), Rubin wrote, "Despite the best efforts of committed teachers, these inequalities were reinforced rather than challenged" (p. 566). She concluded that some students had trouble meeting the high expectations of their teachers and that "for detracking to be effective, students need to be able to work together comfortably" (p. 568). In Ms. L.'s classroom, the attention paid to creating a positive climate in which all voices were valued and the level of support extended to all students were as important to success as high academic expectations. Further, by adopting a dialogic stance that considered student talk essential to students' construction of knowledge and explicitly teaching students the norms of academic conversation, Ms. L. established the respectful social practices necessary to overcome the barriers of social and academic ranking.

As discussed in Chapter Five, much of the recent research on detracking has studied the challenges to detracking. Anyon (1997) wrote, "Our systems of social class and racial organization are significant impediments to the success of restructuring and other reform attempts" (p. 13). Indeed, if there is one constant in the detracking literature, it is that parents of students from the high track are the most resistant to change. They fear, despite evidence to the contrary, that their children will lose status and their *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1984) will be

diminished. The findings of this study, described in detail in Chapter Four, revealed that when

Ms. L. introduced dialogic instruction to her detracked classroom, all students reported benefits.

I studied a teacher whose pedagogy eliminated the disparity between the instructional

quality of low-and high-track classes. Gamoran (2009) explained, "Ultimately, how students are

engaged matters less than the instruction they encounter, so bringing together research on

tracking with research on teaching offers the most useful way to continue to shed light on this

topic of continuing interest" (p. 15). This is what my research did: this work has significance not

only for those who struggle to meet the needs of students relegated to *dead-end* low-track classes

but for all educators. While tracking promotes inequality of achievement (Nystrand et al., 1997),

monologic pedagogy silences students' voices, suppresses diverse perspectives, and "risks

disengaged, off task students" (Nystrand et al., p. 18).

Dialogic Teaching

This section is designed to define dialogic teaching, to discuss how others have studied

its use in classrooms, and to make the case that it may effectively reduce the adverse effects that

monologic instruction has on the academic trajectory of low-track and high-track students.

Several thematic strands run through the literature on effective dialogic pedagogy. The first is

that to facilitate student talk, the classroom teacher must develop a community of caring with an

attention to social-emotional learning (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Flynn, 2009; Larson, 2000;

Wells, 2007). Second, a consistent requirement for shifting pedagogy from monologic recitation

to dialogic teaching is to teach students specific, targeted skills needed for productive discussion.

A third precondition for facilitating discussion is that students must be prepared in advance

(Larson, 2000; Parker, 2015; Resnick & Schantz, 2015; Wells, 2007) to address the common fear

that their ideas "would be seen as unworthy" (Wells, 2007, p. 49).

My experience as a classroom teacher shapes my thinking about this topic. Throughout my career, I have witnessed a wide gap between the pedagogy in low-track and high-track classes. The objective of this study was to investigate the elements of dialogic teaching that can be generalized to provide all students access to instruction that encourages discourse. The findings of this study indicate that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or community in which they live, can develop the skills and confidence to participate in dialogue. Dialogic teaching can deepen content acquisition, foster a sense of belonging, and teach strategies for personal empowerment and social change. This study contributes to informing pedagogical decision making for those educators and policy makers who view public schools as essential to sustaining a democracy that is based on reason, justice, and the rule of law.

Definition. Dialogic pedagogy is defined as instruction designed to teach students discussion skills, meta-cognitive processing, and student-to-student talk about curriculum infused with sensitive/critical/social justice/controversial issues that relate to students' lives. Embedding these topics into the ELA curriculum requires strategic design, and it is an essential component of creating an environment in which all voices are valued. Exposure to diverse perspectives and exploring the complexities of conflicting opinions is a critical function of public schools in a democratic society.

In addition to the benefits to democracy, Resnick et al.'s (2015) edited collection of research articles represents the most contemporary data on the effects of student discussion on learning. This volume includes evidence of dialogic teaching improving standardized test scores (Osborne, 2015) and of students retaining information for more extended periods after discussion (O'Connor, Michaels, & Chapin, 2015). A useful aspect of this volume is its discussion of

terminology: dialogue, dialogic pedagogy, dialogic teaching, accountable talk, deliberation, and argumentation. After consideration of this work, I decided to use the term *dialogic teaching*, which is most closely aligned with my purpose of examining a dialectical relationship between teaching and learning. The findings of this study show that student exposure to the dialogic classroom for a sustained period transformed their identity and increased their agency as students and citizens. It is conceivable that these shifts will benefit not just them but society as a whole. For democracy to be sustainable, citizens must be able to both articulate their ideas and to listen to those of others. The urgency of instruction that targets this fundamental democratic skill is self-evident.

Low-track classes. According to a review of the literature, less discussion occurs in low-track classes than in high-track classes (Burris, 2008; Gamoran, 2009; Oakes, 2005). Larson (2000) cited studies of classroom instruction, which revealed that teachers' instructional decisions are often driven by the prior academic achievement of their students. Oakes (2005) summarized, "All researchers agree that practices that label some students 'low achievers' and give them dumbed-down schooling—whether called ability grouping, tracking, or something else, do neither the students nor the nation any good" (p. 224).

While dialogic teaching benefits all students regardless of track placement, when introduced to detracked classes, the effects are magnified because of the expanded diversity and the interruption of tracking labels. The findings of this research suggest that the dialogic classroom experience can be transformative for both students and teachers. Freire (2000) argued, "If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it; dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (p. 88). This dissertation study explored how dialogic teaching, through giving students the opportunity to develop their

voices, produced fundamental shifts that transformed their identities and empowered them with a new sense of agency as citizens.

Successful dialogic teaching requires that teachers relinquish power to a large degree; researchers have determined that a critical factor in promoting student discussion is that teachers must ask questions they do not have preconceived answers to (Larson, 2000; Parker, 2015; Parker & Hess, 2001). Chilcoat and Ligon (1998) described how in Mississippi in 1964, freedom schools interrupted the status quo by a curriculum "developed around discussion as a means of evoking student activity, expression, critical thinking, and community participation" (p. 165). This dissertation study investigated whether dialogic teaching could free students from the oppression of low-track status. Resnick et al. (2015) described an emerging pedagogy of dialogue:

> …Dialogic teaching has the power to break the cycle of low demand/low performance. All students are invited into discussions that allow all (respectful) forms of expression. This form of talk increases cognitive demand, and hence learning opportunities. Students do not just chatter. They must defend their statements—for example by referring to a text…or citing evidence. In short, students must make a claim on truth. (p. 3)

As students who have been silent begin to talk, there can be significant changes in their relationships to each other and to the way they view themselves and school. They can begin to think differently.

Dialogue as a path to higher order thinking is grounded in the theoretical literature, as well as empirical research (Facione, 1998; Newman 2006; Reisman, 2015). Vygotky (1978) reasoned, "By giving our students practice in talking with others, we give them frames for thinking on our own" (p. 88). On the other hand, the low level of engagement and poor retention

of information common among students from the low track is believed by many researchers to be

a result of an opposite pedagogy in classrooms: lecture and recitation are most common, with

students filling in worksheets and answering recall questions (Goodlad, 1984; Onosko, 1989).

Onosko referred to this as a "landscape of mindlessness" (p. 143) in which students are not asked

to think critically. Nystrand et al. (1998) observed 106 middle schools and found that in 90% of

class time, there was no discussion at all. An important explanation for the scarcity of discussion

in classrooms is that many teachers have a misconception that discussion consists of a teacher

asking questions and a student answering them (Wilen, 2010). The most commonly observed

discourse pattern consists of the teacher asking a question, a student responding, and the teacher

evaluating the response (Larson, 2000; Newmann, 1992; Parker & Hess, 2001; Reisman, 2015).

This inquiry, response, evaluation (I-R-E) model first discussed by Mehan (1979) emphasizes

factual knowledge but is not the same in quality or purpose as a discussion.

There is a growing body of research on measuring and coding *teacher moves* in order to

evaluate classroom discourse (Alexander, 2006; Clarke, 2015; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1999;

Reisman, 2015; Wells & Arauz, 2006) as well as a move toward structured approaches to

implementing academic conversations (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011) and *accountable talk*

(Resnick & Schantz, 2015). These approaches are designed to stimulate critical thinking and

literacy, which is essential but limited in scope. These studies lack the needed emphasis on how

students perceive dialogic teaching, and this research attempts to fill that gap.

Those who have been relegated to the status of low achiever need more than vocabulary

support to promote engagement in discussion. As Greene (1974) noticed, "I rather doubt that

individuals who are cowed or flattened out or depressed or afraid can learn" (p. 49).

Unquestionably, this emotional state must be addressed. Christoph and Nystrand (2001) in a

study of discussion in a low-track ninth grade English class over an 18-week period, concluded the key strategies that promoted effective discussion were (a) developing an ethos of engagement and respect, (b) using scaffolding and carefully constructed prompts to encourage discussion, and (c) fostering relationships among students. This type of teacher behavior is difficult to script and requires culturally sustaining pedagogies and a critical stance. Genuine dialogic teaching is not easily deconstructed into discrete teacher moves, but as Alexander (2014) explained, it "draws our attention to what matters most: the quality, dynamics, and content of talk, regardless of the way classrooms are organized" (p. 23). The focal teacher in this study demonstrated these core principles while maintaining flexibility in pacing, sequencing, and instructional design.

While challenging to facilitate, the rewards of dialogic teaching are found in the growing participation of students, as they shift from peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to legitimate competence (Bourdieu, 1984). Wells (2007) argued,

> Students should have the opportunity to come to understand, through their participation, that all knowledge of any scope is created through dialogue between alternative points of view, supported by argument from evidence, and subject to revision in light of further evidence…The question is not whether dialogue has a place in…curriculum, but rather the ways this can be made possible. (p. 45)

This study demonstrates the power of dialogic teaching to promote and enhance the learning of students who were educated in almost exclusively monologic classrooms.

Teachers' misconceptions. Even as an emerging body of research points toward discussion's efficacy in facilitating higher order thinking (Alexander, 2010; Mayer et al., 2018; Newmann, 1992; Reisman, 2015; Worthy, 2009), the literature shows that teachers have broadly disparate ideas about what, exactly, constitutes discussion. In fact, Cazden (2001), in her seminal

work on discourse, claimed that teachers view discussion as "any form of teacher-student interaction" (p. 48). Larson (2000) studied teachers' overall views of classroom discussion by asking six high school teachers to describe an ideal discussion and a failed discussion. One of his findings was that "recitation is the most frequent form of discussion, and teachers find it to be a viable form of discussion" (p. 666). Larson also called for further research about student diversity and its influence on discussion and student participation. The detracked focal classroom in this study, composed of students from the high and low tracks, includes diversity in ability groups, race, gender, ethnicity, and SES.

Critical Pedagogy and Multicultural Education

For teachers to establish safe environments in which dialogic pedagogy can succeed, they need the training, support, and theoretical commitment to multicultural and critical pedagogies. Parker (2003) wrote, "the pluralism of the democratic education and the praxis of critical pedagogy are two sides of the same coin" (p. 21). Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also "helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). Banks' (1996) model also provided insight into the dimensions of multicultural education, which include "knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, empowering school culture and social structure, equity pedagogy, and content integration" (p. 337). A component of this study must include explicit attention to creating a safe space for students to "come to voice" (hooks, 2009, p. 137). She argued:

> Students are often silenced through their acceptance of class values that teach them to
>
> maintain order at all costs. When the obsession with maintaining order is coupled with

the fear of *losing face*, of not being thought of well by one's [teacher] and one's peers.,

all possibility of constructive dialogue is undermined. (p. 137)

Students from the low track and the high track in this dissertation research confirmed that they

often stay silent in classes for fear of getting the wrong answer.

Creating an environment where students feel safe expressing emergent ideas requires

thoughtful instructional planning. Meece et al. (2005) reported a correlation between non-

competitive environments and "perceived sense of belonging" (p. 496). To foster a climate in

which all students' voices are heard and valued, the competitive rankings that stigmatize students

must be rejected in favor of a more inclusive, mastery-based goal structure. Further, to achieve

the goal of creating a community of practice that embraces diversity, all students must participate

in courageous conversations (Singleton, 2015) about race, class, and social justice. In this study,

these conversations were embedded in the curriculum to deepen student understanding of (a)

crafting argumentative essays, (b) examining rhetorical devices, and (c) interpreting literature.

Throughout each unit, students reflected on prompts in their writers' notebooks and discussed

contemporary social issues such as immigration policy, race in America, the death penalty,

abortion, and wealth and poverty in America. Through building a *safe space*, the teacher created

an opportunity for students from the low and high tracks to express divergent views with

increasing sophistication. Dialogic teaching promotes a non-judgmental forum for the

exploration of ideas; this is an essential component of education in a democracy.

Conclusion

American schools are becoming increasingly segregated, both across districts and within

schools (Wells et al., 2008). Segregation within schools is done through tracking, which

separates students into what are often arbitrary or discriminatory groupings (Bernhardt, 2014;

Burris et al., 2008; Wells et al., 2008; Worthy, 2009). Students in high-track classes receive

resources that mimic those received by students in wealthy schools, whereas students in low-

track classes receive resources that mimic poor schools (Wells et al., 2008). Further, high-track

students are more likely to receive instruction that includes inquiry and dialogue, whereas low-

track students receive monologic instruction, in which what little discussion that occurs consists

of the Inquiry-Response-Evaluation (I-R-E) pattern (Gamoran, 2009; Larson, 2000; Oakes,

2005).

This reality aligns with Bernstein's (1990) theory of pedagogic practice, which describes

how inequality is socially reproduced through schools. To interrupt this pattern, teachers can

introduce dialogic pedagogy to students who have been educated in low-track classes, to

transform their identity, awaken their agency, and increase their ability to resist oppression

(Freire, 2000). Further, I argue that dialogic pedagogy can facilitate detracking, providing

benefits to students from low and high-tracks. As students become fluent in engaging in dialogue

with diverse groups, their thinking expands, their opportunities for higher education grow, and

their confidence as students increases. Through dialogic pedagogy, students can join

communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which they may begin to think differently

through using language differently (Vygotsky, 1978).

This chapter has outlined the theoretical frameworks of the sociology of pedagogy and

situated learning and has discussed relevant research on tracking and dialogic pedagogy. I have

argued that students in low-track classes receive an inferior, monologic education and that this

may be remedied through detracking and dialogic pedagogy. Obstacles are numerous, including

lack of teacher training, the need to shift mindset, and the need for organizational support. As

Gamoran (2009) pointed out, there is a gap in the literature that can be filled by connecting the

research on tracking with the research on dialogic pedagogy. While research has begun to

emerge (Mayer et al., 2018), it has been mainly quantitative and focused on discourse analysis.

This study adds nuance to this field of inquiry through gathering qualitative data, with attention

to how a focal group of detracked students interprets the impact of dialogic pedagogy on their

lives.

The literature shows that too little discussion is occurring in classrooms, generally, and

that discussion is essential to promoting higher-order thinking. We also know that the amount

and quality of discussion in classrooms decreases as the tracking level of students decreases. I

have discussed the literature that explains teachers' misunderstandings of discussion as well as

the research explaining critical steps for promoting dialogic pedagogy. This dissertation (a)

utilized the research on how teachers can facilitate dialogic teaching and (b) applied it to the

students from the low track who are least likely to be exposed to it, and (c) investigated the ways

it created a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that supports detracking. This work

illuminates the path for future educators to empower their students from low and high tracks, and

also provides a coherent pedagogy for successful detracking.

Alexander (2014) argued, "while talk is essential for the intellectual and social

development of all children, for some of them the talk which they engage in at school is nothing

less than a lifeline" (p. 19). For this reason, detracking and dialogic teaching, when combined,

may be a way to interrupt the reproduction of inequality and to promote social justice. Students

who have not been disadvantaged by assignment to the low track have, however, according to

the findings of this study, been disadvantaged by monologic pedagogy. Indeed, society has a

moral imperative to awaken a generation of students, who will be faced with challenges of a

society that is becoming increasingly polarized. The purpose of this research is to realign

pedagogy to reflect the values of a democratic society that protects freedom of expression yet

teaches students to recognize and challenge propaganda and mendacity.

CHAPTER THREE:

Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods used to conduct a qualitative, critical case study. As discussed in previous chapters, this research employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework developed from the work of Bernstein (1990), and Lave and Wenger (1991), to explore the complexities of how students in a detracked 12th-grade ELA make sense of dialogic teaching. This study was designed to determine whether dialogic teaching in a detracked classroom could transform student identity and impact their agency as students and citizens. Tracking and monologic classroom pedagogy, viewed through the lens of the sociology of pedagogy (Bernstein, 1990) reproduce social inequality, and this lens will shape the investigation of whether dialogic teaching can interrupt the pattern. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning framed the study of a veteran teacher's use of dialogic teaching and how students and teachers socially constructed meaning from the experience. I observed how students who had been educated in low-track classes moved from novice to expert fluency through social and dialogic interaction with classmates who were educated in high-track classes.

As discussed in earlier chapters, tracking is conceptualized as the sorting of students within a school or district based on measures that generally include standardized tests, teacher recommendation, and IQ, which result in different access to academic curriculum and resources (Burris, 2014). Monologic pedagogy is defined as teacher-centered instruction in which students are passive recipients of information (Alexander 2010; Bahktin, 1981; Matusov, 2009). Dialogic teaching is defined as instruction designed to encourage all students to participate in an academic discussion, nurturing emergent ideas, which increases cognitive demand (Resnick et al., 2015). When asked how she defines dialogic teaching, Ms. L., the focal teacher of this research, stated:

Classroom discourse is a powerful conduit through which students use their knowledge about language to use language to understand concepts and ideas. A consensus among researchers is that speaking and interactions that occur in a classroom environment among students and teachers are integral to learning. Researchers also view productive classroom discourse as joint, critical inquiry, and an open exchange of ideas that promotes equity and academic rigor in a culturally, linguistically, and academically heterogeneous classroom.

Introducing dialogic pedagogy to detracked, heterogeneous classes needs to be intentional regarding equity and required reflexive planning, coherent design, and explicit community building dependent on the unique configuration of students within a classroom (Alexander, 2010; Wells, 2007). This study documented, through observations and interviews, the effective strategies of a *focal teacher*, her interactions with students, and her reflections on the process of dialogic teaching. The term focal teacher is used here to describe Ms. L., a teacher with over 25 years of teaching experience, with advanced degrees in literacy and education, who has consistently promoted high levels of student academic attainment, as measured by state standardized test benchmarks and noted in supervisory reports. Ms. L. promoted a classroom environment of collaboration and set high standards for all students, as indicated in supervisory evaluations and witnessed through observations.

Observations were conducted of students from low and high tracks, working together in small group discussions, and I investigated their perceptions of the process over time, through conducting interviews, examining writers' notebook entries, and reading their written work. While there is a growing body of research on dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2010; Cazden, 2001; Resnick et al., 2015; Singleton, 2015; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011), and persuasive research

indicating that tracking confers an inferiority status on students from the low track (Burris &

Garrity, 2008; Burris et al., 2008; Oakes, 2005; Oakes & Guiton, 1985; Wells et al., 2010;

Wortham, 2004), this study fills a gap by investigating how dialogic pedagogy, coherently

introduced using culturally sustaining instruction, can awaken (Greene, 1974) students from the

boredom of monologic pedagogy. I also describe the dialogic classroom's effect on students'

identity, confidence in their voice, and agency as students and citizens.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this critical case study was to describe a focal teacher's use of dialogic

teaching in a detracked 12th-grade suburban high school ELA class and to understand how the

students and the teacher in this course made sense of its impact. The study examined how

students and the teacher constructed meaning of the curriculum through dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981)

and what impact this had on students' identity and agency as students and citizens in a

democracy.

Research Questions

1. What does dialogic teaching look like in a detracked 12th-grade ELA course?

2. How does the teacher describe the process of dialogic teaching?

   2a. What instructional methods has the teacher developed to support dialogic teaching for

   all levels of students?

   2b. According to the teacher, which elements of dialogic teaching are critical to

   transforming student identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating

   increased agency as students and citizens in a democracy in a detracked 12th-grade ELA

   course?

3. How do students make sense of using dialogue in the classroom (e.g., dialogic teaching) and

its impact on transforming their identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating

agency as students and citizens in a democracy?

      3a. How do they compare dialogic teaching in the focal ELA course to their other high

      school courses that use monologic pedagogy?

Research Paradigm

      The following sections describe the research design of the study, explaining how a

methodically designed and systematically conducted study adds to the empirical research and

theoretical understanding of the topic. Explanation is provided of the following elements of this

study: (a) research paradigm, (b) role of the researcher, (c) participants and setting, (d) data

collection procedures, (e) data analysis procedures, (f) expected significance of the study, (g)

limitations of the study, and (h) a summary.

      I conducted a constructivist, critical-case study, as a quasi-participant observer. The

rationale for a single case design was that, as stated by Yin (2012), "the single case can represent

a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or

extending the theory" (p. 51). This case study captured the dialogic teaching practiced by Ms. L.

and explained how students in a detracked dialogic classroom make sense of the experience. The

fact that Ms. L. was assigned to teach a detracked class for the 2017-2018 school year and that

she had developed a dialogic practice afforded me the opportunity to investigate the complex

intersectionality of tracking, dialogic pedagogy, and situated learning.

      The constructivist and critical philosophical worldviews informed this study's

methodology. The critical epistemology was selected because ultimately, it is hoped that this

work can identify elements of dialogic teaching that might disrupt patterns of inequality in all

schools. As a critical researcher, I began with a point of view driven by the purpose of "exposing

hegemony and injustice, challenging conventional structures, and engaging in social action"

(Crotty, 1989, p. 157). The ontological position of critical theory is historical realism—reality is

historically constructed, taking the "view that reality has been shaped by social, political,

cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values" (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 110). This underpinned

sampling decisions and shaped interview protocols. However, the critical epistemology was

tempered by constructivism; while holding a point of view, it was essential to remain open to

new possibilities that emerged during the research process.

  The constructivist epistemology assumes that the researcher and subjects co-construct

knowledge—this understanding grounded the methodology as themes emerged through

conversations and interviews with the students and the teacher, and through observations.

Creswell (2009) wrote, "The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of

action with the human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with

the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field" (p. 9). In many ways, the

construction of the study's iterative methodology mimics the dialectical nature of the pedagogy,

in which reflexivity is the praxis for meaning making.

  Reasons for selecting a qualitative research design are theoretical as well as practical.

The qualitative methodology provided a richer view of the phenomena of interest than

quantitative data could. Because of the dialectical nature of this study, in which dialogic teaching

was examined in a social context, a case can be made here for a more nuanced evaluation of

individuals' perceptions, rather than quantitative measures of achievement. In this study, what I

hoped to capture could not be measured by standardized tests or by coding student and teacher

dialogic moves. Interviews with students and observations of the classroom climate and

discussions were the most effective methods to determine how students made sense of the

pedagogy's impact on their identity and agency as students and citizens in a democracy. For

triangulation and a richer understanding of students' identity and agency, field notes and memos

from observations and transcripts of interviews were member-checked through multiple

discussions with the focal teacher. Observation field notes were triangulated with Ms. L.'s plan

book and student interview data, and interview data were also triangulated with student writers'

notebooks, reflections, and observations.

Role of the Researcher

I met Ms. L. seven years ago, in 2012, when she transferred from a middle school to the

Northeastern suburban high school where I taught. We were assigned cafeteria duty together and

had talked often during that year about teaching and students. Our conversations interested me in

learning more about Ms. L.'s practice; In 2013, I elected to conduct a Teacher Evaluation Project

of her low- track 11th grade ELA class during an internship for a principal preparation program.

This project, endorsed by the school principal through a memoranda of agreement (MOA),

required me to conduct three formal observation cycles with pre and post observation

conferences. (See table 1). Drawn to Ms. L.'s focus on academic discussion, highlights of the

report included her reflexivity, the sophisticated level of conversations students engaged in

during class, and the high level of expectations and engagement in the class. As part of the

project, I read supervisory observation reports of Ms. L.'s teaching; when administrators

observed Ms. L.'s classes, they commented on how her low-track classes resembled AP classes,

which raised interesting questions for me about tracking and teaching assumptions. At the time

Ms. L. taught two low-track classes and three Advanced Placement (AP) classes.

Table 1
Study of Ms. L.'s Teaching, 2013-2015

	Ms. L. Interviews	Observations	Student Interviews
Prior research for administrative degree, 2013-2014	6-30 minute, formal	6-40 minute classes	0
Conference Presentation, 2015	4-30 minute, informal	4-40 minute classes	0

Note. These observations, conducted prior to my doctoral work, are listed to show that the doctoral research questions were developed based in part from prior knowledge of Ms. L.'s practice through fieldwork experiences.

Through working together, Ms. L. and I developed a shared vision of best practice and teaching philosophy as well as a mutual respect, without which this work would have been impossible. In 2014, I created a Critical Friends group with Ms. L. and five other colleagues. Our goal was to build a sense of shared community in a school climate that was unraveling in response to the disorganized rollout of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Annual Pupil Personnel Performance Review (APPR), which tied teacher evaluations to student test scores was also causing widespread chaos throughout the school. To keep our sense of mission toward our students intact, we held meetings outside of school, where we formally discussed readings about the complex policy issues affecting public schools.

We also shared our teaching successes to generate grassroots support for best practice as an antidote to the negativity spreading through the school. Through using the consultancy protocol to examine issues and challenges in our school, we developed a commitment to the principles of the Critical Friends model (Quate, 2004). The Critical Friends philosophy continues to provide a framework to understand the relationship between Ms. L. and me, and we have continued to employ its principles in modified form throughout the dissertation study and analysis. Ms. L. and I also took a course together at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and have presented together at several conferences. As our conversations about pedagogy,

philosophy, and research deepened, Ms. L. enrolled in the same doctoral program, and we

continue an exceptionally productive intellectual partnership.

I no longer work at the high school, but several of the students in the focal class were my

psychology students during the 2016-2017 school year. These factors afforded me a pre-

established rapport with the students, yet also required that I continuously checked my biases—

while observing students with whom I had a prior relationship, establishing clear boundaries was

essential. To ensure that I maintained objectivity, I discussed my field notes and memos with

Ms. L., my dissertation chairperson, and several colleagues throughout the pilot study/pre-

dissertation and dissertation phases of data collection.

Site Selection and Context of the Study

The setting of Rockford High School (a pseudonym) is important theoretically and

conceptually because of the ways that tracking decisions are made and because of the growing

diversity of the district. As the district becomes more diverse, the potential for perpetuating

social inequality through potentially biased tracking decisions grows. It is widely agreed, even

by proponents of tracking, that disproportionate numbers of Black, Latinx, low SES students,

and English Language Learner (ELL) students are placed in lower tracks, and that this creates a

widening opportunity gap (Burris, 2012; Carter & Welner, 2013; Gamoran, 2009; Loveless,

1998). I have worked in this district for 16 years, which afforded me access to student

demographic and tracking placement data, and to an insider's understanding of the culture and

the hidden curriculum.

Rockford High School is a large suburban high school in the Northeastern United States.

There are approximately 2400 students. The school is part of a tight-knit, multi-generational

community, and approximately 60% of the faculty graduated from the high school. As Table 2

illustrates, between 2008 and 2018, the Latinx student population increased, from 6% to 22%,

the African-American student population increased from 1% to 6%, and the Asian and Pacific

Islander student population increased from 3% to 6%. Meanwhile, the White student population

decreased during this time from 90% to 64%. Further, as seen in Table 2, in 2008, 15% of

students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, and by 2017, this number had increased to 30%.

A secretary expressed a common view among staff about these demographic changes:

> The community has changed. You know what, you know, the community has changed,
>
> I've seen, um —When I first started, this guidance office was filled with students who
>
> were very, um, eager to learn, uh, very, uh—they all went to four year colleges and were
>
> very much into their education, and I've seen that decline since I've been here every year.

Table 2

Demographic Changes at Rockford High School, 2008-2018

	2008	2018
Latinx	6%	22%
African American	1%	8%
Asian and Pacific Islander	3%	6%
White	90%	64%
Free and Reduced Lunch	15%	30%

Tracking Decisions

Tracking decisions in the focal school district are made by sixth-grade middle school teachers, who recommend students for tracking placements in seventh-grade social studies and ELA classes. Tracking options include Regents; the low track; and Honors and Advanced Placement (AP), which are referenced in this dissertation as the high track. Middle school teachers continue the recommendation process as students move to the high school. Students are supposed to have a course grade of 90 or above to move to honors classes, but there is little consistency in grading across departments and among teachers. This inconsistency in tracking was described by Oakes (2005). Once students are placed in a track, it is common for them to stay there throughout high school. While the guidance department officially promotes student acceleration, in practice, it can be challenging to jump tracks because (a) the sequencing of courses prohibits a student moving from a Regents class to an AP class; and (b) after several years in a low-track class, the knowledge gap widens. Further, guidance counselors and teachers are reluctant to make recommendations that they fear may "set students up for failure" (Oakes & Guiton, 1985, p. 28).

Unfortunately, there is no demographic information available to indicate whether there are disproportionate numbers of African American and Latinx students in low-track classes at Rockford High School, but anecdotal evidence is widespread. There is evidence indicating that a disproportionate number of low SES students are assigned to low-track placements. A 60-student sample of 11th-grade ELA students obtained through the Rockford guidance department coordinator showed a disproportionate number of low SES students in low-track classes, with 38

out of 60, or 63% of students, reported as low SES, which is well above the school's 30% of low

SES students overall.

The Focal Class

Ms. L. was assigned to teach a detracked class in the 2017-2018 school year, and this

class became the subject of my case study. While I originally planned to investigate how Ms.

L.'s use of dialogic teaching affected her low-track students, the unexpected scheduling change

provided the opportunity to study the combined effects of dialogic teaching and detracking. The

focal class of this case study research was an ELA college-level course, open to students from all

tracks with a grade of 85 and above in their 11th-grade ELA class. The college class had been

running for 20 years, taught by another teacher, but the new ELA coordinator assigned two

sections to Ms. L. to "shake things up." In past years, students reported being discouraged from

taking the course by guidance counselors, who feared it would be too challenging and that

students would fail to graduate. A significant incentive for taking the class was that students

could fulfill their college English 101 requirement at a fraction of the cost. Students who passed

the class received six credits for 300 dollars; however, students could also receive high school

credit without paying the reduced college tuition. Some students who took advanced placement

(AP) ELA classes from grades 9 through 11 choose the class as an easier alternative to 12th-grade

AP literature. Students from the high track were likely to take the class as their 12th-grade ELA

requirement, and students from the low track were traditionally placed in the class upon request.

There are also low-track 12th-grade courses available.

The focal class was composed of 12 students from the low track and 11 students from the

high track in a 12th-grade class. It is important to understand that students' ELA classes had been

tracked from seventh grade on, suggesting that privilege had accrued over time to students from

the high track, and conversely, students from the low track had experienced the cumulative

effects of monologic, remedial pedagogy. The administrative decision to allow students from all

tracks to enroll in the 12th-grade college course and to assign the course to Ms. L. provided a

unique opportunity to investigate how students made sense of the impact of dialogic teaching on

their identity and agency as students and citizens in a democracy.

Data Collection Procedures

After obtaining permission from the Rockford Board of Education to conduct research in

the high school in September 2017, I met with the school principal to explain the purpose of the

study and to assure him that the study would not interfere with instructional time. In November

2017, I obtained IRB approval to conduct research from Molloy College (See Appendix E). The

Molloy IRB covered the pre-dissertation and dissertation phase of the study. Next, Ms. L. signed

a formal consent form and distributed consent forms to her class. After explaining the purpose of

the study to Ms. L. and the class, students were informed of their right to decline participation in

the study at any time. Consent forms were sent to inform parents about the research study and to

give them the option to opt out. While all 29 students in the class consented to be observed, three

students missed their interview appointments and could not reschedule, and three students

students declined to be interviewed. All 23 students who participated in interviews signed

individual consent forms. All parties were ensured that their information would remain strictly

confidential. No parents or students elected to opt out of the research study.

To protect the confidentiality of students, a complete class list was compiled and

pseudonyms were assigned to all students. All consent forms continue to be stored electronically

on a password-secured computer. All audio and video recordings and interview and observation

transcripts are stored on this secure computer as well.

Sample Selection

The unit of analysis during the pilot study phase of the research was the diverse,

detracked 12th-grade ELA class. Within the class, three embedded units of analysis studied were

the teacher, 29 students, and the dialogic teaching. Students were identified as "high-track" and

"low-track" groups based on their 11th grade ELA placement. The demographic makeup of the

class (see Tables 3 and 4) included nine White, two Asian, one Black, one multiracial, and two

Latinx students in the low-track group, and nine White, two Asian and three Latinx students in

the high-track group. Further, the general school trend of low SES students being over-

represented in low-tracks did not hold true for this class: 6 of 15 in the low-track group were low

SES, and 10 out of 14 of the high-track group were low SES. The fact that the class was a

college course and provided the opportunity to purchase credits may explain its departure from

the broader demographic trend—even though purchasing credits was not mandatory, students

interviewed did not all understand the policy. Nevertheless, this does not mitigate the

significance of the study: students from the low track are more likely to have been exposed to

monologic pedagogy than the high-track group, and their response to detracking and dialogic

teaching is the focus of this research.

Table 3

Demographics of Students from the Low Track

Pseudonym (*n*=15)	Gender	Low SES	Track-Grade 11, ELA	Race and Ethnicity	Interviewed for Study
Caroline	F	no	Regents	White	no
Harry	M	no	Regents	White	yes
Freddy	M	no	Regents	White	yes
Mya	F	yes	Regents	White	no
Mala	F	yes	Regents	Asian	yes
Karolina	F	no	Regents	Multiracial	yes
Mary	F	no	Regents	African-American	no

Julia	F	yes	Regents	White	yes
George	M	no	Regents	Latinx	yes
Laura	F	yes	Regents	White	yes
Maria	F	yes	Regents	Latinx	yes
Sandra	F	no	Regents	White	yes
Andrea	F	yes	Regents	White	yes
Justyna	F	no	Regents	White	yes
Rucha	F	no	Regents	Asian	yes

Note. Low SES was determined by a student's eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch. Track refers to students' placement in the 11th-grade ELA class. H refers to honors classes, and AP refers to advanced placement classes.

Table 4

Demographics of Students from the High-Track

Pseudonym (*n*=14)	Gender	Low SES	Track- Grade 11 ELA	Race and Ethnicity	Interviewed for study
Sydney	F	yes	Honors	White	no
Bella	F	yes	Honors	White	yes
Sasha	M	yes	Honors	White	no
Frances	F	no	Honors	Asian	yes
Martin	M	no	Honors	White	yes
Pooja	F	no	Honors	Asian	yes
Meryl	F	no	AP	White	yes
Dolores	F	yes	AP	Latinx	yes
Karla	F	yes	Honors	Latinx	yes
Jennifer	F	yes	AP	White	no
Carlie	F	yes	Honors	White	yes
Roland	M	yes	Honors	White	yes
Patricia	F	yes	Honors	White	yes
Carson	M	yes	AP	Latinx	yes

Note. Low SES was determined by a student's eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch. Track refers to students' placement in their 11th-grade ELA class. H refers to honors classes, and AP refers to advanced placement classes.

This was a purposeful sample. The teacher, Ms. L., developed the dialogic teaching

approach and therefore offered a unique opportunity to investigate what elements of the

pedagogy could be transformational, especially for students who have been historically placed in

the low track and therefore have been taught using monologic pedagogy. Ms. L. was studied as

the creator of the pedagogy and the facilitator of the instruction of interest. I observed how Ms.

L. co-constructed lessons with students by giving them choices of readings and by using

formative assessment to guide instructional decisions and noted things she said and did to create

a dialogic framework in which students and the teacher learn from each other. Field notes and

memos were written during and after observations, and in the analysis phase, they were cross-

referenced with Ms. L.'s plan book.

Timeline: Phases of Data Collection

The data analyzed for this dissertation study were collected in two phases. The

preliminary, pilot phase started in November 2017 and concluded in May 2018. The second

phase of the dissertation research began in June 2018 and lasted through October 2018. Table 5

describes the data collected during the two phases of the study and is followed by a more

detailed description of the data.

Table 5

Study of Ms. L.'s Teaching 2017-2018 (As Part of Doctoral Level Work)

Phase of Research	Ms. L. Interviews	Observations	Student Interviews
Phase One			
Pre-dissertation Pilot Study, November 2017-May 2018	One formal, six informal	40, 40-minute classes (27 hours)	No student interviews were conducted during this phase
Phase Two			
Dissertation Phase, June 2018-October 2018	Four formal, 30 informal	10, 40-minute classes (8 hours)	23, 30-40 minute semi-structured interviews with students from the low track ($n=12$) and the high track ($n=11$)

Phase One

Phase One entailed conducting observations and teacher interviews and collecting

documents. The teacher's reflections and writers' notebooks were scanned throughout phase one

of the data collection. Below is an explanation of the details of the data collected.

Observations. After obtaining school board approval for the pilot phase of the study in November 2017, I began observing Ms. L.'s class. I conducted 40 observations, twice a week between February 2018 and May 2018. During these observations, the theoretical framework of situated learning served as an organizing principle, framing the collection of data to focus on how learning was socially situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Field notes were taken during each observation and audio recordings were made of teacher instructions and episodes of small group discussions, which were transcribed using the online transcription service Rev.com. After each week of observations, I wrote a memo, and as themes begin to emerge, observation protocols were adjusted to reflect new insights.

The field-notes protocol for observations included noting: (a) ratio of student talk to teacher talk; (b) specific instruction by the teacher of discussion skills; (c) body language and attitudes of students; (d) instances of students building from others' ideas; (e) indications of students from the high track inviting students from the low track into the conversation; and (f) evidence of increased sophistication of verbal expression, particularly among students from the low track. Throughout the data collection, the dialogic teaching's impact was observed to determine its effect on increasing all students' access to what Bourdieu (1984)identified as cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to assets, competencies, and skills that afford individuals access to power in society. As the pedagogy transformed student identity and increased their agency as students and citizens in a democracy, it seemed conceivable that it may lead them to go on to attain higher levels of education than they might have without taking the class. I also watched for indications that students might become more politically engaged, displayed as their ability to make coherent and sophisticated arguments about current issues in the country and the world.

Teacher reflections. Ms. L. took notes by hand in a notebook while she taught, which she used to shape future lessons and to provide feedback. She kept multiple journals, in which she wrote regular reflections on pedagogy, student achievement, and effectiveness of strategies. Ms. L. gave me access to these notes, as well as to several examples of her academic writing, including her teaching philosophy, "autoethnography," and several doctoral papers. Since we worked together closely before I began doctoral studies, I have a solid understanding of her values, attitudes, and dispositions, which was extremely useful in painting a picture of her instructional decisions and how she made sense of her role as a teacher of diverse learners.

Writers' notebooks. Throughout the year, students completed approximately 15 assignments during each ten-week marking period in their writers' notebooks. These entries provided a focus for small group discussion, served as student reflections on their work and thinking, and showed evidence of student-to-text connections. At several points in the year, Ms. L. collected and graded the notebooks, and when she collected them in the final marking period, I made copies of salient entries for analysis. These were helpful for evaluating the progression (or lack of progression) of student voice; Ms. L. used them as evidence of improvement (or lack of improvement) in literacy, which included more complex sentences, better syntax, and improved coherence in the structure of paragraphs.

Phase Two

During the dissertation phase, I conducted semi-structured interviews with students and formal and informal interviews with the focal teacher. I also returned to conduct observations of a different detracked class in September 2018 to gather data describing how Ms. L. introduced dialogic teaching practices to students. I describe the data in more detail below.

Interviews. After careful consideration and observation of the class, individual interviews were scheduled and conducted in June 2018, with 23 students, 12 from the low track and 11 from the high track. Four students, while included in observations, failed to make their interview appointments and could not be rescheduled, and two students declined to be interviewed although they consented to being observed in the classroom. The interview protocol was developed to answer the research questions, to probe themes that emerged during the observation phase, and to refine my understanding of the students' experiences with the theoretical framework of the study. The students' familiarity with me, both as a teacher in the school and a frequent observer in the classroom, created a level of student comfort that was particular to this study and provided for a rich trove of interview data. While originally planning to conduct focus groups, Ms. L.'s suggestion that students would be more honest and forthcoming "one on one" was an example of the many ways she contributed to the data collection and analysis.

Interviews were conducted following a methodically designed interview protocol (Creswell, 2009). Questions were asked to investigate students' views of their identity, whether they reported increased confidence in their voice, and whether (or not) their sense of agency as students and citizens had increased. Students were probed about their perceptions of the dialogic process and its impact on their learning, and a series of questions were designed to elicit student views on how they made sense of the experience of the dialogic classroom. Students were prompted to describe how they viewed themselves and their status as students from the low track and high track, how they viewed the class ethos, and how they perceived the teacher's role in creating a climate of engagement. They were asked how the class compared to their other monologic classrooms, and how they viewed the use of discussion in Ms. L.'s class. Throughout

the interviews, probes were used to inquire how the dialogic classroom impacted students'

academic identity and confidence in their voice, and how or if the ability to articulate their views

related to their agency as citizens in a democracy.

Four formal interviews with Ms. L. were audio recorded and transcribed, and over 30

informal interviews were conducted. The interview questions were designed to capture her views

on the process of dialogic teaching; her attitudes toward her diverse students; what motivated her

practice; and her thinking about the relationship between dialogue, literacy, and citizenship.

Observations. I conducted 10 observations between September 2018 and October 2018.

The purpose of these observations was to obtain data about the introduction of the dialogic

teaching procedures and ethos to a group of students in a new detracked 12th-grade ELA class

taught by Ms. L. During this phase, the pedagogy and the teacher's introduction to the dialogic

classroom were examined using protocols established based on preliminary analysis of phase one

data. Observations were audiotaped and transcribed, and I reviewed segments of them with Ms.

L. to refine my understanding of how she planned and implemented the essential components of

the dialogic classroom.

Data Analysis

Interviews with students and the teacher were transcribed verbatim and then

coded to discover categories, themes, and findings. Field notes were written during

and after observations, and as interviews were transcribed, notes were added on emergent themes

and codes. This is an essential element of qualitative research; as the analysis unfolded, changes

were made to include emergent themes in the interview questions. Student interviews were

triangulated with teacher interviews, writers' notebooks, and observations. Yin (2012) cautioned

that "any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is

based on several different sources of information, following a similar convergence" (p. 120).

Teacher interviews were triangulated as well, creating a dialectical relationship between teacher interviews, observations, student interviews, and writers' notebooks. I looked carefully for overlapping patterns between student interviews and observations, as well as between teacher interviews and student interviews. In this manner, multiple sources of evidence were used to "provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 2012, p. 121).

While developing and beginning to categorize themes across interview transcripts, it was essential to check for diverging viewpoints and to be aware of inconsistencies between what students said and what was observed in the field. Vigilance about recognizing data that did not conform to my preconceived notions was essential, as multiple perspectives emerged from student interviews. I did not dismiss data that contradicted my assertions. It was necessary to look methodically at all episodes and passages, taking the time to examine them repeatedly, "reflecting, triangulating, [and] being skeptical about first impressions" (Stake, 1995, p. 78).

While this is a single case study, there was an implicit comparative case—the non-dialogic and low-track classrooms that dominated the students' high school classes. Comparative analysis was mostly inferential, and evidence was gathered from student interviews. For triangulation, other data were examined, including written work and teacher notes.

A password-protected database was created on Dropbox to organize data and the computer software Dedoose was used to facilitate coding of data. After analyzing the transcripts and having Ms. L. member-check the results, another researcher was invited to participate in the triangulation process. Merriam (1988) described methods to ensure internal validity of qualitative research: (a) triangulation; (b) member checks; (c) long-term observation at the research site; (d) gathering data over a period of time in order to create increased validity of the

findings; and (e) identification of the researcher's worldview, theoretical orientation, and biases.
The research procedures were methodical and consistent throughout the research process.

Limitations of Case Study Research

Evidence of student transformation of identity and developing confidence in voice was
primarily revealed through self-report. However, to mitigate this limitation, the writer's
notebook, and quantity/volume of talk in the classroom can be construed as evidence of change
and even transformation. Without any standardized measures available, drawing a straight line
between the pedagogy and the student attitudinal transformation defies quantitative
measurement, which again justifies the choice of a qualitative method. Critics of the case study
method argue that the research is not generalizable and that a single case study is less valuable
than larger, multiple case studies (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2012). However, the
opportunity to study a single case in depth with thick descriptive detail may be complementary to
quantitative studies of tracking and discourse analyses of dialogic pedagogy. While only
examining one class, my prior experience conducting observations of Ms. L.'s teaching as an
administrative intern provided rich background knowledge of her instructional design and
planning process. Additionally, our multi-year professional partnership preceding my doctoral
work provided context that was helpful to understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the
dialogic teaching. Our work together, described in detail above and in Appendix B, also proved
useful when analyzing and discussing the emerging data. Merriam (1988) wrote, "the more
grounded in supporting detail one's findings are, the more credible and trustworthy they are" (p.
121).

During the pilot study and dissertation study combined, I spent 35 hours observing and
over 15 hours interviewing Ms. L. This was an uncommon opportunity— my unlimited access to

the school, students, and the teacher gave me an ability to gather rich, reflective data and honest

feedback that many researchers do not have. Ms. L. expressed willingness to make herself

vulnerable to the significant exposure of her attitudes and practice, which is consistent with the

high degree of reflexivity she demonstrates as a teacher. Further, I implicitly compared this case,

the detracked high school ELA class, to the dominant pedagogy in the other, tracked classes in

the school. The dramatic differences were revealed through student interviews and are discussed

in depth in Chapter Four.

Yin (2012) and Merriam (1988) identified reliability, validity, and generalizability as

limits of case study research. The reliability of the research will be ensured through triangulation

of data; multiple sources were included, and weekly analysis was discussed and co-constructed

with Ms. L. Student interviews, writers' journals, observed behavior, and audiotaped classroom

discussions provided evidence to support the validity of conclusions drawn about the relationship

of dialogic pedagogy to student identity, voice, and agency.

Ethical Considerations and Potential Research Bias

As a former teacher at the school and admirer of Ms. L.'s teaching (I nominated her for

an award in 2015), I needed to continuously check my bias through member checking, field

notes, and memos, and through discussing transcripts with Ms. L. My stance as a critical

researcher meant that I brought preconceived notions of what I expected to find; however,

vigilant reflexivity tempered my philosophical and political conviction. Knowing how I would

like students to answer interview questions, it was crucial not to cherry-pick the transcripts to

support my views. Instead, open-mindedness was necessary and accepting findings that were

unexpected and even undesirable was essential to the integrity of the research process.

Throughout the data collection and analysis phases, in fact, I routinely grappled with the

significance of unexpected data; I remained committed to conducting research in an ethical way and to representing the findings with integrity.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the research design and methodology used to conduct this study. As explained above, a qualitative critical case study was designed to analyze the situated and transformative process/effects of dialogic teaching. The methodology was framed by an inquiry-based paradigm, with a critical and constructivist worldview. To understand how students perceived dialogic teaching and its impact, twelve 30-40 minute semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from the low track, and eleven 30-40 minute interviews were conducted with students from the high track. Fifty-two observations were conducted in total, and 5 formal and 36 informal interviews were held with Ms. L.

This study aspires to contribute to the research on dialogic teaching and detracking, and to describe through qualitative research, the impact the pedagogy has to transform student identity, develop confidence in their voice, and activate agency as students and citizens in a democracy. Research on tracking continues to describe broad discrepancies between low-track instruction and high-track instruction (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Burris et al., 2008; Oakes, 2005; Wells et al., 2016), and research on dialogic teaching has established that it produces gains in academic achievement (Alexander, 2010; Cazden, 2001; Gamoran, 2009; Matusov, 2009; Resnick et al., 2015). However, with a few notable exceptions emerging (Mayer et al., 2018; Hardman et al., 2018), there is almost no research that brings these fields of study together. The significance of this dissertation research is that it merges the research on tracking with the research on dialogic pedagogy through the frameworks of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the sociology of pedagogy (Bernstein, 1990). Further, much of the extant research on

discourse, dialogue, and discussion is quantitative; discourse analysis has proved useful, and there is broad state-supported dialogic pedagogy professional development underway in the United Kingdom (Alexander, 2010; Hardman et al., 2018). While discourse analysis is invaluable for identifying effective dialogic teacher and student moves, it is essential to determine how students and teachers make sense of these shifts. This is where my qualitative case study extends the research on dialogic pedagogy.

Scholars worry that technology is impacting human discourse, and Terkl (2011) wrote that many students claim, "I'd rather text than talk" (p. 118). Also, the United States is experiencing a dangerous turn toward authoritarianism (Allbright, 2018; Snyder, 2018). For students to become discerning consumers in an age where facts are fungible and truth has become detached from opinion (Allbright, 2018; Leonhardt & Thompson, 2017; Snyder, 2018), a new emphasis on dialogic teaching may be warranted. Standardized test preparation has altered the landscape of education for a generation of public-school children (Ravitch, 2013); I hope this dissertation study can show the value of shifting toward a more humanistic version of education.

The next chapter will describe the compelling findings of this research, which advocate policy shifts that, if enacted, could restore public education to its status as, in the words of Horace Mann, the "great equalizer of the condition of men" (Mann, 1957, p. 87). In an era of growing economic inequality and polarized discourse, the power of education's role in a democratic society must not be minimized or hijacked by nihilism; the time has come for a new pedagogy of hope. This study makes a case for a pedagogical shift that holds the power to transform deficit identities created by tracking and to awaken students silenced by monologic teaching. Rather than reproducing the social inequalities, American public schools could reclaim their most aspirational vision: to imbue all students with the confidence to use their voices to

participate fully and intelligently as citizens in a democracy. The detracked, dialogic classroom

embodies the promise of public education in a democratic society. In the pages that follow, I

explain how, through learning how to articulate positions on issues relevant to the world they

live in and coming to understand that their voices are important, students' identity and agency

can be transformed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Overview of Findings

The findings from this dissertation study are focused on the practice of dialogic teaching in a detracked English Language Arts (ELA) class and include the analysis of how the teacher understands and facilitates the instruction and how students describe the experience. Through the theoretical lens of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this study sought to understand how dialogic teaching that values all students' voices and experiences may curtail the adverse effects of tracking and monologic pedagogy. Dialogic teaching is defined in this study as teaching and learning in which: (a) students and the teacher engage in inquiry and exploratory talk to co-construct knowledge; (b) all students are provided with frequent opportunities to express their voices; (c) students and the teacher adopt a critical stance; and (d) the classroom becomes a community of practice created through "respectful, supportive, caring relationships and inclusive and reciprocal participation norms" (Snell & Lefstein, 2018, p. 42).

As idefined in Chapter One, tracking is the practice of sorting of students according to perceived ability into separate classes (Burris, 2014; Oakes et al., 1997). Since Black, Latinx, and low socioeconomic status (SES) students are disproportionately relegated to the low track, there is a consensus in the literature that in tracked schools, separate is not equal (Burris, 2014; Mayer et al., 2018; Oakes, 2016; Oakes et al., 1997). This is the case because research has shown that teachers of low-track classes often deliver predominantly monologic pedagogy focused on test-prep, rote learning, and conformity (Burris, 2014; Gamoran, 2009; Goodlad, 1984; Hallinan, 1996). Findings have also reported how teachers may speak of their "low-track" students as

"having discipline problems, being unmotivated to learn, and having uninvolved parents" (Worthy, 2009, p. 272).

Students from the high track, on the other hand, receive access to a more challenging curriculum, better resources, and instruction (Burris, 2014; Burris et al., 2008; Gamoran, 2009; Oakes, 2005). The literature (Wortham, 2004; Worthy, 2009) documents teacher preference for students from the high track, viewing them as "every teacher's dream" (Worthy, 2009, p. 272). Students from high-tracks may internalize their identity status as privileged, viewing themselves as *better,* and *smarter* or, as Harry, a student from the low track interviewed for this study put it, "they just think they're more superior." Tracking decisions have the power to shape student identity or the "social positioning of the self" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586) and can affect students' opportunities to develop the intellectual dispositions needed for citizenship in a pluralistic democracy (Parker, 2010).

Role of Researcher: Critical Friends

A foundational component of this dissertation study is the relationship that Ms. L., the focal teacher of this study, and I built through the process of working and studying together since 2013. Our mutual interest in dialogic teaching emerged through proximity; we were both teaching at the same high school and studying for our second masters' degrees, and both were struggling to understand the growing complexities of teaching and learning. The Critical Friends model (Quate, 2004) promotes the principles of (a) being reflective, (b) making teaching practice public to each other, (c) asking for and giving substantive feedback to each other, (d) challenging each other's assumptions, and (e) believing their collaboration is a source of growth (Chaltain, 2010). As discussed in previous chapters, we formed a Critical Friends group in 2014 and adapted several protocols, including the tuning and consultancy protocols to evaluate student

work, lessons, and work conflicts. While analysis of data for this study was not literally faithful

to these protocols, Critical Friends principles informed the way we discussed teaching and

therefore provide a useful lens through which to view our process.

Ms. L. and I have engaged in sustained intellectual dialogue that has shaped our identities

as educators-—analogous to the way students describe the power of dialogue to shape their

academic identities. We have collaborated on conferences, led professional development,

pursued doctoral degrees at the same institution, and worked together productively as partners in

an academic fellowship. The trajectory of our partnership is illustrated chronologically in

Appendix A.

The Focal Class

As described in detail in Chapter Three, the focal class was an ELA college-level course

that included 29 12th-grade students. The official title of the course was "English College

Composition Introduction to Literature." The course was affiliated with Lincoln University (a

pseudonym)— students had the option to purchase credits that could transfer to their freshman

year of college as six credits. The course has run for almost 20 years as part of the 12th-grade

course offerings at Rockford High School. This was the first time Ms. L. taught the course.

My original plan was to study Ms. L.'s 12th-grade low-track class, in which her use of

dialogic pedagogy demonstrated the capacity of students from the low track. However, in the

mixed ability, or detracked college ELA class, the theory of situated learning was even more

useful. It provided a framework to study how students from the high-track classes formed a

community of practice as experts with students from low-track classes moving from peripheral

participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to expert participants. What occurred was, in fact, more

nuanced than I expected: there was as much diversity within tracks as between tracks in terms of

students' exposure to academic discussion.

The criteria I used for identifying students as low track or high track was determined by their tracking placement in 11th-grade English. In the analysis phase of this study, it became clear that students classified as being from the low track may have taken other high-track classes and vice versa. Additionally, the tracking placements of students did not reflect the overrepresentation of Black, Latinx, and low SES students in low track classes described in the literature (Burris et al., 2008; Gamoran, 2009; Loveless, 1998; Slavin, 1990) or the disproportionate number of low SES students in the low-track in Rockford High School ELA classes overall. It is possible that the factor of paying for the college credits in the class deterred low SES students from taking the class, thereby diverging from the larger racialized and socio-economic tracking pattern in the school.

Research Questions and Summary of Findings

This dissertation research investigated what dialogic teaching in the focal, detracked class looked like, the teacher's process in creating the instruction and how she perceived its impact. The study also sought to understand whether or how the dialogic, detracked classroom impacted students' academic identity, promoted the emergence of student voice, increased students' agency as learners and citizens, and finally, how students viewed the class compared to their other classes. The main findings reported in this chapter, which are discussed in detail and contextualized in the sections that follow, are:

1. Dialogic teaching's successful implementation in the focal detracked ELA class was a result of the focal teacher's *intentional* listening and speaking, explicit instruction of student talk skills, philosophical conviction that ability and intelligence are not fixed, and epistemological conception of learning as socially constructed.

2. The experience of the dialogic classroom transformed students' academic identity, promoted the emergence of student voice, and increased students' agency as learners and citizens.

3. Dialogic instruction was found to be an effective method for detracking, maintaining academic rigor that benefited all students.

4. Students reported little or no experience with academic discussion prior to Ms. L.'s class and throughout their four years of high school regardless of their track placement.

This research adds to the body of literature advocating for a vision of education policy in America that sees students as more than consumers and tests scores by empowering them to participate in their learning. The findings indicate that dialogic teaching in a detracked classroom benefited all students. Throughout 23 interviews, students described that the focal class amplified their voices, empowered them, gave them agency, and was completely different from their other classes. I observed an uncommon degree of purposeful, sustained student talk and academic rigor among students from both the low track and the high track. While students explained that in other ELA classes teachers read aloud to disengaged students, lectured about the author's meaning, and gave multiple-choice reading quizzes, in Ms. L., the focal teacher's, class, students read independently and then co-constructed their understandings through discussion. Over time, they came to reject the assumptions of monologic teaching in favor of a socially constructed view of knowledge as reflected in the routine student discussion comments, "But what about…?" and "I hear what you're saying, but is there another way to look at it?"

As U.S. society's discourse becomes increasingly polarized over political and social issues, students in Ms. L.'s classroom practiced disagreeing with each other in a moderated academic setting. They critically analyzed informational texts, literature, and visual media that provided the foundation for serious academic discussion about a range of controversial topics

and learned to consider multiple perspectives. If one concedes that all teaching is political (Bartolome, 1994; Dewey, 1966; Giroux, 1983; Parker, 2003), dialogic teaching may be a lever for political and social progress. Teaching students the skills to read critically, form and express ideas, and challenge their views by considering alternative perspectives prepares them for democratic citizenship. Students in Ms. L.'s class practiced collaborative reasoning and came to value the power of discussion to improve their thinking.

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part One answers the first and second research questions, which asked what dialogic teaching in a detracked class looked like and how the teacher perceived its impact on students. I introduce the reader to Ms. L. and discuss the findings related to her philosophy of ability and intelligence and the epistemology of learning as a socially co-constructed process. I contribute to the literature on dialogic teaching and detracking by explaining the strategies that were integral to creating a detracked, dialogic classroom where academically rigorous discussion benefited students from the high and low tracks. These findings emerged through observations of the focal class twice a week for 27 hours between February and May 2018. I also returned to Ms. L.'s classroom in September 2018 to understand how Ms. L. established norms and procedures at the beginning of the school year. I include a detailed analysis of the dialogic classroom obtained through observations, interviews with Ms. L., and interviews with 11 students from the low track and 12 students from the high track. Six students from the focal class were not interviewed due to scheduling conflicts.

Part Two explains the major findings and themes that answer research question three, which asked how students viewed their experience in the focal classroom and how it shaped their identity, voice, and agency. I also discuss how students compared the focal class to their other classes. I found that students believed the class was transformational to their identity—through

being empowered to discover their voices, students from the low track began to see themselves as smart. The class also gave students agency by (a) teaching them to construct arguments by considering diverse perspectives; (b) teaching them to express complex ideas with clarity, orally and in writing; and (c) teaching them to be critical consumers of a variety of written text and visual media. Because this study departs from most quantitative research of dialogic teaching by using a qualitative analysis of interviews, the second section of the study relies mostly on the voices of students to articulate the emergent themes.

As well as filling a gap in the literature by studying detracking and dialogic teaching as complementary, the findings of this research may prove useful to teachers and teacher educators for whom the trajectory of students' lives and respect for the diversity of their human experiences is an essential component of learning. A core principle underpinning both Ms. L.'s pedagogy and my study is that all students deserve an It is hoped that this study challenges the status quo of tracking and monologic pedagogy by providing evidence of a better model that values students' capacities to think and express original ideas. The proliferation of education policies that encourage compliance over creativity is part of a broader, fundamentally undemocratic neoliberal enterprise. Further, in Rockford High School (a pseudonym). I saw and heard entrenched beliefs about student identity—*lazy kids*, *kids who don't care*— that perpetuate harmful notions of fixed identity, which translate into deadening classroom experiences for too many students (Worthy, 2009). This study answers the question of how Ms. L.'s dialogic, detracked ELA classroom is different and why it matters to the students in her classroom and beyond.

In the following section, Ms. L.'s teaching practice is discussed in more detail. First, a typical 40-minute class is described, showing how Ms. L. facilitated a complex discussion of a

controversial issue. I describe Ms. L.'s dialogic stance, attitudes, and practice, which included explicitly telling students that all voices matter, practicing intentional listening, promoting met-level talk, and creating a community of practice among students from low and high tracks. An explanation of the importance of situated learning to the dialogic process is explored by analyzing what I observed during 40, 40-minute classes over seven months.

Part One

The Dialogic Classroom

The main themes discerned pertaining to the effective implementation of dialogic teaching in a detracked class and the teacher's perception of the process were:

1. Ms. L. believes that (a) learning is socially constructed and that (b) student ability and intelligence are fluid rather than fixed. These beliefs were essential to creating a dialogic classroom that maintained rigorous academic expectations for students from the high and low tracks.

2. Ms. L.'s commitment to building a community of trust and rapport was reflected in her instructional habits, which included intentional listening, intentional speaking, explicitly privileging all voices, being available to students, and designing heterogeneous small groups that served as communities of practice. These strategies allowed students the safety required to practice academic discussion without fear of embarrassment or being wrong.

3. Ms. L.'s instruction was designed to ensure that all students' voices were heard every day, and as the norms of academic discourse were established through explicit instruction, formative assessment, and peer review, students attained the confidence to contribute increasingly sophisticated ideas to the community.

4. Ms. L.'s instruction focused on revision and process, requiring students to construct knowledge through exposure to multiple perspectives. This transformed students' ideas about believing in a single right answer to seeing the value of co-constructing knowledge through discussion. In addition, by (a) participating in discussions that developed their thinking; (b) engaging in peer review; and (c) structured revision strategies, students recognized that they could produce excellent work. The process, therefore, challenged students' views about their ability and intelligence.

Table 6 provides an overview of the main takeaways obtained from observations and interviews developed in answering the research question: What does dialogic teaching look like in a detracked classroom, and how does the teacher perceive its effect on students' identity, voice, and agency?

Table 6

How the Detracked Dialogic Classroom and the Focal Teacher Transformed Student Identity, Voice, and Agency

	Teacher Moves	Classroom Practice
Student Identity	• Ms. L.'s ideology that ability and intelligence are *not* fixed was routinely expressed to students. • High expectations were applied to all students regardless of former track placement, and all student completed the same work. • Ms. L. was available during her free periods and through email and texts to provide students support with academic needs (and personal issues when appropriate). • Attention to grades promoted student confidence.	• Student reflection promoted growth of skills, which translated to beliefs about their ability. • Meta talk peer editing and revision helped student see the potential of their ideas. • Participating in academic discussion on the same level as peers shifted deficit identity of students from the low track. • Completing serious academic work—research paper, book talks, etc.—increased students' sense of competence and identity as learners.

Student Voice daily	▢ Ms. L. communicated that "all voices matter." • View that discussion is the "holy grail" of the classroom was transferred to students. • Daily formative assessment allowed students to understand how to improve and scaffold their progress. • Ms. L.'s practiced intentional listening validating that students' contributions to conversations were important. Students gradually internalized that their voices mattered, leading to confidence and enthusiasm.	• Prompts were provided to scaffold the skills of discussion, producing increased fluency in student talk. • Talking in small groups created a community of learners—students from the low track leveled up and students from the high track were exposed to different ideas. • Many students engaged in academic conversations for the first time. • Practicing the skills of academic conversation with guidance and feedback allowed students to increase their fluency as speakers, developing more sophisticated language and advanced reasoning. • Writers' notebooks provided a way for student to develop ideas before making them public.
Students' Agency	• Maintaining rigorous academic expectations forced all students to acquire more sophisticated reasoning, demonstrated through critical literacy in reading, writing, and speaking. • Ms. L.'s stated goal was for students to be able to discern the difference between opinions and evidence-based arguments—this promoted habits of democratic citizenship.	• Talking with diverse classmates in the detracked setting about controversial issues promoted students' ability to communicate viewpoints intelligently and articulately, while considering all sides of an argument.

One of the distinctive aspects of this study derived from my access to Ms. L.'s teaching

practice, which allowed me to study dialogic pedagogy and detracking in a way that other studies

have not been able to. Typically, researchers study a random sample of classrooms and rate their dialogic aspects, or they introduce professional development on dialogic pedagogy and observe the results (Alexander, 2006, 2010; Applebee et al., 2003; Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003; Wells et al., 2009). This dissertation research, however, is significant because it focuses on Ms. L, who, over 25 years of reflective practice teaching all ability and grade levels of students, implemented the structures necessary to create a dialogic classroom.

Ms. L.'s practice hewed closely to the scholarship on dialogic teaching[1]—a body of literature compiled from observation of best practice, theoretical frameworks, epistemological conceptions of learning, and discourse analyses (Alexander, 2006; Applebee et al., 2003). Dialogic teaching places extraordinary demands on a teachers' "knowledge and flexibility" (Alexander, 2010, p. 6); Ms. L.'s commitment to the dialogic classroom developed as she pursued an advanced degree in literacy, re-examining how students learn to write.

Alexander (2010) described the challenges to making the shift from monologic to dialogic teaching: "The list of obstacles to pedagogical transformation is headed by the professional culture within which classroom decisions are made and by which all but the most determined and talented teachers are bound" (p. 4). Ms. L. worked in a school that perpetuated a culture of good enough; that Ms. L.'s persistence in such a climate is a testament to her radical resistance to a system that confers deficit identities on students and allows them to sit silently through four years of high school.

The next section explains how Ms. L. facilitated student dialogue and taught students to

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[1] By all measures, it aligns with the core principles outlined by scholars in the field, as illustrated in the appendix.

deconstruct and discuss controversial issues. I also explain the relationship between the framework of situated learning and detracking, analyzing the ways students from the low tracks and high tracks benefited from establishing a community of practice.

Snapshot of a Dialogic Lesson

Walking into Ms. L's classroom, I knew I would observe some variation of her typical 40-minute period. Reflected in Figure 1, the procedures included the following steps:

1. Ms. L. introduced a question and prompt.

2. Students constructed a response in their writers' notebooks.

3. Students shared responses with a partner and completed an additional task.

4. Partners formed larger groups and discussed their thinking and answers.

5. Students jigsawed to another group to collect additional perspectives.

6. Groups shared out to the class.

7. Ms. L. summarized and introduced a new task.

The next section demonstrates Ms. L.'s dialogic moves and illustrates and explains the complexity of her instructional design process. I describe a lesson designed to examine the controversial, many-sided issue of race in America by building on understanding constructed in an earlier lesson on the issue of immigration. This lesson format gives a sense of the flow of students from pairs to groups to accomplish a particular set of instructional goals. While many procedural patterns were employed, it is reflective of the fact that during all of the observations, every student had several opportunities to talk through and build on ideas. The steps are illustrated in Figure 1, and then explained through the transcription of an actual lesson.

Figure 1. Illustration of a Dialogic Lesson
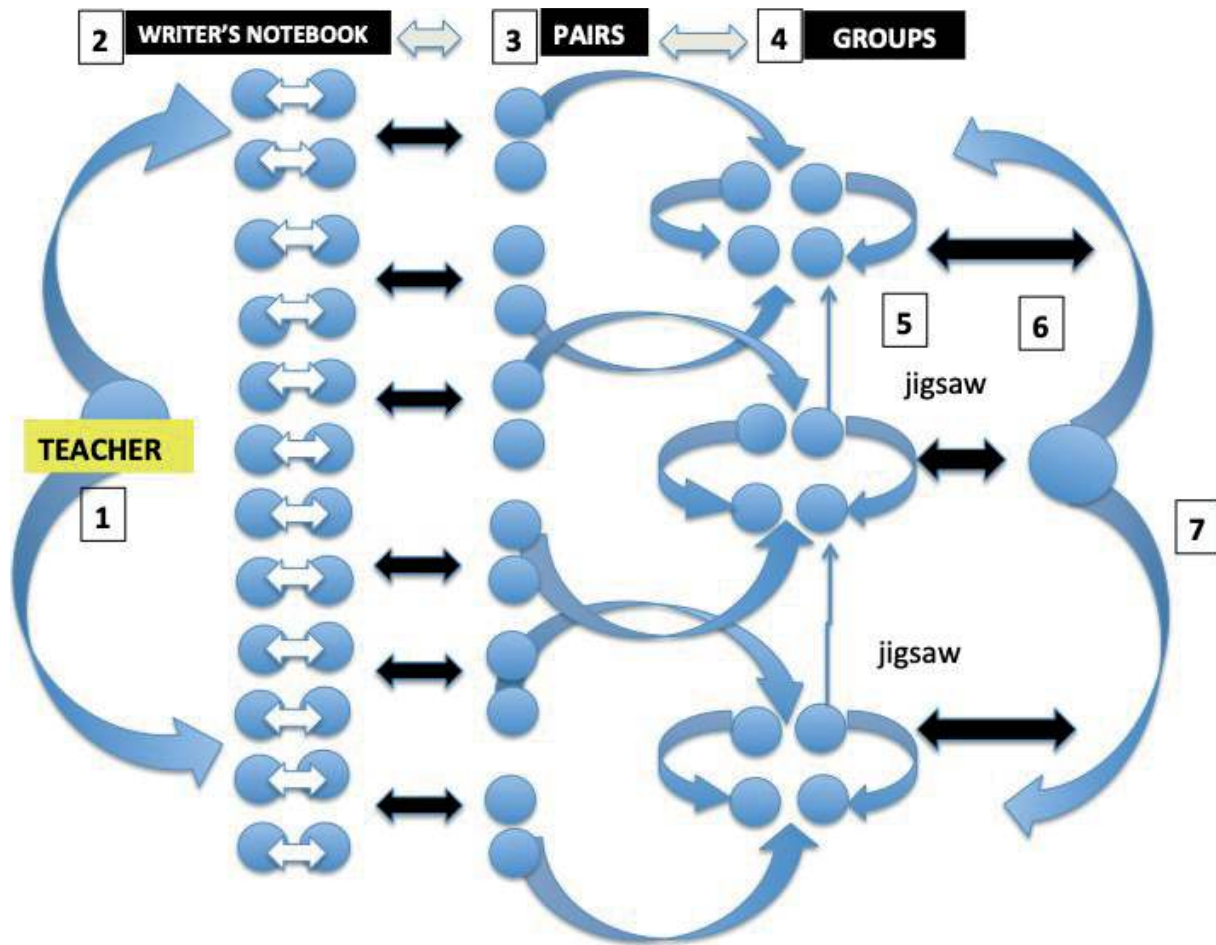
In a lesson on controversial issues, Ms. L. reinforced the critical process of deconstructing a

controversial issue before engaging students in a dialogue about race in America. She allowed

students to spend a full 40-minute period reviewing a previous lesson to reinforce the conceptual

elements of a controversial issue. Through revisiting the idea that there are multiple perspectives

and *layers* within issues, students became increasingly more open-minded and articulate.

Snapshot of a lesson: Deconstructing controversial issues by grappling with

complexity

One technique Ms. L. used to expand students' views of a controversial issue was to

break down the process into a series of steps. [Note: Numbers bracketed within the transcript

correspond to steps represented in Figure 1.] In introducing the question "Does race matter in

America?" Ms. L. first reminded students how they had deconstructed the issue of immigration.

[1] Ms. L. explained to the class that racism "seems to be an issue that has no finite solution and

we can't talk about it unless we think about all the layers that are embedded within this issue. So

let's think back to when we were talking about the issues within the immigration argument first."

She then moved through a series of instructional procedures to review how students had

uncovered the layers of a complex issue by revisiting the class's work on immigration.

Several weeks earlier, Ms. L. had assigned a reading about the border crisis. Students had

responded in their writers' notebook, filling in a T-chart with examples of different "layers"

within the issue, with supporting quotes and page numbers on one side and explanations for their

selections on the other. On this day, as every day, they had their writers' notebooks and were

able to easily access the labeled entry. **[2]** Ms. L. said,

> You're going to talk about immigration, with your partner, look at your notebook entries,
>
> and tell me one of the issues that are inherent in this controversy-in other words, before
>
> you can take a position—what we have to think about— before we "build a wall' like you
>
> know who says. Talk to your partner first before I even hear from you. Uncover some
>
> ideas.

Students then discussed in pairs. **[3]** Below is a sample of Ms. L. joining in with a

student pair talk:

Ms. L.: So what did you talk about?

Student 1: We said that you have to think about violence in these countries before you just send

them back—you have to think about the dangers.

Ms. L.: So if you're a politician and you're arguing this, how will this influence the way people

listen to your argument if you bring this up?

Student 2: Well, you have to use facts like the specifics with like Honduras —like how much violence there is—you could bring that up.

Ms. L.: OK, so your audience will be more persuaded to think about your position—Fred, what were you going to say?

Student 1: People who have essentially no choice to leave, like, their lives are being threatened— they're going to die and I'm sure a lot of people leave and then get sent back to the place they escaped.

Ms. L.: So why is it important to consider that?

Student 2: Because they would die.

After about five minutes, after Ms. L. had visited all pairs, pairs moved into groups **[4].** This process allowed students to express and hear viewpoints that prepared them to speak in increasingly larger configurations and allowed students to talk to and hear most of their peers' ideas. As Ms. L. circulated among the groups, she encouraged talk, probed for deeper thinking, made a point of listening to let students know their voices matter, and checked for gaps in content understanding.

Below is a sample of group talk as Ms. L. joined the conversation:

Ms. L.: How many sides would you say there are to the immigration issue?

Student 1: Many. Because it's not one perspective— you can't just say let them in— like there's reasons why—let's say one immigrant girl comes to America to get with her parents but they can't do the paperwork because it takes too long—so she winds up coming in because she's in danger, but regular Americans are paying taxes.

Ms. L.: What do you mean by "regular Americans"?

Student 4: Not like regular Americans but a person that lives here and has a job and pays taxes and all that stuff; not like an undocumented person that works off the books just getting free stuff.

Ms. L.: So what's your point?

Student 3: That's not the only issue—there's other issues, too.

Student 2: I mean there's a moral issue and ethics issue; if you build a wall, other people will just die in their countries.

Ms. L.: And the fact that you take this into consideration shows your audience that you're aware of these things. So if George is up on a platform and he's famous, how will that influence the way you listen to his argument?

Student 1: Because he didn't just give it as one sided— he listed the many-pronged tidbits of the immigration issue that many people beat around—they just don't say or aren't aware of because it is a case-by-case situation, so you can't just say 'oh don't let them in' or 'let them all in'—this is a gray area that you address.

After visiting all groups, Ms. L. decided that certain groups were generating ideas that she wanted more students to hear, so she instructed student reporters from each group to visit other groups to gather additional perspectives **[5]**. She said, "I want other groups to know what your groups talked about—*I* know, but I want the other groups to know— just tell them what your thoughts were and then we will address our new understandings." After five minutes, the reporters moved back to their original (home) groups, discussed the new ideas, and added them into their notebook entries on the perspectives within the issue of immigration. Finally, groups shared out with the whole class **[6]** and Ms. L. made summarizing remarks and gave an assignment for the next day **[7].** Ms. L. addressed the class:

So, you all agreed there are gray areas. And taking it back to racial injustice or the

problem of racism, it's just as complex if not more than the immigration issue. So I came

up with these questions and I want you to write about them and tomorrow we are going to

discuss them in groups of four… So I want you to think about the problems that James

McBride and his family dealt with [In the novel *The Color of Water*] and see if you can

jog some ideas.

Discussion Driven by Content

Notice the amount of content that underpinned Ms. L.'s instruction. She did not ask

students to discuss complex issues without preparation—she used an informational text to

prompt the immigration discussion and began to delve into race through the context of literature.

It is essential to make the point that the dialogic classroom and academic conversation only

produce learning when student talk is tethered to complex text or media including "essays,

journalism, political writing, speeches, graphics, science writing, nature writing,

autobiographies/biographies, diaries, history, film, criticism, comics, advertisements," as

described in the class syllabus. One of the assignments students commented on most frequently

in interviews was the research paper they wrote that investigated a topic of their choice. Ms. L.

explained that there were multiple steps in teaching students the research process through

dialogue:

After they do the first initial [topic search], there's reflection. There's written reflection.

They share it with their peers. Then we share it as a whole class to see the different

experiences that people have. Because I'm noticing there's got to be these steps, right? It's

got to be conversation between the partner, the triad, or the four people. But then that has

to be shared with the other people. Then somehow I have to tie it up in a neat bow and

bring it together. I think that's part of discussion pedagogy because I don't believe that I

can just, 'Oh, let kids talk'.

Although the analysis of ELA content and student gains in reading and writing are beyond the

scope of this study, a table explaining the literacy skills and concepts students learned over the

course of the year can be found in Appendix F. It is important to emphasize the distinction

between academic discussion or dialogue and social classroom talk that achieves no academic

purpose.

   Persistence. Ms. L.'s instructional design facilitated complex conversations between

students. She changed groups routinely, had students generate their own questions, and always

required student preparation (reading, writing, or both), including homework that supported the

next day's conversation. Ms. L. did not relent when students tried to check out—whether through

absences, skill deficits, or emotional issues. Through a process of rigorous record keeping and

grading formative assessments, drafts, reflections, and writers' notebooks and handing work

back quickly, she identified students who were falling behind and promptly intervened.

Interventions included parent phone calls, student conferences, and providing extra help on all of

her free periods. A word frequently used by students to describe Ms. L.'s attention to their

individual progress was "intense." Her persistence drove students to breakthroughs in

understanding; then, propelled by each small victory, they were motivated to challenge

themselves. Conversations with peers were essential to this process—through situated learning,

they began to internalize their success, and their voices began to emerge.

The Social Construction of Knowledge

   In a typical dialogic lesson, students combined ideas and questioned each other's

thinking. A key aspect of dialogic pedagogy is meta-level talk, where students reflected on and

monitored the ideas of discussants (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013). While students discussed

their thinking about, for example, what they thought the important points were in a passage of

literature, Ms. L. provided feedback at regular intervals to extend the conversation and provide

further inquiry, saying, as in the observation above, "keep delving into those ideas." As students

practiced building on each other's ideas and discovered how discussion could shape an

undeveloped thought into serious, thoughtful contribution, they began to understand the value of

the dialogic process. Providing multiple opportunities for inquiry based dialogic interactions

allowed students to experience knowledge as co-constructed.

The socio-cultural theory of learning is a profound departure from monologic pedagogy,

which positions the teacher as a spokesperson for a unitary story and places students as

receptacles for what the teacher decides is knowledge. When students began to understand that

learning is a fluid, socially constructed process, they could shift their focus away from their

individual ability (or lack of ability) to memorize and repeat facts. With scaffolding and support,

students came to trust the process of participation in the community of practice to support their

learning in the dialogic classroom. The shift in perspective about the nature of learning from

individual to socially constructed allowed students to see themselves as capable and competent,

and created the conditions in which they could learn from each other without fear of adverse

judgment. Once this classroom ethos was established, students began to "come to voice" (hooks,

2009).

"Waiting for Me to Tell Them What Something Means"

Ms. L.'s practice evolved over the years as she became frustrated with the effectiveness

of teacher-centered instruction to generate learning. As she explained in interviews, while she

always incorporated student-centered activities as part of her work and continues to admire the

traditional Hunter (1982) lesson plan, as she became more confident in her foundational technique, she began "letting go" of control. She described how when she moved from the middle school to the high school that students were "waiting for me to tell them what something means and this, I think, contributed to this letting go of control because I realized they weren't thinking." Ms. L. reflected that as she started letting go of control, she allowed herself to "loosen up," leading her to develop deeper and more personal connections with students. She explained:

> When I started…to let go in a sense, started to get the kids talking more, I kind of got back into how people learn and that's what I've always been curious about, more than anything else is how people really learn…because I've always struggled with learning myself. Things don't stick in my head unless I really grapple with the information.

Soledad from the high track reinforced this idea when she said, "In other classes you know the answer because you were told it, not because you had to delve into it." When Ms. L. was asked to describe the importance of student talk to developing understanding, she said, "It's like the holy grail of the classroom." She explained that "If they don't talk, the thinking doesn't stick; the learning doesn't stick." Interestingly, Mala, a student from the low track, when asked how Ms. L.'s class was different from her other classes, said, "I feel like the way we learn, it's gonna stick more." Ms. L. explained that, "students need to have the opportunities to question with another person. They need to figure out what they don't know so they can ask someone." Students from high and low tracks described how this helped them to have "confidence" in their ideas. This theme is explored further in Part Two, where students explain their perceptions of how the dialogic classroom transformed their identity, voice, and agency.

Intentional Listening, Intentionally Talking

A vital component of Ms. L.'s dialogic classroom is how she routinely communicated to

students through a variety of overt and discrete practices that all voices mattered. I observed the importance of formative assessment to the work— she frequently adjusted lessons to respond to comments made by students and focused on supporting participation from students who were shy or tentative speakers. This communicated to students that they were being heard, and not simply engaging in chatter. Ms. L. engaged in a critical practice that she called "intentional listening," which, as she described, required discipline and focus. She explained, "It's tiring because you try to concentrate on what the student is saying to you…but I also need to redirect the conversation with the discussion so another student responds." For example, in a discussion on racism in America, White students talked about how stereotypes were one of the themes that contribute to racism, and they made claims such as "anybody can be a racist," and "I don't really think one race can be more racist than another." Ms. L. gave students space to continue the conversation for a few minutes and asked the only student who had remained silent, a South Asian girl who appeared increasingly uncomfortable: "So, Rucha, you said one day that racism is in existence in the real world as well as in the novel—do you agree with what's being said?" The student replied, "In my country, there are problems, but my parents taught us that everyone's the same." This shifted the conversation and another student said, "Stereotypes might be taken too seriously, and may be, like, what caused—like, created society."

As students worked in pairs or in small groups, Ms. L. deftly navigated the room interacting with all students. I found the key qualities in her interactions with students included (a) restraint—being careful not to give students answers or interrupt them, (b) focus—attending to students when they spoke; (c) humility— which she described as "checking her ego;" and (d) caution— being careful not to dismiss another's point of view or style of speaking (Parker, 2006). During observations, I tracked Ms. L.'s movement from group to group—she almost

always asked an open-ended question such as, "But what about…," a clarifying question, "So

you're saying that…" or an invitational question , "Do you agree with what Meryl just said? Do

you have anything to add, Harry?" Most distinctly, she listened seriously, mouth closed, head

slightly tilted, notepad in hand. When asked to describe her process of facilitating student

dialogue, she explained:

> I do a lot of annotative work. I write down things that kids say and…I'll say at the end of
>
> the class, 'All right, well so and so said this; did anyone else have a similar idea?' I'll
>
> always let the kids know I'm listening.

Ms. L. intentionally listened to students' group talk, which entailed trying to identify

misunderstandings, content gaps, or creative ideas. Rather than reflexively adding her ideas, she

jotted down notes that she often referenced in her comments to the students at the end of class or

the following day. Not only was this a highly effective instructional planning strategy for

expanding understanding, but by amplifying their voices, it also showed students that she

believed their ideas mattered. As this process continued throughout the year, students began to

internalize the worthiness of their ideas, and their identity as students shifted. Laura from the low

track who told me that until taking Ms. L.'s class, "I never thought I was smart at all," explained

how Ms. L. "Let's everybody say what they think and doesn't just let one person talk." Laura's

view of herself changed and she developed agency because of how "[Ms. L.] listens to your

opinion and she expects you to say what you think. I never had a teacher who did that before."

As Carson from the high track described intentional listening: "She just watches how we learn.

She can, like, just see us learning." He noticed Ms. L.'s critical stance, in which she stepped back

and allowed students the space to develop ideas, rather than interrupting.

Intentionally Talking. Ms. L.'s interaction with groups also included listening to see if someone was monopolizing the conversation and attending to students who were not talking. She would ask a quiet student "So, what are you thinking?" and listened to their ideas. She also asked to hear "a voice that's not being heard." When she interacted with groups, Ms. L. said, "I'm not just talking with them, I'm intentionally talking with them." Ms. L. described her respect for students and how, through the processes of intentionally listening, intentionally talking, and reflecting, she allowed students to develop their ideas and build deeper understanding:

> I learned…that just asking that first question will get kids to start talking and build their own discussion skills, but then there's got to be reflection…if you are inductive with your teaching and you kind of blend it with what they're thinking—because kids know a lot and if you ask them the right questions, they can give you some great answers. They're not these empty vessels to be filled with the information. There's a lot of information there, so it's through the reflection and through that, when they talk, things expand.

> Perhaps most critically, Ms. L.'s intentional listening was an element of her dialogic stance, in which she positioned herself as learner as well as teacher. She said that during group discussions of controversial issues,

> It's almost as if I become one of them during those kinds of conversations if it's a small group. And I almost take on the attitude that I'm going to learn from them and they're not going to learn from me. So I use these small phrases, 'What do you mean?' 'Can you explain that?' "Do you know what he means?' 'Did you ever feel that way?'

Ms. L. talked about mindfulness, saying, "I have to be very careful about my diction." She explained how she used a high degree of control to regulate what she said in the classroom, "checking her ego" and being "very careful about how I say certain things." She added:

I think it's okay for a teacher to share their views, but we do have to remember that these

kids are young adults and they're very impressionable…I want kids to wrap their heads

around issues. I want them to question issues, so my questions have to…get them to a

place where I'm not just telling them what I think.

A key theme is that Ms. L.'s interest in what students have to say is central to the effectiveness

of dialogic teaching. However, while focus on authentic questioning is important, as Wells

(2009) and Alexander (2010) pointed out, if teachers do not focus on student answers to their

authentic questions as well, learning is not possible.

     Meta-level talk and peer review. As students became more comfortable talking in their

groups, Ms. L. encouraged meta-level talk, which is essentially talk about the discourse. As

Kuhn and Zillmer (2015) wrote, "meta-talk [is] particularly important because what students say

about discourse potentially reveals the concepts and norms they hold with respect to the

discourse" (p. 79). In observations, this was noticeable as students included phrases like, "Can

we find a better way to say that?" and "You answered a different question than the one I asked,"

and, "Can we find a quote so that our theory has more validity?" and "If we put both of those

ideas together, I think our argument would be stronger, what do you think?" Because Ms. L.

routinely asked students to evaluate their thinking, reasoning, and understanding, this meta-level

talk became a part of discussions and helped groups of students to become increasingly

sophisticated in the way they spoke and the ideas they generated.

     Meta-level talk was also reinforced as a strategy to improve writing through peer review,

as Ms. L. taught students the skills to evaluate their own and other's work while internalizing the

disciplinary skills of composition and literature. This process clearly familiarized students with

disciplinary vocabulary that became evident as the year progressed. For example, in one

conversation, a student said, "We've been working on the differences between paraphrasing, summarizing, and direct quoting. And that kind of leads to the details that you should insert into your paper and what is considered too much." A second student added, "Quoting directly kind of gives you everything; you're not going to give your opinion or your voice. It's literally just the person who you've taken the quote from." Ms. L. explained the peer evaluation process that she required of students, starting with simple questions, like, "What was your impression of your partner's paper" and then, as the year went on and students acquired more expertise and fluency, becoming more specific, such as, "Does the writer include focused and relative commentary, analysis, interpretations?" Ms. L. also described embedding reflection and analysis into the process of peer review, asking follow-up questions such as, "What did you say to your partner?" and "What kind of feedback did you receive?" She explained,

> Rather than just tell kids what to look for, you blend it with what they're thinking because kids know a lot and if you ask the right questions, you'll get [good] answers. They're not these empty vessels that need to be filled…it's through reflection and [talking] that things expand.

As the community of learners asked each other questions and evaluated each other's reasoning, and the teacher asked questions driving further reflection and reasoning, the classroom became dialogic.

Views About Student Identity

Ms. L.'s ability to successfully adopt dialogic teaching for a detracked class was related to her ideology about pupil identity, viewing student ability as fluid and all students as competent. She explained:

I've said to my low-track classes in the past: 'you know, you're no different from a [high-track] class'…It's really just supporting and reinforcing their humanity, their human right to an education, to believe in their intelligence as capable human beings. I mean…you wonder why we have so many kids with problems [when they] go through a whole school system thinking that [they're] just not as good as these other kids and nobody may say it explicitly, but it's the message that's internalized.

Ultimately, dialogic teaching is more than a set of strategies or scripted lessons. Because each classroom is a community of individuals, the practice must be infused with social and emotional intelligence. Committed to understanding the unique voices of each student, Ms. L. embraced the principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which, as Paris and Alim (2014) wrote, "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic process of schooling" (p. 88). Ms. L. rejected deficit attitudes about students from different tracks and cultural backgrounds and used dialogic teaching to allow students to be "able to see themselves and be seen by others as capable and competent" (Bartolome, 1994, p. 178).

Caring for students and respect for all voices—"I want to hear what *you* think"

Ms. L. provided a powerful example of what can be achieved when deficit ideologies about students in the low track are rejected. Ms. L. created a climate and structure that made students feel safe enough to express themselves in an academic setting, often for the first time. In observations, it was clear that all of the dialogic teacher *moves* described in the literature (Alexander, 2010; Nystrand et al., 2003)—such as asking open ended questions, making space for interpersonal relationships, and creating an ethos of respect and caring, occurred regularly in Ms. L.'s classroom (see Appendix G). Sandra, from the low track, explained:

> It's a very welcoming environment…She constantly repeats to us, 'In my class you're open to say whatever you want to say.' Like if you have a complete opposite opinion, then go ahead and say it.

All of the students from the low track described how Ms. L.'s attitude toward their ability gave them confidence to speak. Maria from the low track said, "There's teachers that look down on you, but Ms. L. doesn't do that at all." Andrea, another student from the low-track,

> She understands our strengths and our weaknesses. Even the little things— she understands everyone in the class. I feel like a lot of teachers don't have that kind of relationship with everyone.

Julia from the low track said, "She makes everybody's ideas feel important." Creating a climate where everyone felt like their teacher cared for and respected them was an aspect of Ms. L.'s practice that was essential to creating a dialogic classroom and to detracking.

While many scholars (Alexander, 2006; Applebee et al., 2003; Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Cazden, 2012; Larson, 2000; Lyle, 2008) have written about the skills to implement the protocols for dialogic teaching, these strategies can be little more than tricks without a teacher who is fully committed to the philosophical stance that all student voices matter and should be taken seriously (Alexander, 2010; Mayer et al., 2018; Nystrand et al., 2003; Parker, 2015; Resnick et al., 2015). Inviting students who had systematically been excluded into communities of practice is critical and fundamentally democratic. As Ms. L. explained:

> I think when you promote a classroom that values people and when the kids know you don't care whether they're the smartest one, when they realize that when you do teach them, treat them with respect, a natural outcome of that is being able to have respectful academic conversations. I don't think that's a mystery.

In the detracked setting, approaching a group where some students from the high track were comfortably adept at following directions and getting the "right" answers, Ms. L. always asked the quiet students, who appeared tentative and perhaps insecure, "I want to hear what *you* think." This subtle but constant respect for all voices had a powerful impact—as evidenced by the consistent refrain from the student interviews. Meryl from the high track said, "She makes everybody's ideas feel important." The humanizing element of dialogic pedagogy, in which all voices are valued and the teacher and students learn from each other is a critical foundation for promoting a dialogic classroom. The importance of laying a foundation of respect, particularly in a detracked class, cannot be overstated, nor did it go unrecognized by students.

   Nonjudgmental listening—giving students space to make mistakes. Relationships that formed and interactions that occurred, formally and informally, between Ms. L. and her students were essential to establishing the value of all voices. In particular, students from the low track, who were exposed to deficit models of schooling and internalized deficit labels from other students and adults, benefited significantly from Ms. L.'s demonstration of nonjudgmental acceptance. In the discussion on race the day after the immigration lesson, Ms. L. gave students broad latitude to express opinions that many teachers would have interrupted. For example, when Ms. L. joined a group of four students discussing the question "What are the issues inherent in this problem of racism that we can't deny are out there? She observed the following exchange:

Ms. L.: You're talking about stereotypes?

Student 1: Yeah.

Student 2: So a Black guy tries to get a job and he has to support his family and the business owner's afraid he's going to get robbed and the Black guy doesn't get the job.

Ms. L.: So is this a White businessman?

Student 2: Or anything—anyone can be a racist.

Ms. L. did not interrupt to correct the student. As she explained to me in a conversation about discussing complex, controversial issues:

> I look at the kid's expressions. I give them the floor. I give them opportunities to explain what they mean. And then many times, what will happen is kids will work through their own ideas. And by the time they're trying to explain something, they're saying, 'well wait, that's not exactly what I really mean.' And if I interrupt quickly, then it interrupts their thinking so it's better to keep my mouth shut.

The student, in fact, went on to say that racism against Blacks in America is a serious issue.

Many students described the importance of these interactions with Ms. L., in which they were treated with respect rather than the indifference or hostility often present in interactions between low-track students and their teachers. For example, Maria from the low track explained:

> I feel like certain teachers don't give the opportunity for somebody to speak at all. Let's say you walk into a class. You have this teacher and she sees that you're not doing good at all. I feel like some teachers look down on you. They're just like, 'Oh, this student is not doing anything in the class. I don't think he wants anything.'... I feel like Ms. L. is the type of person that if she doesn't see you doing your work, she's going to ask you, 'What's wrong? Are you okay?' She knows you can do it.

Ms. L. said that she needed to establish trust and rapport for both low-track and high-track students—as they began to feel safe, they felt more empowered to take academic risks. The need for students to feel confident that they could share ideas without being mocked or embarrassed for their comments was independent of tracking status. While this does not come as a surprise, the key takeaway is that teachers' mindfulness of how they communicate with students and

moderate the way students speak with each other is critical to shaping an inclusive climate of academic rigor.

Detracking

Coaxing meaningful student dialogue required multiple strategies by Ms. L., as seen in the lesson excerpt in Appendix B, including sentence prompts and explicit teaching of discussion skills (including looking at each other). In the detracked classroom, this shift was complicated initially by an additional barrier of an internalized sense of inferiority (identity) expressed by some students from the low track. Ms. L. described the importance of steadily breaking down these barriers by explicitly valuing the ideas of students from the low track:

> When you have a kid that has been a ["low-track"] student and they're intimidated by your so-called ["high-track"] student…so that just takes time, but that's where the teacher comes in also. That's where you have to visit the groups and respect what that ["low-track"] kid has to say as well and make the other kids see that you're respecting it.

According to Ms. L., another early challenge that needed to be addressed in the detracked class was a tendency for students from the high track to dominate group conversations. This domination could be attributed to confidence instilled by high-track affiliation, the educational advantages that accrued by exposure to more academically demanding curricula or a combination of these factors and others. Nonetheless, with Ms. L.'s daily guidance, by the middle of the year, students from both tracks began to listen to and build off of each other's ideas regardless of track placement.

When asked to describe the effect of her work on students from both tracks, Ms. L. replied:

I see such growth in the kids, socially, academically. They're writing better. They're more

inclined to speak in class. They're more motivated. It works. They're not used to it and so

I think we've created this system where the kids know they're being educated differently

in different classrooms.

An important finding that emerged was that many students from the low track and the

high track, after four years of high school, reported that they were not required to speak in a

sustained and academic way until they reached Ms. L.'s class in grade 12. Monologic pedagogy

predominated in their previous classes, where students were expected to listen rather than talk.

Harry a student from the low track who also attended high-track classes in other subjects, talked

about how this class was different from others:

It's not just teaching. The teacher just doesn't get up there and talk for 40 minutes. She

lets you talk, She lets you discuss. Discussion is a very big thing. Yeah she teaches, but

she teaches in a way that you're allowed to talk. You're allowed to give your voice. That

compared to my other classes? Ten times different.

Leveling Up. While there were instances of students from the high track helping students

from the low track, most students from the low track leveled up quickly enough to report enough

confidence to participate in sophisticated and extended conversations. When I asked at the end of

the year what she noticed about the ways students interacted across tracks, Ms. L. answered:

It's a lot of different things, like body language, for instance. They're looking more

directly at the people they're talking to. They don't tend to keep their eyes down. They're

a little bit more comfortable with making mistakes, more comfortable with sharing ideas.

Now of course, that's in degrees. Some kids have grown more than others, but I would

say every single kid who was a [low-track] student, grew in some way, shape, or form.

The data show that students' discussion fluency was less dependent on former track status than on their exposure to daily, extended opportunities to talk with each other in well-scaffolded academic conversations. In other words, after a period of adjustment, students from the low track were as likely to be natural discussion leaders and fluent participants as students from the high track.

Situated Learning in a Detracked Dialogic Classroom

Observations of the focal class revealed a clear sense of community as demonstrated by a high level of on-task behavior and consistent engagement in higher-order cognitive tasks. Work started at the bell and continued throughout the period. There were few to no occasions when students were unclear about the intricately designed activities and expectations. When asked to describe the class, Julia from the low track said, "In Ms. L.'s class, I kind of feel like there's actually, like, a point...Like, I'm actually getting something out of it." Most students, when asked to describe the class, echoed this sentiment. It was evident that serious work was being done and for the majority of each period, this entailed students analyzing and investigating content in dialogue with each other.

One of the critical strategies Ms. L. used to facilitate student talk, having students work in small heterogeneous groups, was especially crucial in the detracked setting. It was in these groups that, in the parlance of situated learning, *novices* joined *experts* to form *communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Ms. L. initially designed groups based on balancing talkative and quieter students— making a decision not to look at their track status. If tracking were a valid measure, novices would be students from low tracks and experts would be students from high tracks. However, in Ms. L.'s detracked classroom, that was not always the case. Even though some high-track students dominated discussions early in the year, some students from the low-

track had more linguistic competence than their counterparts from the high-track, and factors

such as shyness and extraversion played a factor. As it turned out, balancing the social-emotional

dispositions and personality traits of students was as crucial to creating community as attending

to tracking status.

Many students, when interviewed, talked about feeling supported to talk by working in

small groups. Students from high and low tracks spoke about being less afraid of being

embarrassed by getting the wrong answer than if they had to speak in front of the whole class.

Students were able to check their answers in low-stakes small conversations, while Ms. L.

continuously assured them that all ideas had value. For example, in one lesson I observed (see

Appendix B), she asked the group, "Did you hear what Joe just said?" in order to amplify his

voice. Most lessons were built from student-generated questions that invited multiple

perspectives to the conversation: the dialogic classroom is by definition driven by questions that

lead to more questions.

Absences. Because student understanding was constructed through situated learning,

which, as Ms. L. said was "more than group-work," she was agitated by student absences due to

field trips and scheduled private music lessons during the class hour. This agitation may be

understandable when considering that the learning occurred through interaction with peers in the

communities of practice—no amount of makeup work could replace the time lost. Since the

learning was dependent on social and dialogic interaction, it was impossible to duplicate with

traditional makeup work.

The next section explains the findings derived primarily from student interviews. Two

primary findings were that (a) the detracked dialogic classroom had the power to transform

student identity for students from high and low tracks; (b) the detracked, dialogic classroom

benefitted students from both tracks; and (c) a strong theme that emerged from these two findings was that students from the high track were as likely to have been educated in predominately monologic classrooms as students from the low track.

Part Two

"I Realized that I Have a Voice:" The Power to Transform Student Identity

When students engaged in dialogue in the classroom, they became part of a community where the learning impacted the way they viewed themselves. Learning itself involves the construction of identity; according to situated learning theory, "Dialogue is about helping students to locate themselves within the unending conversation of culture and history. With dialogue comes identity" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 199). An undergirding principle of dialogic teaching is that identity, or the way a person is viewed by himself/herself and others, is not fixed but co-constructed through interaction with others (Gee, 2000; Snell & Lefstein, 2018; Wortham, 2006). As Snell and Lefstein (2018) wrote, "Pupils who are identified (and come to identify themselves) as competent and productive members of the classroom community are likely to feel more valued in the classroom…than those who have been identified as incompetent or otherwise problematic" (p. 45). It is of major significance that students' experience in the dialogic classroom produced the positive effects on student identity described below.

Students in this study, from both the low track and the high track, talked about how Ms. L.'s class helped them develop the confidence to express their views, about having their opinions valued, and about finding their voices. When students played an active, socially constructed role in their learning through dialogue, it shaped their identity as learners. When asked to describe the impact of discussion in the class, Laura, a student who attended low-track classes in all subjects, replied:

I do think it increases the level of learning, how she does it. I think she pushes you

because she knows you have potential…it makes you think a lot more and it makes you

come up with ideas. Your…whole view changes in a way…we do a lot of discussing in

the class and it helps. We listen to other people's opinions, ideas, and everything. I think

her way of teaching is really good.

Laura connected Ms. L.'s belief in her ability to think more deeply, going on to say that her

"whole view change[d]" about her potential. Students reported that dialogic pedagogy had the

power to change the way they perceived themselves academically, in relation to others, and as

competent human beings whose ideas matter. Maria from the low track talked about how her

deficit identity shifted through participation in dialogue:

At first, I thought I was the dumb one in the class. Yeah. I was like, 'Oh my god. This is

my first high class that I've pretty much ever really taken.' Now I walk in there and I

communicate with my group. I talk to people. Like I said, I'm not talkative at all, but her

class, it's comfortable. It's pretty comfortable.

Ms. L.'s listening strategies and expectations, combined with the experience of dialogic

pedagogy and exposure to students from the high track, genuinely transformed Maria's identity

as a learner. If Maria had not taken Ms. L.'s class, she might have left high school believing she

was "dumb" and remaining "uncomfortable" expressing her views. Maria's single story

powerfully illustrates the significance of this research.

The emergence and amplification of student voices were described earlier as a central

feature of Ms. L.'s practice. Not only did she embed opportunities for all students to speak in

each class, but she also took steps to ensure that space was created for all viewpoints and levels

of sophistication, contributing to their identity as learners. When asked how Ms. L. facilitated

discussion in the class, Maria replied:

> I love that we do group work…that definitely helps because say she puts us in a group
>
> and she sees people aren't talking. She'll go up to them and be like, 'Listen, everyone has
>
> to be talking. This is a group interaction. You'll need to put your ideas in.' She makes
>
> everybody's ideas feel important. Which they are. But she makes sure that we know
>
> they're important and that they should be heard.

This is another example of how the situated learning framework provided a foundation for the

dialogic pedagogy to produce shifts in student identity. When asked how it felt to be pushed to

talk in a way she was not used to in school, Maria went on to say, "When I walk in the class, I'm

just like, 'Okay. I have a voice. Use it.' She makes us use it. She pushes us, like I said before. I

like that…I'm just like, 'All right. It's time to talk.'"

The theme of *emerging voice* was widely repeated, even though I did not include the

word in my interview protocol. For example, when asked how do you feel about being a student

in this class, George from the low track indicated:

> I think that this class I'm the most eager to learn in because it's just a completely different
>
> dynamic…everybody has their own voice and everybody has something to say. And if it's
>
> different, we don't judge each other for it. We know that it's a safe space for us to say
>
> whatever we want to say and get genuine criticism on it. Or not even criticism just a
>
> comment that won't make us feel like we're demeaned for saying something. But
>
> generally in school, I think we're stripped of certain things once you enter a school
>
> building… it's the way it's always been.

This comment spoke to the level of skill used by Ms. L. to confer value on each student's ideas. It also demonstrated George's experience with the ideology of monologism in which "someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 81). George seemed to have processed this ideology, at least on its surface, as one that oppresses students and creates a "culture of silence" (Freire, 2000).

Bella from the high track described the value of interacting with other students and "actually thinking:"

One, you don't have to listen to the teacher lecture for 40 minutes, which is a change of pace. And then two, you get to interact with other kids in the class, which is nice to talk to the kids. And then three, you're actually thinking. In these other classes, you're just listening and digesting the information and putting it on the paper. But here, she makes you come up with your own ideas, which is nice, because we don't get to do that ever. I like actually thinking and not just regurgitating information.

Pedagogy that forces students to think for themselves is empowering. As Alexander (2006) wrote, "learning and identity are inseparable: they are aspects of the same phenomenon" (p. 81). Also, as Bella said, "you get to interact with other kids"—the model of situated learning, with small heterogeneous groups practicing academic conversation together, was central to the success of the pedagogy's ability to shape student identity. When asked if the class was easy or difficult, Bella replied, "It's just you have to really think, and you have to really take it into consideration your own thoughts and really evaluate…It's kind of a little bit like a self-discovery." She went on to explain:

It's good to be taken out of your comfort zone because you learn so much more. You're more open to this and that. I'm speaking from how I feel. Being out of my comfort zone,

it helped a little bit. I saw everybody's different point of views. I realized that I have a

voice. My opinion matters.

While Maria remained silent and felt "dumb" for three years in low-track classes, Bella

described not ever having to "think for herself" in three years of high-track classes. In general,

students from high tracks and low tracks described a similar experience in Ms. L.'s class—of an

emerging agency, a realization that their opinions matter, and *of "finding their voice."*

Students from the High Track also had to Find Their Voices

A subtheme generated by the data is that students from the high track were often as

inexperienced at expressing their ideas in a discussion as their counterparts from the low track.

When asked why she would recommend the class to a friend, Patricia, a student from the high

track, replied, "Cause you...I think you would participate more in it and you would have

discussions and you would have...like, find your voice. You wouldn't feel left out. Everyone

participates, especially in the small groups; you wouldn't feel left out. Yeah, that's it." Both Bella

and Patricia, 12th graders who had attended four years of high-track classes, claimed to have

"found their voices*"* in Ms. L.'s class. When asked, "Did you discover anything about yourself

in this class?" Carlie from the high track answered, "I discovered that, like, I have, like, a more...

a greater voice than I realized." Students from both tracks who had been too shy or uncertain

about speaking in other classes were able to express themselves in Ms. L.'s class. When Patricia

from the high track was asked why she had not talked in other classes before this year, she

answered, "I don't know. I think sometimes what I have to say isn't the right answer, or it's not

good enough." When I asked, "What is different in this class?" she answered,

Ms. L. will always say, 'You're never right or wrong.' Everyone has something different

to say, and not everyone's going to be right. Everyone has different interpretations of how

> to understand things. I think her saying that…definitely helped me…be more comfortable in her classroom. Now, I'm not afraid to say something in her class. I'll just say what I think.

Again, we see how Ms. L.'s class shifted the monologic pedagogy that students from the high track were used to. Dialogic teaching produced positive results in Patricia's view of herself as competent and productive; a shift in identity that produced increased confidence levels and agency expressed as "I say what I think." When I went on to ask, "What is it like for you to be in a class where you're required to talk?" she explained,

> Well, maybe before I wouldn't always say things that I thought because ... maybe I couldn't really either put it into words, or I didn't know too much about the topic, so I would feel uncomfortable saying something I didn't really know. But now I'm kind of more open to doing that.

The type of exploratory talk Patricia referred to is a feature of building understanding through dialogue; it required students to be comfortable enough to take the risk of being wrong, and is supported repeatedly by Ms. L's assurances that "there are no wrong answers." Building the confidence to speak, however, was also reliant on substantive content-based readings selected by Ms. L. While not discussed in detail in this dissertation, it should be emphasized that preparation and the study of background information were foundational to any substantive discussion in the class.

In sum, when students were given the opportunity to see themselves as competent and productive, the way they understood themselves and were viewed by others changed; the dialogic teaching empowered students and impacted their identity. While several students from the low track reported being encouraged to express their voices for the first time in an academic

setting, students from the high track described similar enthusiasm for the rare opportunity to discuss their ideas. In an era that focuses on test scores and scripted curriculum, such comments should give pause. Student claims such as: "I have a voice; use it," "my opinion matters," "it's like self-discovery," "I actually like thinking," and "I realized I have a voice" are not often used to describe monologic low-track and high-track classes, like AP, that focus on tests as the dominant measure of effective teaching and learning.

Grades, Student Identity, and Becoming "Our Best Student, Our Best Self"

Another sub-theme under the finding of dialogic teaching's power to transform identity was the power of grading to increase participation. Students internalized Ms. L.'s expectation as caring and respect. All students were asked about the level of difficulty of the class, and although never explicitly asked about grades during the interviews, many brought up the topic. What emerged from the data, unsurprisingly, was a consensus that Ms. L. implemented her stated grading policy consistently and that she demonstrated an "intense" work ethic. Ms. L. made sure to let students know that a grade attached to "every bit" of work done. On the first day of the semester, she made two specific points: "the important thing is to introduce yourselves; the important thing is to look at each other," and "As I come around to look at your work…you only get half credit on late assignments." As Ms. L. circulated, she pointed out a detailed student paper and said, "I have to give her a check plus plus—reward extra effort." When student groups were given their first quick task, she said, "Remember, you're going to get a little class grade with this—I don't ask you to do anything for no credit."

It was not surprising that this consistency of grading strongly encouraged students to complete assignments and take the class seriously. What was less expected was the sharp

connection between grades and creating a dialogic community. When asked to describe how Ms.

L. encouraged students to participate in discussions, Karolina, a girl from the low track said,

"She'd grade you on how much you participate, so it basically pushed you to speak. And then, at

the start of the year, I definitely didn't speak a lot, but now I just wanna ...I feel like I want

everyone to hear what I have to say."

While seemingly incongruent with the dialogic relationship, grading was a significant

driver of fostering the community of practice. Grades were instrumental in ensuring that students

completed assignments; since pre-writing prompts in the writer' notebooks drove the small group

talk. The only times when Ms. L. lost patience and expressed irritation with students were when

assignments were not completed and when students were absent, as the following exchange

illustrates:

> Some of you have zeroes and I've been taking work late. Some of you—you really
>
> deserve a zero—I'm getting tired of the lack of responsibility…When you're absent from
>
> this class, you should assume you're finishing the work, and if you don't, you're not
>
> prepared.

Notice how *intense* (a term students used often) Ms. L. is about students being unprepared or

absent; what seemed on its surface like scolding was ultimately internalized by students as

caring. For students from the low track in particular, expectations translated into a form of

respect.

There was no ambiguity about the steps required to move from the status of marginalized

learners (or peripheral participants) into the community of practice where they could soon keep

up with their high-track peers. This promoted a sense of agency and a shift in student identity for

many. Sandra from low track classes spoke about identity and grades:

I think Ms. L. is such a great teacher and I feel like she sets the level, that she has such

high expectations for us, which I feel like a lot of teachers…lower their expectations or

don't set the bar so high. So… me and a lot of my classmates, we always want to make

sure that we're on point in that class. Not fearful if we aren't, but we know that she'll give

us a consequence if we're not, so it really pushes us to always be the best that we can be

in that class...It's almost like we challenge one another to be the best that we can be. Our

best student, our best self, in that class, which I think is really good because I know other

classes, everyone's just kind of there to be there. In our class, we're always working; we

always know that we have to be on top of our work. Otherwise our average is going to

drop.

When asked a follow-up question about whether it is "about the grades? Do you think if she

didn't do so much grading, it would be less that way?" Sandra added: "Not really, because when

I, personally, go to her class, it doesn't feel like a burden...The time passes fast because we're

always talking about something… it just feels comfortable all the time." Even as Sandra talked

about being "on top of her work" so her average does not drop, she also claimed the class felt

comfortable all the time. This is a paradox; demonstrative authority is anathema to a perfect

dialogic community of practice. However, in the context of the school environment where

students were formally tracked for five years, the teacher needed to be a strong and consistent

leader in shaping the culture in a detracked class, particularly for students who were subjected to

low expectations for most of their school years.

 In the next section, the argument will be made that the detracked, dialogic classroom had

benefit for students from low and high tracks as (a) students from low tracks leveled up through

entering the community of practice; (b) students from the high track expressed admiration of and

appreciation for the ideas of students from the low tracks; (c) students from both tracks had the opportunity to be exposed to multiple perspectives, previously denied them through monologic classrooms and tracking.

Positive Benefits for Students from Both Tracks

When it came to combining students from the low track and students from the high track into groups, the result of the findings showed that both groups benefited. Students from the low tracks were challenged and motivated by their peers in the high tracks. On the other hand, students coming from the high tracks appreciated the different points of view that students from low tracks brought to the discussions.

Diversity and Leveling Up

Differences in verbal fluency and confidence between students from high-track and low-track classes were evident to some students at the beginning of the year. Asked if she could tell who the "low-track" students were, Andrea from the high track said, "I think I can. I think it's mostly based on participation." However, she went on to clarify, "Yeah. I noticed in the beginning of the year that you could point out who the ["low-track"] kids were and as the year has gone on…you could see them changing a little bit...now they are more willing to speak first." As students from the low track, who were less experienced with academic talk, practiced in small groups with their more experienced peers, the boundaries between groups became less obvious. Emily from the low-track explained how she changed: "Last year in my class, I want to say there were like four kids who always had something to say in class like they could always participate and I'm just like, 'How do you do that?'" When I asked if working with more experienced, high-track students helped her, she replied, "I feel like...My personal experience, I feel like

they've …just being around them and having them answer a lot has kinda pushed me to wanna answer more so I can.. so I kinda pull my own weight instead of having everyone else do that."

The teacher's instructional design and the heterogeneous structure of the community of practice ensured that all students' voices were heard. At this point, around mid-year, students' speaking frequency and complexity across tracks began to level. Freddy, another student from the low track, described the process: "When I hear someone say something that I thought, then I'll be like, 'All right then yeah, okay, so I'm on the right track.' And then someone else will say something else, and I'll be like, 'All right, then yeah.'"

Most students from the low track described that hearing other students express ideas gave them more confidence to talk, often by confirming their own emerging thoughts. For example, Karolina explained,

> Sometimes in classes, you just feel like, 'Okay, I'm isolated. I don't have anyone to talk
> to. Do I know if I'm correct or not…I feel like [in this class] having my partner saying
> 'Oh, yeah I thought that too—' that gives me the reassurance that I'm right.

When asked what it is like to work in groups with students from the high track, Laura from the low track, answered,

> When you have someone who puts an example for you, it's easier for you to follow their
> footsteps. These kids, they're in [high-track] classes, they study a lot, they work hard…
> and I think that motivated me a lot to want to do good in the class.

Research on detracking describes how crucial it is for teachers of detracked classes to create opportunities for students from the low and high tracks to work together. Rubin and Noguera (2004) described that typically, when students were allowed to select who they wanted to work with, they tended to cluster with students from their track, leading to a stratification of learning.

However, they noted, "In classrooms where teachers deliberately mixed students in seating arrangements [small groups in this case], students…were more likely to work across these differences" (p. 94). Ms. L.'s attention to creating heterogeneous groups, conscious of the need for community building, assured that students from the high and low tracks would work together, as Laura's comments indicated. Another student from the low track, Justyna, explained how differences between students from low and high tracks worked positively in the class:

> You can see who was on different levels, with the reading and stuff, but I feel like, as a whole, when you have a group discussion, it brings everyone on an average playing field. It just brings everyone's understanding to the same point because if I don't understand something and say someone else explains it, then I'm back up to their level because now I understand what they're thinking and their thought processes.

Justine's comments illustrate a core benefit of detracking; Rubin and Noguera (2004) could have been describing Ms. L.'s class when they claimed, "In challenging each other to examine new viewpoints, these students embodied the ideals of education for a democracy, an ideal that would be much more difficult to realize in a…homogeneous setting" (p. 97)

Viewed through the framework of situated learning, students from low tracks enter the community of practice as novices and over time, through practice and exposure to experts or high-track students, they become full, legitimate participants. Patricia, a student from the low track, described this phenomenon:

> Well, I did feel at the beginning…When I heard that there were so many [high-track] kids, I felt like, 'Oh my God, I'm not smart enough to be in the class.' Because I just... I felt like I wouldn't really understand what... like, they would get it much more quicker than I would. And I'm not the only one, 'cause my friend also felt that way. She's in the

same class as me. But as the year moved on, I think I sort of catched up to their level and

now I understand it better, like the same levels that they do.

It was not uncommon for students from the low track to express deficit identities conferred by

their track status, but more important to this study is how Patricia's identity changed from being

"not smart enough" to being able to understand "at the same levels" as the high-track students.

By May, many students had forgotten about the track distinctions altogether. In a

testament to Ms. L.'s consistent attention to valuing all voices and to dialogic teaching's

humanizing properties, when, asked in May if he noticed differences between tracks, George

from the low track responded, "I honestly don't...only when kids…are out for tests, I'm like 'oh, I

forgot that you were really high up there in the ranks, because I'm just talking to you like we're

all the same.'" Students from the high-track were not as quick to forget their prior experience in

high track classes. Some described the detracked class as a relief from competition, and many

expressed favorable views of the way in which students from the low tracks thought about issues,

articles, and literature.

The next section shows how the diversity of learners and ideas increased the depth of

learning and complexity of ideas. Students from the high and low tracks recognized that the

combination of multiple perspectives enriched their discussions and, ultimately, their learning.

The Benefit of Diverse Perspectives: "Big Bubble of Knowledge"

As described below, all students found value in what Bakhtin (1981) called

"heteroglossia," or including the voices of students from different socio-economic groups,

ethnicities, and genders and accommodating different values beliefs and perspectives (Nystrand

et al., 2003). Bakhtin (1981) argued that heteroglossia is fundamental to understanding the

world, and indeed, it is a component of developing agency as citizens in a democracy. As

described in Chapter Two, public schools in a pluralistic society provide an opportunity for

students to come into contact with people from a wide range of socio-economic, ethnic, and

racial backgrounds. Boundaries imposed by tracking segregate students from each other,

simultaneously conferring a privilege to specific groups and strengthening internalized biases.

Through dialogic teaching in a detracked class, I found that these boundaries can be pierced, and

students can begin to hear the viewpoints of others. Public schools, by bringing together

representatives from groups who would not normally interact, place students within a socio-

political network (Parker, 2010). While schools have historically conferred middle-class

Eurocentric views (Bartolome, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014) by promoting

exposure to a broad range of perspectives, dialogic pedagogy can challenge bigotry and

parochialism and provide students with tools for democratic citizenship.

Detracking's benefits in the focal class went beyond students helping each other with

academic work. While some students from the low track were motivated by the expertise of

students from the high track, students from the high track mentioned a benefit of the detracked

groups as well. When asked how the blending of different tracks felt to her, Soledad said,

"Coming from the [high-track], it was refreshing to hear different viewpoints from people that

weren't in that little bubble where the smartest kid is always the one talking." When asked to

describe how Ms. L. got all students to talk and how the blend of students from the low track and

high track seemed to him, Carson from the high track repeated this sentiment:

> I think what I like about Ms. L. is she'll see that extra hand and she'll be like, 'Well, wait.
>
> What do you have to say about something?' And then that extra hand could be a kid who
>
> used to be in [low-track] classes and they'll have, oftentimes, a smarter viewpoint than
>
> the [high-track] kids do. I think what kids from [low-track] classes are able to do, is relate

things to their lives and what's going on around them. Whereas, a student who's been in

[the high -track] their whole career can only really focus on the text that they are given...

You know what I mean?

Carson's perspective reinforces the finding that detracking benefits students from both tracks

(Burris et al., 2008; Oakes et al., 1997; Wells & Serna, 1996; Wheelock, 1992; Wortham, 2004)

and shines light on the various identities both imposed and internalized, that accrue to students

through tracking. Carson's quote also reveals a compelling sub-theme about the way students

from the high track view their high-track classes that will be explored further in the next section

of this chapter. Students from low-and high-track classes expressed awareness of how diverse

perspectives could enrich conversations and transform their identities. In a 2016 report, Wells et

al. proposed how diverse schools benefit all students:

> There is a pedagogical value in having multiple vantage points represented in classrooms
>
> to help all students think critically about their own views and to develop greater tolerance
>
> for different ways of understanding issues. (p. 8)

This awareness can be expanded to a broader understanding of the benefit of diversity in

society, a democratic ideology that public schools have a responsibility to promote. Paris and

Alim (2012) suggested, "A pluralistic society needs both the many and the one to remain

vibrant" (p. 95). Dialogic pedagogy in a detracked class appears to embody this American creed

of *e Pluribus Unum* -- Freddy, a student from the low track, explained,

> We all get along in our class; we all intertwine. When we change groups, we all tell our
>
> new group what we learned in our last group and just cause this huge, big bubble of
>
> knowledge, basically, of what we're all sharing. We're always sharing what we're doing,

all the time, with anything... It's good to have different points of view... I feel like people

see things from a different point of view.

Notice how Freddy alluded to the teaching methodology designed to expose students to

as many voices as possible. When asked about the experience of peer reviewing, another widely

employed strategy that provided students access to other levels of expertise and diverse

perspectives, Andrea, a student from the low track, expressed a similar view to Freddy's:

So one person may give you correction because they feel this is more enlightening and it

will help your paper and the other person can give you a totally different standpoint and

as a whole, your paper becomes really good because you have all these different

viewpoints and you have Ms. L. telling you what she thinks.

It is interesting that Andrea described Ms. L.'s viewpoints as one among the many, rather than

the authoritative one, indicating that the classroom ethos has shifted to embrace the dialogic

pedagogy. Once students internalized the value of voices beyond the teacher's and recognized the

potential of collaboration to deepen their understanding, they began to describe the group

discussion in terms of sense making and depth. Laura from the low track explained:

If we're doing a project or we're reading something and I have a different point of view

and someone else has a different point of view, when you talk about it, you see both

sides, the validity in both sides. You kind of often have to merge our thoughts together so

it becomes one big viewpoint, but it's so elaborate. It's so in depth, it makes so much

more sense because we're able to discuss, evaluate, change, and alter things.

In the dialogic classroom, students began to accept the view of knowledge as co-

constructed. In a departure from monologic pedagogy, this reflected a radical shift in how pupils

thought about knowledge, authority, and learning. Carlie from the high track described her processing of the concept of heteroglossia:

> Just because I might have...if I have an idea and I only have one part of that idea, someone else might have the other part, and then we can bring it together, and that'll make maybe the perfect idea for that scenario, or something.

Meryl, another student from the high track, agreed, "Once you get into the discussion and everyone brings their original ideas together, that's when you create better ideas."

In sum, until Ms. L.'s class, students reported very few opportunities to exchange ideas among students within the high track and low-track classes, and none at all across tracks. Firm boundaries both within and between tracks, and monologic pedagogies combined to stifle communication among students from different backgrounds. This status quo of teaching and learning is problematic in preparing students for citizenship in a healthy pluralistic democracy. Further, as illustrated below, many students from the high track expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of diverse perspectives they were exposed to. They complained that their high-track classes stifled the expression of multiple perspectives by promoting competition and conformity.

"Programmed like a robot:" The perils of privilege. High-track students did not always internalize their track status as a privilege; some described dissatisfaction with the boundaries created by tracking and expressed a preference for the detracked classroom. Roland explained:

> So I feel like you never get the chance to really explore and meet new people because once your academic standing is established, you're with the same people in all those classes, whether you're taking [high-track] or [low-track], you're always with the same people. So that's why I feel like…this class…let me open up and see all different perspectives and stuff and different mindsets and different thought processes.

Roland's comment illustrates a sub-theme that emerged: several students from high-tracks felt there were clear disadvantages to tracking. Even though they were the privileged group, they were critical of the competition, the rigidity of the tested curriculum, and the lack of diverse viewpoints in high-track classes. For example, when asked to describe her experience in the detracked class, Meryl from the high track noted:

> In [high-track classes] you have a very formatted way of thinking, and then you have kids who are kind of taught like [low-track] kids, and they have a more creative way of thinking. So then you put that together and you get your right answer…the way we're being taught, it's like being programmed like a robot.

While still framing the end point of discussion as arriving at "the right answer," Meryl's comment revealed noteworthy respect for the "creative" ideas of students from the low track. This suggests dissatisfaction with the narrow scope of education's purpose (i.e., to get into a good college) in high-track classes, and their tendency, as described below, to be predominately monologic.

Several other students from the high track also reported that the top five students in their usual classes dominated any student talk that occurred and, as students from the low track, reported few opportunities for discussion overall. When asked to describe working in groups with students from the low track, Soledad from the high track explained:

> I actually kind of like it, because...I feel like it's more intimidating when you're in a group with all ["high-track"] kids, because…you're always thinking about how the kids around you could be smarter than you or you don't want to say the wrong thing, and sometimes if there's one kid in the group who's significantly quote-unquote smarter than the rest of the group, you just naturally adhere to what they say or just follow their lead. But when

there's a diverse...like the [low-track] kids, they speak their ideas. I feel like they try to

give ideas and it's nice to hear new things. You're not just hearing the same thing.

When I asked, "But did they necessarily have the best ideas? And "what makes a person smart?"

Soledad answered,

That's what I was saying, basically, because you just...It's fixated in your head that this

kid is the smartest one, or whatever, in the group, or they know what they're doing. But

then, when you're in the group with kids that are at different levels, then when you

actually put your ideas together, I feel like that's what makes it a better idea. Because

you're hearing perspectives that you don't even think of, but I feel like if it's four [high-

track] kids, you've all been on the same track for four years, you all have the same

mindset. It's not as split up.

Martin, another student from the high track, also commented on the diverse views in the

detracked class, repeating the theme and describing how competition is a negative feature of

high-track classes:

Yeah, it definitely is refreshing because, if you think about it, when we are in those

["high- track"] classes, you're ranked pretty much. And that's how you feel once you're in

it. Either you're the...You could be smart, but you're at the bottom of the class. Or, you're

smart and you're at the top of the class. And that's definitely a big stress because you

wanna be at the top. Yeah, it's definitely competitive, and it's hard to talk sometimes, and

we're usually trying to talk over each other. It's like a dogfight in the class sometimes.

And then when you have ["low-track"] kids, you have different ideas. Because in [the

high-track], everyone has the same mentality and the same way of thinking.

These comments describing how student perceive their high-track classes as

compared to the detracked, dialogic class provides a strong counterargument to opponents of detracking. The most vocal and influential players in maintaining the status quo of tracking are parents who fear detracking will shrink their children's privilege and diminish their social capital (Oakes, 2016; Rubin & Noguera, 2004; Wells & Serna, 1996).

The final section describes the third main finding of this research, which was how the predominant experience in high school of students from low and high tracks was of monologic teaching. In other words, the expectation drawn from the literature that high-track classes would tend to be more dialogic than low-track classes was not borne out by this research. All of the students interviewed explained that they preferred dialogic teaching to monologic teaching. They claimed the dialogic classroom produced deeper understanding, promoted student voice and engagement, and encouraged original thinking. This raises the question: if neither high-track nor low-track students are receiving the superior dialogic instruction, what is the purpose of tracking?

The Case Against Monologic Pedagogy, "Are We Done Yet?"

An important finding that emerged was that many students from the low track and the high track, after four years of high school, reported that they were not required to speak in a sustained and academic way until they reached Ms. L.'s class in grade 12. Monologic pedagogy predominated in their previous classes, where students were expected to listen rather than talk. For example, Mala, a student from the low track, when asked to describe the class, said, "We talk here—you're allowed to talk," revealing the contrast between Ms. L.'s class and most other classes in the school and beyond (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Carbonaro, 1998). In traditional monologic classrooms, the teacher talks and the students listen; as Bakhtin (1981) described it,

"someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error" (p. 81). Ms. L. commented that monologic teaching

> disrespects their intellect. It disrespects their ability to interact with the information. There's something to me that's...it undermines their development. So that they come to me in 11th grade or 12th grade, and if they haven't had those opportunities to interact, and they're made to believe that what the teacher says is true all the time, what's on page 16 is the most important thing. If you don't challenge them to research, and to read, and to survey, and to question, to inquire, then how is being spoken to for 40 minutes learning?

For students at Rockford High School, "talkative" is a negative report card comment. When asked to describe her other classes, Karla from the high track said, "Most teachers don't like you talking to other people." Language is a means of control (Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1990; Freire, 2000), and in schools, it is often exclusively the domain of the teacher. Providing all students access to linguistic competence (Bourdieu, 1984), which can change the trajectory of their lives, is vital to the human development of students, to the mission of public schools, and the disruption of the reproduction of inequality in society (Bernstein, 1990).

Most students from both the high track and the low track reported that their classroom experiences were almost entirely monologic until they took Ms. L.'s class. Meryl, from the high track, said, "When we're in Ms. L.'s class, it's more ,'Well what's our opinion?' And then different classes, it's like, 'Okay, this is the way it's taught. And now we're gonna have a test Tuesday.'" In monologic classrooms where students are not permitted to talk, "curiosity is replaced by monotony and learning withers under the weight of dead time" (Giroux, 2013, p.

169). Justyna, a student from the low track, explained the differences between Ms. L.'s class and others, describing fluid thinking as a component of the class:

> You're forced to think outside the box in this class. If you have a 'run of the mill' idea, honestly, it won't really fly. You really have to dig deeper in this class, or else you're just not gonna get it. You're just gonna think, well, why can't we just do this? Instead of, why don't we bring up multiple points? You really can't just think one way; you have to be fluid, and I think that's how this class is so different, because...usually in classes, we're taught one way…You learn the one way, and that's it. You don't ask questions, it's just how it is. But then with this class, there are many different ideas to think...many different sides. So, you really can't streamline it; you have to go around. You have to be fluid.

Students from the high track also described attending predominantly monologic classrooms. Asked to describe the difference between Ms. L.'s class and her other classes, Pooja commented,

> Oh, it's completely different, because in other classes, we kind of just sit in our seats. The teacher stands up and teaches and talks a lot, gives you a handout and you do the work. This class is a lot of interaction between yourself, other people, partnership groups, talking; sometimes we go in a big circle and talk as a class and hear everybody's ideas with presentations. And there's just so many things that other classes don't do.

Other students from the high track echoed Pooja's description; Carlie explained the monologic experience in her high-track classes and why she liked Ms. L.'s class better:

> Yeah, so pretty much every class I've taken has been kind of structured the same way, especially 'cause I took majority [high-track] classes. So it's just the teacher standing in the front and then everyone just sitting down taking notes for 40 minutes or two periods straight. So it's exhausting, but [Ms. L.'s] class is so different, because the pace just

completely changes. There's times where she literally...She'll say 10 things all period. She

won't speak at all. So it's nice, because you're still learning, but it's not in the traditional

sense that you have to listen to the teacher all period long. So that's why I liked it.

Carson from the high track also remarked that his past experiences in ELA classes were

monologic: "In my past English classes, the teacher would do all the talking. She would just give

us study guides; we would do our homework while we were in class or whatever. She would read

to us." Patricia from the high track described doing "the same thing for 40 minutes and listening

to the same voice and just taking notes." When I discussed these comments with Ms. L., she was

deeply disturbed but not entirely surprised. She has advocated for change in her department, but

despite excellent results with student achievement and engagement, her colleagues have not

embraced her dialogic practice.

Several students mentioned that the teacher led some discussions in their 12th-grade

social studies class, but Dolores said, "I don't put my thoughts in like in English." When asked

why not, she said, "I'm afraid that if I say it wrong, the attention's automatically drawn on the

fact your answer wasn't right or your thought didn't make sense." These were the "dogfights"

Martin mentioned earlier, where the "top five" students dominated the conversation and the

opportunity to speak was not open to all. Bella explained, "He'll [the teacher] discuss it with you,

but it's almost like an intimidating type of factor because I feel like, I'm more self-conscious of

what I say unless I know, for a fact, that it's correct in that class."

Students from the low track also described their experiences in school as predominately

monologic and expressed a strong preference for the dialogic classroom. They reported that, with

the exception of the burdens of competition, their high school experience mimicked those of

high-track students. Like their high-track peers, students from the low track described that Ms.

L.'s dialogic teaching was more "meaningful" and less "boring." Freddy from the low track described his experience, "I just find that teachers kind of drone on about something that no one really cares about…whereas Ms. L. has like top poking questions. She just doesn't ramble on regurgitating information." Mala described a typical monologic class: "When you're just copying down the notes...I never retain anything I copy on the notes because I'm just copying it to get down in my notebook, but I never end up looking back at it." She then said, "You're not really reading into what you're copying down. So if you're talking about it, I feel like you have such a better understanding because you're discussing and you're building upon it." It is clear that Ms. L.'s class has allowed her to internalize the value of discussion. I asked her, "So, up until 12th grade what was your experience of going to school?" and she answered, "Worksheets and writing notes off the board."

Finally, Harry from the low track articulated the benefits of dialogic teaching, describing how he mastered concepts by using them in authentic practices. His indictment of monologic instruction should be a call to action for educators:

> The majority of classes you learn the topic, do a few...For instance math, you learn the topic then you practice it, then you do homework, then you take quizzes and tests. But here, it's just like you...She doesn't really teach the topic, she lets you learn it. She relates it to other things. We didn't learn paraphrasing and summarizing; we used it and then we learned it in our research papers. That's how it's done…I feel like this way it's gonna stick more. 'Cause if a teacher's just in front of me talking, I tend to zone out sometimes and it's like, "Oh, are we done yet?" If I'm in those classes when I study, I study for the test. Memorize this. Memorize this. Memorize this. Then, after the test, forget it all.

Conclusion

This research suggests that further study is needed to determine whether students in high-track classes do have more opportunity to participate in discussion than students in low-track classes. The prevailing consensus may be outdated—it is possible that with the era of standardized testing, monologic pedagogy is now dominating the high-track classes. Nonetheless, according to the students in this study, there are still distinctions between the tracks in terms of pacing, attitude, classroom management, teacher quality, and stigma that separate student experience and achievement levels.

In sum, the findings have shown how engaging in dialogic pedagogy has the power to transform students' identity, shifting self-perception positively and allowing all learners to come to voice (hooks, 2009). The findings also showed that detracking and dialogic pedagogy, through exposing students to diverse perspectives, (a) helped low-track students level up, (b) revealed some surprising student attitudes about the differences between students from the low and high tracks, and (c) led to more in-depth understanding of concepts as multiple ideas were combined. Finally, monologic pedagogy, while less effective than dialogic teaching, was the dominant style of instruction in both low-and high-track classes, as reported by students. Significantly, students described that it was possible for a student to attend four years of high school, in either the high or low tracks, without ever participating in an extended, content-based discussion, deliberation, or debate. The silencing of students, by their own account, appears to be ubiquitous. The implications of these findings are troubling for maintaining the health of democracy and the vitality of public schools. Student interviews and observations pointed to the potential for dialogic teaching to facilitate detracking, to change the trajectory of students' academic paths,

and to more fully respond to the mission of public schools to educate future citizens in an

increasingly diverse society.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In this dissertation study,, I investigated the problem of (a) tracking, a discriminatory policy that confers deficit identities on students from the low track; and (b) monologic instruction, which silences student voices, leaving them without agency to make intelligent decisions as future citizens in a democracy. After a thorough review of the literature related to tracking/detracking and dialogic teaching, as summarized in Chapter Two, I developed an understanding of these problems and their relationship to each other. Next, as described in Chapter Three, I designed and conducted a qualitative, critical case study of dialogic teaching in a detracked ELA class, using the theoretical frameworks of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the sociology of pedagogy (Bernstein, 1990).

To review the methods described in Chapter Three, the data for this study were collected in two phases over 11 months between 2017 and 2018. In total, I observed 50, 40-minute classes; conducted 5 formal and 36 informal interviews with the focal teacher; 23, 40-minute interviews with students; and collected a range of documents, including demographic information, teacher plans, and student writers' notebooks and reflections. After completing the data collection and transcribing interviews and observations, between November 2018 and March 2019 was devoted to coding, analyzing, and member-checking emerging themes in an iterative process to answer the research questions:

1. What does dialogic teaching look like in a detracked 12th-grade ELA course?

2. How does the teacher describe the process of dialogic teaching?

3. How do students make sense of using dialogue in the classroom (e.g., dialogic teaching) and its impact on transforming their identity, developing confidence in their voice, and activating agency as students and citizens in a democracy?

A detailed explanation of the findings in answer to these questions is found in Chapter Four. To summarize, the data showed that (a) dialogic teaching's successful implementation in the focal detracked ELA class was a result of the focal teacher's reflective planning, intentional listening, explicit instruction of student talk skills, philosophical conviction that ability and intelligence are not fixed, and epistemological conception of learning as socially constructed; (b) the experience of the dialogic classroom transformed students' academic identity, promoted the emergence of student voice, and activated students' agency as learners and citizens; (c) dialogic instruction was found to be an effective method for detracking, maintaining academic rigor that benefited all students; and (d) students from both tracks reported little or no experience with academic discussion throughout four years of high school, regardless of their track placement.

These conclusions are discussed in light of the findings, as well as the findings in relation to the theories of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the sociology of pedagogy (Bernstein, 1990). These findings are also discussed in relation to the literature on tracking and dialogic teaching, including how they support existing research, how they depart from it, and how I break new ground. Next, I make recommendations for further research based on what I uncovered and suggest possible implications for policy and practice. This dissertation ends with some brief, concluding remarks, including insight and inspiration derived from conducting this research.

Conclusions Drawn from Findings/Discussions of Findings

After spending several months considering the sum of this work, I drew conclusions from the results that represent my most significant reflections on the findings. As a classroom teacher, I might call this the "so what?" section. While in no way exhaustive, these are several of the themes I continue to reflect on.

Democracy

Since public schools in the U.S. are established by the government and funded by taxpayers, curriculum and instruction are inherently political. These findings show that education policies that perpetuate inequality, such as tracking, and that stifle students' voices and critical thinking, such as monologic teaching, are fundamentally undemocratic and therefore antithetical to the mission of American public education. Conversely, based on evidence from this study, this study argues that implementing dialogic teaching in a detracked classroom promotes democracy and can be considered a social justice initiative. First, detracking eliminates a practice determined to be discriminatory (Burris, 2014; Burris et al., 2008; Carter & Welner, 2013; Gamoran, 2009; Oakes, 2005; Rubin, 2003) and, as this study showed, opens students to the diverse views of a broader population, promoting pluralism and democracy. Second, dialogic teaching, as implemented in the focal class of this research (a) teaches students to use their voices to articulate views supported by evidence; (b) promotes critical-thinking skills that teach students to question and test claims for their veracity and logic; and (c) nurtures the agency of emerging citizens by discussing critical issues using evidence while remaining open to diverse perspectives. These endeavors are essential to the core principles of American democracy; this study's results clearly indicate that detracking and dialogic teaching can be effective tools for preparing an engaged and informed citizenry.

Reconciling Research with Reality

This study and its results are unequivocal in support of dismantling tracking so that all students receive access to the highest quality of instruction available. Providing equal access to high-quality education is the primary job of American public schools; this study demonstrates how detracking and dialogic teaching can increase academic achievement and promote the practice of discourse essential to democratic citizenship. Unfortunately, the policy of tracking shows no signs of changing—on the contrary, it is becoming more entrenched. Monologic teaching is also entrenched practice across tracks. The findings of this study provided evidence of how misguided these policies are, both for individual students and for society, and identified practical strategies for making transformational shifts toward dialogic teaching in detracked settings. Evidence in this dissertation study suggests that, while advocating for the dismantling of tracking, teachers who currently struggle to meet the needs of students in low tracks can and should provide some relief to their students by adopting dialogic instructional strategies described in this study.

Critical Pedagogy

Evaluating these data and grappling with the literature led me to conclude that dialogic teaching and detracking are critical pedagogies and should be explicitly identified accordingly. Giroux (1983) explained that critical pedagogy "challenges us to recognize, engage, and critique (so as to transform) any existing undemocratic social practices and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social identities and relations" (p. 2). I suggest that any future study of these findings explicitly identify the connection to critical pedagogy, specifically because this study provides concrete suggestions to illustrate a theory that is often criticized as overly theoretical. I found that a comparative analysis of the key elements of Ms. L.,

the focal teacher's practices showed significant symbiosis: (a) open-mindedness, (b) intentional

listening, (c) rejection of deficit identities, (d) epistemology of learning, (e) adopting a dialogic

stance, (f) positioning herself as learner as well as teacher[1],and (g) mindfulness about teacher's

speech with the tenets of critical scholarship (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1983). To illustrate one

example of many, I offer an excerpt on the essential practice of listening to facilitating dialogue

described by Shor (1987) in conversation with Freire (1987) for comparison to Ms. L.'s practice

of intentional listening described in Chapter Four:

> I listen intently to every student utterance and ask other students to listen when one of
>
> their peers speaks. I don't begin any reply after the student ends her or his first sentence
>
> but ask the student to say more about the question. If I'm asked what I think, I say I'd be
>
> glad to say what I think but why don't a few more people speak first to what the student
>
> just said whether you agree or not. If I don't have a reply to what the student said or don't
>
> understand a series of student comments and can't invent on the spot questions to reveal
>
> the issue, I go home and think about it and start a next class from what a student said
>
> before to keep signaling to students the importance of their statements. These small
>
> interventions contradict the verbal domination which has driven students into resisting
>
> dialogue. (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 79)

The conceptual overlap between Ms. L.'s practice and critical pedagogy was an element of what

propelled my interest in the focal class, but as I evaluated transcripts and analyzed Ms. L.'s work

to determine its essential elements, the parallels became overt and could not be ignored.

Constrained by the limits of length, I suggest that future researchers (including Ms. L.) use the

data described in Chapter Four to elaborate on the connection to critical pedagogy.

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[1] Freire (2000) coined the terms "teacher-student" and "students-teachers" (p. 67) to describe the shift from teacher as "one who teaches" to one who is also learning in dialogue with students.

Contributions to Theory

Situated Learning

The findings of this research support the theory of situated learning, which views learning as socially constructed and not as an individual cognitive event. Woven throughout this study are illustrations of how situated learning provided a theoretical framework for understanding the use of small heterogeneous groups to facilitate detracking and dialogic teaching. Qualitative interview and observational data support the findings that students co-constructed knowledge through discussion. Small heterogeneous groups used in the focal class supported the theory's main tenets, showing how students from the low track, or *peripheral participants*, entered into full participation through interaction with and exposure to *experts,* or high-track students. Viewed through the lens of situated learning theory, Ms. L.'s class became a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) wherein both students from the high and low tracks supported each other as they acquired increased confidence and fluency through practice. Because of flaws inherent to the tracking system, novices and experts did not conform seamlessly to low-track and high-track status, but that had no bearing on the main takeaway: students co-constructing knowledge together; working in pursuit of common understanding; and promoting academic growth, deeper understanding of complex concepts, and increased engagement.

The data also showed that students from the low track quickly leveled up to achieve parity with their high-track classmates through access to rigorous curriculum discussed in the small group discussions. Students from low tracks benefited from "the example" set by students from high tracks, who were more experienced with "being good students," which included the superficial yet important skills of completing assignments, staying on task, and following

directions. Communities of practice allowed students from the low track to transcend the academic labels ascribed to them.

Sociology of Pedagogy

While the intersection of social and economic class, tracking, and instructional quality suggest that school-tracking policies play a role in reproducing social inequality (Bernstein, 1990), the reality may be more complex. Mayer et al. (2018) compared the instructional practices of the same teachers in high-track and low-track classes and found that "some teachers resist structuring their practice in ways that create inequitable structure for students tracked into lower classes" (p. 453). What the emerging research and this dissertation study suggest is that while students in high and low tracks experience real differences in opportunity and access to social capital, the epistemological beliefs of teachers about how students learn may be as significant as tracking placement to student achievement. When teachers of high-track students perceived themselves as experts, whose job was to transmit knowledge to students, regardless of the track placement, they adopted a monologic stance. In light of these findings, I proposes a closer look at the accepted wisdom that students in high-track classes have more access to dialogic teaching. This study found that students from the high track—because of the prevalence of monologic teaching, and a competitive ethos that created anxiety and, in some cases, low self-esteem—did not accrue the educational privileges expected from high-track status. In other words, one of the key strategies used to reproduce privilege may be ineffective, rendering elite parents' resistance to detracking pointless.

For students to develop increased agency as students and citizens, or more accurately within Bourdieu's theory, to have increased *legitimacy*, it is essential that students perceive their ideas as valued. More research is called for to investigate how dialogic teaching can interrupt the

reproduction of inequality within schools and within society through shifting student identity and empowering them with agency as learners and citizens.

In a broader sense, the focal class discussed in this dissertation study did not conform to the national pattern of racialized tracking in which low SES, Black, Latinx, and ELL students are overrepresented in low-track classes, although the pattern of overrepresentation of low SES students in low-track classes was true for the school. Further, although the White population in the Rockford School District has decreased by 20% in the last 10 years, the Rockford High School demographics did not qualify it as a *diverse school.* Therefore, while this study does not contradict the claim derived from Bernstein's (1990) theory that detracking may interrupt the reproduction of social inequality, it does not explicitly support it.

Consideration of Findings in View of Research

One of the unique contribution of this study is that it brings together the disciplines of dialogic teaching and detracking to show how they can work in tandem to empower students to grapple with diverse perspectives, develop sophisticated ideas through discussion, and shed the deficit identities conferred by tracking. This study showed that some students spent four years in a middle-class, suburban high school, rarely engaging in an academic conversation. I also contribute to the literature by using qualitative case study data to describe how students made sense of their experience in a detracked dialogic classroom led by the focal teacher committed to promoting the voices of all students. The next section elaborates on the study's contributions to the literature.

Detracking

This study adds to the literature suggesting that tracking is an inherently unequal, biased practice (Burris, 2014; Gamoran, 2009; Oakes, 2005) by providing qualitative student interview

data that describe how students from the low track internalized deficit identities conferred by

tracking. Detracking literature (Wortham, 2004; Worthy, 2009) shows that teachers who hold

fixed attitudes about student ability tend to re-track students through differentiation and hold a

narrow view of what detracking success looks like (Rubin & Noguera, 2004). This study showed

that it is possible to avoid the retracking/differentiation that often hijacks efforts to detrack

through dialogic teaching, and my findings suggest that shifts in practice and epistemology can

accomplish this goal. While detracking, as the literature suggests, is a challenge, this study shows

that it is both possible and beneficial for all students.

I provide a sound argument in support of detracking, and I add to the literature by

describing strategies used by the focal teacher that demonstrated how all students can engage in

rigorous instruction in a detracked setting. I identify the key elements to Ms. L.'s success at

"leveling the playing field" to create a community of practice where students from low and high

tracks participated in academic discussions, often for the first time. A surprising finding of this

study contradicted a consensus in the tracking literature that discussion occurred more frequently

in high-track classes (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Gamoran, 2009; Nystrand et al., 1998;

Oakes, 2005). Most students from the high track interviewed for this research reported that in

four years of high school, they had never participated in a class discussion and that only the

"smartest five" students expressed their views in an atmosphere described as a "dogfight."

Through this study, I uncovered themes that fill a gap in the literature by analyzing how

the combination of dialogic teaching and detracking can promote what students described as

deeper levels of understanding, transformation in student identity, confidence in their own voice,

and increased agency as students and citizens. I also found that when students from the low track

and the high track were exposed to a variety of texts and ideas, which they discussed with

increasing sophistication, their engagement and confidence levels increased in response to the academic demands of Ms. L.'s classroom.

Finally, this study's findings debunk many of the obstacles to detracking that have dominated the detracking literature for the past 15 years (Rubin, 2003; Rubin & Noguera, 2004; Oakes, 2016) by suggesting that high-track classes may not, in fact, provide the expected advantages. I demonstrate that elites who fight detracking to maintain privilege are entirely misguided. I allowed students from the high track explain why: They said repeatedly in interviews that their high track classes were "boring," almost entirely monologic, and that they "memorized facts for the test and then forgot them." If students are to be believed, then parents who attempt to privilege their children through maintaining the status quo of tracking may actually be doing them a disservice.

Dialogic Teaching

In Chapter Two, I discussed the multiple ways that researchers have studied the benefits of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2010). Resnick et al. (2015) provided evidence that discussion improves standardized test scores and allows students to retain information longer than recitation pedagogy. Researchers have concluded that dialogic teaching can deepen content acquisition, foster a sense of belonging, and promote critical thinkingand the habits of mind essential to democratic citizenship (Alexander, 2010; Parker, 2003; Resnick & Schantz, 2015; Resnick et al., 2015; Sutherland, 2010; Wells & Arauz, 2006; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). My study supports these claims through observational and interview data.

As a conclusion to their volume *Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue,* Resnick, Asterhan, and Clarke (2015) wrote, "We need a larger empirical base for the claim that dialogic teaching is likely to be effective with all kinds of students in various settings"

(p. 448). This dissertation study takes a step toward closing that gap by providing qualitative data that suggests dialogic teaching, coherently introduced to a detracked class can help all students fundamentally shift their identity, develop confidence in their voice, and increase their agency as students and citizens in a democracy. In fact, this study adds a new dimension to the dialogic teaching research dimension by including the element of detracking. By adding a new branch to the research on dialogic teaching, I have shown that by detracking, more diverse perspectives are added to the classroom, multiplying the positive effects of dialogic teaching. Further, I contribute to the literature by demonstrating how, for students from the high and low tracks, participation in dialogue and removal of the boundaries of tracking and its attendant stigma shifted their identity and empowered them as future citizens.

While many studies on the dialogic classroom contain extended discourse analysis of student talk within the classroom setting, there is a gap in the literature pertaining to how students make sense of their experience of socially constructed, dialogic learning. I address the gap, through vivid descriptions provided by students of (a) how the class impacted their self-confidence and their ability to express themselves in a rigorous academic setting; (b) their understanding of how discussions facilitated learning, providing them with deep conceptual understandings rather than the memorization of facts; (c) their perceptions of the teacher's caring and respect as essential to their transformation; and (d) how the dialogic classroom compared to their other high school classes.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature on dialogic teaching that spans the past several decades. Most research, including the work of Alexander (2006), Resnick et al. (2015), and Nystrand et al. (1998), focused on discourse analysis, teacher moves, and instructional design.

This study's methodology adds a unique perspective to the research. Most studies either analyzed

the results of an applied professional development program (Alexander, 2010; Hardman et al.,

2018; Nystrand et al., 1998) or examined a broad cross-section of pedagogy in different levels of

classrooms by measuring the amount of discussion (Nystrand et al., 2003; Reisman, 2015;

Wilen, 2010). In contrast, this study provided a close examination of one teacher's original

dialogic practice that evolved organically through her 25 years of reflective teaching, systematic

study of literacy and learning theory, and evolving commitment to equity and social justice. This

study showed how the detracked dialogic classroom has the power to transform student identity.

Chapter Four described the central elements of Ms. L.'s practice and identified her

epistemological understandings of learning as socially constructed. Through being reflective,

highly educated in her discipline, and committed to a humanistic and culturally sustaining

pedagogy, Ms. L. was able to uproot any academic hierarchies that existed by privileging all

voices. This promoted a climate that was nonjudgmental, and by the middle of the year, all

students were comfortable discussing their ideas.

Finally, my research yielded a surprise that diverges from the consensus in the literature

on dialogic teaching. The literature explains that most low-track classes limit student talk to

Inquiry-Response-Evaluation (Applebee et al., 2003; Cazden, 2001; Christoph & Nystrand,

2001; Gamoran, 2009; Mayer et al., 2018). While the lack of student talk in low-track classes has

been widely reported, there has been less discussion of the finding that high-track classes fare

only marginally better (Gamoran, 2009; Nystrand et al., 1998; Snell & Lefstein, 2018). A clear

finding that emerged in my study was that students interviewed reported that monologic

pedagogy was the predominant form of instruction in both the high track and the low tracks. This

contradicts many of the tracking and monologic teaching studies and warrants further investigation and a possible update to the literature.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research are based on questions that emerged during the data collection and analysis phases of this study. An essential topic my study alluded to but provided no data for is the relationship between dialogic teaching and literacy gains. The unexpected finding that high-track classes were predominately monologic, as mentioned above, bears investigation, and I propose that research should be conducted to determine if this is a trend linked to the increasing number of advanced placement classes offered. I also encourage further study of the connection between dialogic teaching and democracy, to test the efficacy of the key practices described in this research, particularly in more diverse settings.

Literacy Skills

While Ms. L.'s content specific interest is critical reading and writing instruction, this research focused on dialogue and student identity. There is clearly a connection, and I concede that reading and writing are critical to acquiring social capital and that literacy can, in fact, interrupt the reproduction of social inequality. While the data inferred gains in students' reading and writing skills, analysis of this went beyond the scope of this dissertation. There is a need to research how dialogic teaching and detracking impact students' reading and writing, and Ms. L. is beginning a study of this phenomenon, taking up where this work leaves off. Since she is an ELA teacher and holds a master's degree in literacy, she is well positioned to examine the relationship between dialogic pedagogy and literacy gains.

Monologic Teaching in the High Tracks

It is critical that research be conducted to investigate (a) the dominance of monologic instruction across all tracks and (b) the prevailing attitudes of educators that view learning in narrow terms that belie the research of neuroscience, sociology, and linguistics. Ability and intelligence are fluid, and knowledge is constructed through shared experiences and grappling with diverse ideas, not by obedience to a teacher and memorization of facts to be tested.

Do AP and IB Courses Promote Monologic Teaching?

School districts, in the current era of standards and accountability, compete against each other for rankings determined by several factors, including the number of advanced courses offered. Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, in which student success is measured by a single summative standardized test, dominate the offerings to students in high tracks. The total number of U.S. students who took an AP examination in 2003 was 514,163; by 2013 the number almost doubled to 1,003,430 (Kolluri, 2018). Therefore, more research is needed to see whether or not AP and IB instruction is driven by the final test. Is it possible that as high-track classes become increasingly test driven that they become more monologic?

Testing Identified Strategies

Research that identifies and tests effective strategies to promote dialogic teaching and detracking should proceed, both independently and together. Within both fields of investigation, these dissertation findings suggest that future studies might consider educators' mindset about ability and fixed intelligence as essential elements to broad systemic policy shifts.

This study was conducted in a single classroom in a suburban school setting. To make a robust argument for dialogic teaching's efficacy in supporting detracking reforms, more research

needs to be done of teachers facilitating dialogic teaching practices in detracked classrooms for larger, multi-case studies to test the findings of this dissertation study. It is also important that researchers test the findings of this study in more racially and linguistically diverse settings, to ensure that the findings can be extrapolated to a wider population.

Teacher Attitudes, Dialogic Teaching, and Detracking

This dissertation research concluded that the focal teacher's epistemology of learning and her rejection of deficit student identities were foundational to making the shift toward dialogic teaching in the detracked classroom. Through a highly reflective teaching practice, Ms. L. came to understand learning to be socially constructed, and she described the transformation toward dialogic teaching as often uncomfortable. At times, she reported worrying that she "wasn't really teaching." The paradigm shift from monologic to dialogic teaching requires conviction and support. While supervisors recognized Ms. L.'s impact on student learning, she identified the teacher–researcher relationship as the "best professional development" she ever received Practitioner support is needed for dialogic teaching to work. Future research could examine how a single subject or grade level of teachers facilitate the shift to dialogic teaching through their own dialogic process by (a) creating a shared mission statement, (b) realigning curriculum to reflect the shift from teacher talk to student talk, (c) engaging in lesson plan studies and instructional rounds, and (d) making decisions about best practice based on the unique needs of their school's students.

For detracking to succeed, teachers need to investigate their biases about the fixed abilities of students from low tracks (Snell & Lefstein, 2018). Teachers' attitudes about student ability are deeply entrenched and may be among the most significant challenges to creating meaningful policy shifts. Deficit language such as "good kids" and "bad kids*,"* frequently

embedded in tracked schools' culture (Wortham, 2004; Worthy, 2009) presents a formidable obstacle to detracking. Research that identifies strategies to challenge the biases of fixed identity and to disseminate a radically different way of speaking and thinking about students is critical. Implicit and explicit biases serve as barriers to deploying pedagogy and policies that level the playing field for students who have been systemically underserved. In sum, research that expands understanding of dialogic teaching and detracking should proceed, both independently and together. Within both fields of investigation, these dissertation findings suggest that future studies should consider educators' mindset about ability and fixed intelligence as essential elements to broad systemic policy shifts.

Implications of Study for Current Policy and Practice

While the current education policy climate is not aligned with the principles underpinning this work, it is hoped that with persistence, evidence, and the empowered voices of students, attitudes can change. This study is a testament to the understanding that profound shifts in teachers' attitudes are possible. My recommendations include (a) organizing teacher-led Critical Friends groups to disseminate best practice and challenge ideas of fixed ability, (b) implementing dialogic teaching by limiting the scope of taught content, and (c) creating professional development programs based on the key findings of this dissertation. Applying the principles of dialogic teaching within a detracked setting are worthy endeavors.

Start a Critical Friends Group

Working from the individual teacher level up is critical to disseminating a new way of speaking about and thinking about student ability. The Critical Friends process can provide the structure for observing each other's classrooms and evaluating the results. The protocols can make space for difficult conversations among teachers about their understanding of structural

inequality (e.g., tracking) and about race and class privilege. As Critical Friends, teachers can promote dialogue among teachers, which will allow for the dispositions of dialogic teaching to become embedded in the ethos of school culture. When teachers embrace dialogue among themselves, they promote communities of inquiry (Wells, 2009) and build the foundations necessary to making the radical transition from monologic to dialogic teaching and the epistemological shifts in teachers' understanding of student learning.

Less Content, More Talk

While there are surely skilled teachers who infuse inquiry and discussion into their classrooms, the wider and deeper the content that requires coverage, the more likely classes are to be monologic. Even Ms. L. has described problems encouraging an AP class she is teaching this year to talk to each other because they expect her to teach in the monologic style they have been trained in. The findings of this study suggest that curriculum must be designed with less content to cover so teachers can introduce explicitly taught dialogue strategies into their instruction. This will require effective professional development as well as leaders who are willing to create cultures of teacher inquiry. Alexander (2014) suggested a reassessment of teachers' notions of timing, structure, sequencing, and pacing of curriculum, arguing that, "Dialogic teaching…draws our attention away from particular organizational settings to what matters most: the quality, dynamics, and content of talk, regardless of the way classrooms are organized" (p. 23). When teachers focus on conceptual understanding and plan time and space in their instruction for structured discussion, students are more likely to acquire the disciplinary skills and conceptual understandings they need than in classrooms that focus on content coverage.

Professional Development

To facilitate the skills and habits of mind to begin the shift toward dialogic teaching, the following strategies can be incorporated into professional development as beginning practice:

1. Intentional listening – Teacher professional development has been focused on asking authentic questions, which is a start, but the findings of this study indicate that teachers would benefit from training that goes beyond designing authentic questions to focusing on student responses. As important as good questioning technique is, without the added step of listening to student answers and using them to drive instructional decisions, authentic questions alone do not promote learning (Nystrand et al., 1997).

2. Focus on formative assessment and feedback strategies - Described in Chapter Four, these reflective practices include employing teacher moves like uptake rather than simply complimenting students for participation. Alexander (2004) argued, "feedback given as reward [that] enhances ego rather than task involvement" (p. 20).

3. Climate - Work toward cultivating a climate that provides students with a safe space to make mistakes and experiment with new forms of verbal expression.

4. Explicit instruction of talk skills - As students are provided with appropriate scaffolding, they can begin to practice text-based discussions. Remember to always begin discussions with a writing prompt.

Limitations

The dialogic classroom described in this study was created by a highly effective and dedicated teacher with 25 years of experience; yet there are strategies embedded in her practice that can easily be adopted by classroom teachers across disciplines and grades. The biggest challenge to replicating dialogic teaching into public education classrooms is that a fundamental shift in epistemology of learning is necessary. To become comfortable adopting the stance of

facilitator rather than a voice of authority and control in their classrooms, teachers need to be highly educated in their disciplines and trained in the social theories of cognition. It is hoped that the views expressed by the students in Ms. L.'s classroom can elicit a dialogue among educators about how students learn.

Since the findings of a qualitative case study are not intended to be generalizable in the manner of quantitative research, it is hoped that these findings advance the theory of situated learning and its application to dialogic teaching and detracking. Finally, students from both tracks were technically required to have a final average above 85 in their 11th-grade ELA class, limiting the focal detracked class from enrolling the most academically challenged students. It is clear that additional research in more diverse settings is warranted. Indeed, the boundaries among tracks at Rockford High School seemed almost random in this particular sample, and students moved across tracks in unforeseen ways. The possibility that tracking decisions were informed by prejudice, as cited in the literature (Burris, 2012; Oakes, 2005; Worthy, 2009) fell outside the scope of this work. However, students did reveal through interview data that their prior track placements contributed to their identity as students and that they internalized the advantages or disadvantages conferred by their prior tracking placements.

Conclusion

Through systemically promoting diversity through policies such as detracking and dialogic teaching, policymakers and educators may help stem the discourse of tribalism currently disseminating from the media and taking root in school cultures. The findings of this study showed how explicitly teaching students to deconstruct controversial issues, consider multiple perspectives, and discuss developing ideas with those holding different perspectives helped students to think more critically. Incorporating dialogue into the curriculum, while not a panacea,

increases the likelihood that students will be open minded to reason and decreases the likelihood that they will embrace undemocratic ideologies. It is through valuing individual stories and perspectives for their differences that ignorance can be healed and bigotry disarmed. My study demonstrates that a combination of detracking and dialogic teaching is completely possible and produces positive academic and social-emotional benefits for students.

Today, America faces unprecedented demographic shifts, a polarized national discourse, and a shrinking middle class struggling to hold onto its privilege (Pew Research Center, 2015; Ravitch, 2013). These factors make this study important and timely: It is critical to look closely at how "education still offers spaces and levers to bend society toward equity, justice, and vibrant democracy" (Oakes, 2016, p. 101). I have argued in this dissertation that for democracy to thrive, teachers and policy makers need to embrace public education that is more equitable and more dialogic. In the current neoliberal era of standardized testing, I implore policy makers and teachers to intentionally listen to what the students I interviewed had to say about their experiences in school, the benefits of dialogic teaching, and the positive experiences working with their peers from different tracks.

This study describes the range of benefits that dialogic teaching provides for students, and gives teachers (who claim that student talk is too time consuming and challenging to implement) many reasons to reconsider their positions. The students interviewed for this study make a compelling argument for the power of dialogue to promote and enhance learning. I argue that implementing the strategies and mindset required to sustain a dialogic classroom requires sustained effort and commitment to the belief that all students' voices are valuable. Classroom teachers who understand the underlying principles of the process can promote the shift from monologic to dialogic teaching.

Early in my career as a social studies teacher, I discovered that students often called school "boring." Twenty years later, students in this study described their prior tracked classes in similar ways; "the teacher just rambles on, blah, blah, blah." What I came to realize was that student boredom, after years of monologic pedagogy, often turned into apathy, incuriosity, and resigned silence. This does not portend well for a democratic republic that depends on an informed citizenry to thrive. Unfortunately, despite evidence of its positive impact, opportunities for student discussion in school remain scarce. I hope, with this dissertation research, to draw attention to the insufficiency of monologic teaching and tracking policies (particularly when multiplied by the flood of technology and encroaching strains of bigotry in the national discourse) to educate future citizens for participation in a healthy democracy.

As society faces major political, social, and economic upheaval, students are not given enough compelling reasons to look up from the screens that disconnect them from agency and human connection. If public schools hope to educate students to critique, question, and confront injustice, dialogic teaching may be a way forward. Teaching students the skills and habits of mind required for productive discourse among diverse learners may equip them to work collaboratively to solve the existential problems that confront their generation. Corporate reformers, whose policies promote the institutional dehumanization of children, commodifying students as data generators and consumers can only be stopped (Giroux, 2013; Ravitch, 2013) by an awakened citizenry. Our students should not become what Giroux (2012) called "disposable youth" (p. 1).

Teachers have the power to build institutional resistance within schools and reject narratives arguing that the purpose of education is to acquire a credential or pathway to a job. Public schools can, rather, develop citizens equipped to participate in a thriving pluralistic

democracy. Education has a responsibility to suggest an alternative to the 11th grader who said her hero was Kim Kardashian and to the 8th grader who, when asked who his hero was, said, "I don't know." Dialogic teaching may instill an awakening of consciousness—an awakening for democracy—against what the Greeks called "idiocy" (as cited in Parker, 2005, p. 1).

My initial impressions were that the quality and quantity of student talk occurring in Ms. L.'s classroom were transformational: Students who had been muted by tracking designation and monologic teaching were reanimated through Ms. L.'s work. This remains true, and I argue that students have a fundamental right to speak up, claim their power, and contribute intelligently to the marketplace of ideas. Dialogue is essential to our democracy, and public schools can deploy it to fulfill their moral and ethical obligation to our nation's children, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socio-economic class. Students coming from low and high tracks are literally silenced in public schools—this is oppression, and for this reason, I see Ms. L.'s work as critical pedagogy worthy of study and replication.

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Appendix A

A Class Discussion

The following segment of a student discussion about the book *The Help* gives a sense of a

typical day in Ms. L.'s classroom, the pace of the instruction, the level of expectation set by Ms.

L., and the multiple strategies she used to encourage discussion. Notice that students generated

ideas and questions, and constructed their own meaning. Ms. L. served as a facilitator rather than

the transmitter of knowledge or "sage on the stage," as she would put it.

Ms. L.: So, notice my question: How many of you are in groups with people who read more

closely than you do? [Approximately 6 hands went up].

Ms. L.: I'm going to suggest you zone in on them—I want you to focus on what you need to

work on like asking questions after someone poses an idea. Take out your discussion

prompt.

[The discussion prompt sheet contains conversation starters; Ms. L. selected them from

comments she said she would use if she joined a group, as demonstrated in table one

below.]

Table 1

Discussion Prompts

Can you elaborate more on your point?	I agree with part of what you said, but I have a question about…	How does this relate to the question, theme, previous events in the story?
Find another passage or quotation that supports the idea and relate it to this discussion.	So, what do you think is the writer's intention here? Why?	How does the writer's use of words, details, or imagery contribute to the text's meaning?
Is there another way to interpret this passage or detail?	Can you summarize your ideas for me?	Why do you think this is a valid interpretation?

Student: That's my favorite sheet.

Ms. L.: So, remember, you use these prompts to get discussion going. I challenge you to use at

least one of these. Get into discussion groups.

[The students formed circles without demonstrating any confusion.]

Ms. L.: Have your novel open in front of you. Take your analyzing details sheet out. [Students

used this handout to generate their own questions while reading, which they would use

for group discussion. Students gathered their materials and start talking and reading. All

students appeared engaged in the work.]

Ms. L. (approaching group one, listening): I'm going to be joining your discussion shortly, but

ignore me.

Group one

Ms. L.: Did you hear what Joe just said?

Student 1: Let's finish this and then you can talk about volleyball.

Student 1: This book is, like, racist.

Student 2: I'm not sure what you're basing that on. It depends on how you look at it. I think you

can have racist characters in a book without it being racist.

Student 4: Yes, I agree. And going back to the text, we see evidence of people standing up to do

what's right even though it's dangerous.

Students 2: So, like, Abilene is an example of this.

Student 3: I'm waiting for the theme. Is there another way to interpret this?

Ms. L.: All right, so keep delving into those ideas.

Student 3: I think this ties into setting and historical context as well. What makes it interesting to me is how openly racist their language was.

Student 2: Yeah, I know. I wrote that there were really two separate cultural/social contexts, the maids and the white women. But even there, I'm thinking there are differences; I mean they're not all one thing or all the other.

Student 1: So did you have a question for that?

Student 2: Yes, I wrote, "Do the maids and their bosses have separate cultures or are they part of the same culture?"

Student 3: I can definitely write that as a new idea.

Ms. L.: Joanna, I hate to cut you off, but we have about one more minute…

Appendix B

Critical Friends Timeline

	Ms. L.	Collaboration	Researcher
2013-14	Stony Brook University, M.A. Literacy	Three lesson Observation Cycle for Teachers College Leadership program Formed a Critical Friends group; Took an online course with	Teachers College, Ed.M., Organizational Leadership
2014-15	Graduated from Stony Brook	the Harvard Graduate School of Education	Graduated from Teachers College
2015-16		Worked to create a student-run writing center in the high school; ran a workshop "Unpacking the New Social Studies Standards;" Shared students and visited classrooms;	
2016-17		Started filming in Ms. L.'s classroom for NYU conference on Equity Literacy; Presented this research at NYU.	Began doctoral program at Molloy College
2017-18	Began doctoral program	Collaborated on an article on ENL literacy; looked into ENL certification Presented at TAC-D on equity literacy Became Gardiner Fellows, working together on education team	Began pilot study research in Ms. L.'s classroom
2018-19		Continued working on Gardiner Fellowship; Collaboration on dissertation research.	Completed dissertation phase of research.

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Protocol

Worldview

1. What is your general teaching philosophy?
   Probe: Do you think you have an impact on the students you teach? How would you describe it, if so? How important is that to you?
   Probe: How would you describe the job/responsibility of a public school teacher in America today?

2. What is your planning process, and how do you understand coherence as an essential element of instruction?

Dialogic Stance

3. When, why, and how did you shift from teacher-centered instruction toward a dialogic stance?

   Probe: What prompted the shifts?
   Probe: What concerns did you have about traditional teaching?
   Probe: What proportion of time do you spend on direct instruction? Could you recommend a ratio as a general standard?

4. How would you describe the significance of student talk to your philosophy and instructional design?
   Probe: What have you noticed about the ways students talk to each other?
   Probe: What have been some challenges, and how have you dealt with them?
   Probe: Why do you think there is such a small amount of student talk in most classrooms?

5. How do you plan and facilitate discussions in your lessons?
   Probe: What, in your view, is their purpose?
   Probe: What is one thing you'd like all teachers to know about what you've discovered?

6. Would you comment on what you've learned about how students become effective communicators/participants in academic discussion?

7. Can you describe the variety of strategies you employ in a typical unit and the purposes they serve?

Tracking

8. What is your general attitude toward students in different tracks?
   Probe: Do you think the tracking system in the school is effective? If so, why? If not, why not?
   Probe: What have you noticed about teaching a detracked class? Do you think students are aware of the tracking status of others in the class? Do you have any awareness of student bias in this regard?

9. In what ways, if at all, are issues of race, class, gender, and/or ethnicity discussed in your classes? How frequently? For what purpose? Do you think all students feel comfortable expressing their views?

10. What particular strategies have you employed to facilitate discussion in a detracked setting?
    Probe: What do you notice about the speaking skills of low-track and high-track students? To what extent is the detracked setting a challenge or an opportunity?

View of Self

11. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
    Probe: How do you think students view you?
    Probe: How do you respond to the idea that you are a super-teacher or an outlier?
    Probe: How would you compare yourself to other teachers?

12. You have said that you don't think you're teaching effectively unless you can measure learning (paraphrase). How do you see/measure growth in students in the quality and quantity of their classroom conversations?
    Probe: Do you have any ideas about evaluating student talk in a detracked classroom? Is it a different process than in your AP or Regents classes?

13. What does "functional construct versus structural procedure" mean?

14. In your view, what are these complementary teaching practices?

APPENDIX D

Student Interview Protocol

Description of Study: This study examines a mixed-ability high school classroom that uses discussion-based inquiry.

I'm studying the way students learn through discussion, and looking at how different students perceive Ms. Larson's class. I'm also interested in what it's like to

Introduction:

1. How would you describe your school to someone who isn't familiar with the school districts on Long Island?
      Probe: Race, class, LI region, culture, etc.
      Probe: Student groups, tracking, teaching and learning, what makes your school unique.

Perceptions of this class/teacher/students:
   1. How would you describe Ms. L.'s class? Have you ever taken a class with her before?
      Probe: What kind of teacher is Ms. L.?
      Probe: How do you generally feel in this class? What contributes to this attitude?
      Probe: Can you give an example of a time when you felt angry or frustrated in class? How did you handle it? How did the teacher handle it?

   2. In what ways is this class easy or difficult?

   3. Do you think about this class when you are not here? Do you ever make connections between what you are learning in this class and your life inside or outside of school? Can you give an example?
      Probe: How is this class preparing you for your future college or career?

   4. Is there anything you wish your teacher knew about you? Do you think your teacher understands you as a student? As a person?

   5. What is your relationship to other students in this class like? Does the teacher help you interact with all students in the classroom?
   6. How do you feel about yourself as a student in this class?

Discussion Pedagogy:
   1. How frequently do you speak in this class? Why? Does the teacher call on you?
      Probe: Do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable sharing your viewpoints? What makes you feel this way?
      Probe: Is this way of teaching and learning a new experience for you? How did you learn how to participate in the group discussions?

2. How would you describe the way that the teacher encourages discussion in the classroom? Do you think that increases the level of learning that goes on in this class? Why or why not?

3. What makes speaking in class difficult for you? What makes it easy? Have you felt comfortable participating in discussions in this class?
Probe: Do you sense that the discussions help you to improve/deepen your thinking? Can you give an example of a time when a discussion changed your thinking and/or gave you a different perspective?

Literacy
1. What skills do you think you've learned this year? Would you say your ability to read and write has deepened?
Probe: How would you describe your experience using your writers' notebook over the year? Did you find it useful? If so, how?

2. Do you think that reading and discussion make people better citizens?

3. What does it mean to you to be able to share your ideas? Can you connect that to being a citizen?

Comparison between this class and other classes
1. How is this class different compared to the other classes you took in high school?
Probe: Student-led (discussion and projects) vs. Teacher-led (lecture and worksheets)

2. In general, do you think teachers in your school treat students differently?
Probe: Do they have different expectations for different student groups? Does that relate to demographic backgrounds, social class, perceived academic ability, what track they are on?

3. Would you recommend this class to other students in your school? Why or why not?

Is there anything you would like to add to anything you said? Are there any questions that I should have asked that I didn't ask?

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter

Molloy College

1000 Hempstead Avenue
Rockville Centre, NY 11571
www.molloy.edu

Tel. 516.323.3801
Tel. 516.323.3711

Date: October 30, 2017
To: Professor Allison Roda for Student Signy Emler
From: Kathleen Maurer Smith, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board
Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN
Co-Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: MOLLOY IRB REVIEW AND DETERMINATION OF EXPEDITED STATUS – EDU
Study Title: Dialogic Pedagogy: A Recipe for Democracy Proposal
Approved: October 30, 2017
Approval No.: 19051312-1030

Dear Professor Roda /Signy Emler:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Molloy College has reviewed the above-mentioned research proposal and determined that this proposal is approved by the committee. It is considered an EXPEDITED review per the requirements of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects as defined in 45CFR46.101(b) and has met the conditions for conducting the research. Please note that as Principal Investigator (PI), it is your responsibility to be CITI Certified and submit the evidence in order to conduct your research.

You may proceed with your research. Please submit a report to the committee at the conclusion of your project.

Changes to the Research: It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the Molloy College IRB of any changes to this research. A change in the research may change the project from EXPEDITED status that would require communication with the IRB.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Maurer Smith, Ph.D.

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN

APPENDIX F

Ms. L.'s Course Topics (From Syllabus)

September/October	
	▢ Critical Reading/Annotation
	• College-ready writing – Are you college-ready?
	• Literacy Narrative
	• Revision Strategies
	• Academic Discussion Skills
	• Rhetoric – What is it?
	• The rhetorical situation
	• Responsible Writing
	• College Essay
	• Independent Reading Choices
November/December	
	• Crafting Argument – making claims, using evidence
	• Rhetorical Appeals in Argument
	• Writing a convincing argument – the art of persuasion
	• Responding to Counter-Argument
	• Rhetorical Moves
	• Analyzing Elements of Argument
	• Researching Controversial Topics
	• Inductive/Deductive Reasoning
	• Introduction to Analysis
	• Visual Analysis
	• Description
	• Exemplification
	• Writing about culture
January/February	
	• Literary Elements Techniques, and Devices
	• Responding to Literature (*How to Read Literature Like a Professor*)
	• Analyzing Poetry
	• Literary Analysis – Writing about character, tone, setting, imagery, figurative language
	• Metaphor
	• Maintaining a critical focus – Distinguishing critical comments from plot details
	• Writing strategies for developing ideas
	• MLA Documentation
	• Comparing and Contrasting
March/April	
	▢ Literary Theory
	• Literary Criticism
	• Writing about symbols
	• Arguing an Interpretation
	• Reading and writing about short fiction
	• Writing about drama

May/June	• Research Writing • The Research Process • Finding and Narrowing a Topic • Writing a preliminary thesis statement • Gathering and documenting sources • Reading and annotating sources • Planning, drafting, revising the paper

Note. This dissertation research did not study the literacy gains students made, but because they are referred to and implied, this chart shows the depth and breadth of content Ms. L. was able to teach through dialogic methods.