Expanding the Parameters of Exploratory Talk

Monica Glina

In this paper, I define exploratory talk and explore a number of examples that were analyzed using the data-analytic coding rules delineated by Soter et al. (2007). Then, I propose expanding the rules for exploratory talk outlined by Soter et al. (2007) and suggest coding facilitator utterances as *substantive* contributions to the dialogue not intrusive interjections to the discourse. I argue that this approach recognizes the facilitator as an equal participant in the dialogue who is positioned to model good inquiry, cultivate shared possession of the discourse and redistribute power amongst participants. I suggest that a possible mechanism for realizing these goals is an instructional pedagogy that is participatory, liberatory, democratic and critical, such as P4C, which is defined by a community committed to intersubjective interaction and the (re)productive evolution of ideas.

Classroom discourse today is typically associated with a transmission model, which is characterized by the delivery of content from the teacher to the student (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). In a typical classroom, "teachers talk and students listen" (Nystrand, 1997, p. 3), making students the passive recipients of knowledge who are vessels to be "filled" (Freire, 2006). Transmission, which is typically associated with teacher-centered practices, features more talking and questions from teachers than students; more direct, whole-group instruction; and places a greater focus on basic recall of information rather than consideration of complex topics (Cuban, 1984). For example, knowledge questions, such as "What is a quadrilateral?" are captured by the three-step IRE (initiation by the teacher, response from the student, evaluation/follow-up by the teacher) structure and require students to recall basic information. These kinds of "known-answer" questions are asked by teachers and are exceedingly common in traditional classroom discourse (Cazden, 2001; French & McClure, 1981). Freire (1994) argued against teaching students disembodied facts and figures that they are asked to memorize, claiming that the educational system "inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human" (p. 65). A pedagogical model of transmission, despite being the most efficient way to satisfy institutional and curricular requirements (Brown, 2003), does not ordinarily leave room for reflective, participatory, dialogic inquiry (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

The larger, theoretical framework of critical pedagogy (Freire's, 1994, 2006) is an educational practice that seeks to counteract the oppression inherent in the traditional approach to schooling and endorses positive social change through individual empowerment. It offers educators who wish to exercise a more critical, reflective approach to teaching an empowering pedagogy (McLaren, 1989) that encourages students to play an active role in their learning. Proponents of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1994, 2006; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1994, 1997, 1998; Giroux & McLaren, 1989) argue that a healthy participatory democracy requires personal responsibility and mutual trust amongst students and teachers, and that the fundamentals of democracy must be practiced regularly in order to master them.

Critical pedagogy offers a framework through which to understand power relations because it focuses on recalibrating the disequilibrium that exists among individuals, and it purports to offer a mechanism by which to

overtly address the conflict that exists between them. P4C is an instructional approach that manifests features of critical pedagogy, such as fairness, mutual trust, dialogue, compromise, commitment and personal responsibility towards oneself and others in accordance with democratic principles. Therefore, P4C offers a practical, dialogical vehicle consistent with dialogic teaching by which participants in a community can operationalize some of the key theoretical claims asserted by critical pedagogy.

Current research suggests the recognized theoretical potential of dialogic teaching and the emerging evidence connecting it to important learning outcomes (Gregory, 2007; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Reznitskaya et al., 2009; Soter et al., 2008; Wegerif, Mercer & Dawes, 1999). Dialogic approaches are a departure from the transmission model and can cultivate participation and the co-construction of meaning. Dialogic approaches encourage students to critically engage contestable questions, consider their own arguments, weigh the validity of the arguments of others, mediate their ideas through one another and challenge one another's ideas and perspectives by offering alternative reasons and options for consideration. Reflective inquiry and thinking-centered learning are characteristics of a student-centered classroom (McCombs & Whisler, 1997) and are conducive to the kind of reasoned co-construction captured by an indicator of dialogic interaction, such as exploratory talk. In the following sections, I define the conventional, data-analytic parameters of exploratory talk and argue for an expansion of those parameters based on the potential outcomes of a dialogic, egalitarian pedagogy, such as P4C.

The Conventional Conception of Exploratory Talk

Exploratory talk is characterized by the critical, reasoned co-construction of knowledge by two or more students (Mercer, 2002; Mercer et al., 2007), "with speakers following ground rules which help them to share knowledge, evaluate evidence, and consider options in a reasonable and equitable way" (Mercer, 2000, p. 153). Exploratory talk is talk "in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas. Relevant information is offered for joint consideration. Proposals may be challenged and counter-challenged, but, if so, reasons are given and alternatives offered. Agreement is sought as a basis for joint progress. Knowledge is made publicly accountable and reasoning is visible in the talk" (Mercer, 2000, p. 150). Instances of exploratory talk address a single topic and occur primarily amongst students, and an episode of exploratory talk occurs when students proceed for at least three turns without any substantive interruptions from the facilitator.

In their manual for analyzing discussion discourse elements, Soter et al. (2007) operationalize Mercer's conception of exploratory and delineate specific rules for analyzing it. They write:

> By definition, students should do the bulk of the work in the construction of knowledge in episodes of exploratory talk; they are the ones who should be actively contributing and putting forward their views, even if the teacher is present. Sometimes a teacher may interject in an episode of what is otherwise student-student exploratory talk, and you will need to decide whether the teacher's utterance is part of the episode or disrupts the episode. If the teacher interjection does not substantially influence the course of the students' talk (i.e., the students may have continued in this way without the interjection), then the teacher interjection should be coded as part of the episode. (Soter et al., 2007, p. 34)

Thus, any interference from the teacher needs to be weighed to determine whether or not it is procedural

and, therefore, does not disrupt the talk or if it is substantive and, therefore, drives the talk. If the utterance drives the talk, the talk cannot be considered exploratory (Soter et al., 2007).

The following four examples are part of a data set from a research study of dialogic interaction in fourth-grade classrooms in northern New Jersey that were assigned to one of two treatment groups: P4C and regular instruction. The examples illustrate an instance of discourse that, under Soter et al.'s (2007) conventional coding rules, does not qualify as exploratory talk (Example 1) and three instances of discourse that do qualify as exploratory talk under the conventional rules (Examples 2, 3 and 4). After I explore each of these examples, I make a case for expanding the conventional rules used to code exploratory talk.

Example 1 illustrates the type of discourse that would not qualify as exploratory talk. First, the students must be involved in the critical, reasoned co-construction of knowledge (Mercer, 2002; Mercer et al., 2007). In Example 1, the facilitator poses the question, "Anyone want to take a guess as to where they have to literally jam the needle?" Students offer a variety of responses, such as "Your shoulder," "Your neck," "Your foot" and "On their leg," so one could argue that students are co-constructing an understanding of where an EpiPen is administered by collectively working toward the answer. However, only one of the students' suggestions is accompanied by a reason (*Your derrière. Doesn't hurt there.*). The purpose of exploratory talk is for students to offer well-reasoned, critical arguments, a criterion that is not represented by the talk in Example 1.

Second, the talk in Example 1 is primarily facilitator-directed. The facilitator asks a question (Think of a place on your body.), the student provides an answer (Your shoulder) and the facilitator validates the student's response (Oh, that's a good place). This is entirely consistent with the three-step IRE structure, which is common in traditional teacher-student exchanges.

Third, after posing the question, the facilitator nominates students to respond to her question. Nominating a speaker is a procedural interjection and does not interrupt exploratory talk (See Example 2). However, the facilitator in Example 1 adds embellishments to her nominations that, according to Soter et al. (2007), disrupt the talk. For example,"On their leg. But you know what? Their leg is very big. Where on your leg?" is one such disruption. By asking her student, "Where on your leg?" she dictates the direction of the discourse in a manner of her choosing instead of relegating such decisions to the students themselves. Because the facilitator almost exclusively drives the talk, it does not qualify and should not be coded as an instance of exploratory talk.

Example 1

Facilitator: . . . . You know how most needles the point is very, very thin so they can get into your arm and everything?

Multiple Students Respond: Yes

Facilitator: The EpiPen needles are actually much thicker and bigger because, and they do not go in the arm. Anyone want to take a guess as to where they have to literally jam the needle?

Male Speaker: Ewww!

Facilitator: Think of a place on your body. It could be your derrière.

[Multiple Students Laughing.]

Facilitator: H?

H (Female Speaker): Your shoulder.

Facilitator: Your shoulder. Oh, that's a good place. A?

A (Male Speaker): Your neck.

Facilitator: Your neck. Okay, I can understand why. T?

T (Male Speaker): Your foot.

Facilitator: Your foot, okay.

Male Speaker: Most people usually do it on their leg.

Facilitator: On their leg. But you know what? Their leg is very big. Where on your leg?

Male Speaker: Your thigh.

Facilitator: The thigh area. J?

J (Male Speaker): Your neck.

Facilitator: Your neck, K?

K (Female Student): Your stomach.

Facilitator: Your stomach. D?

D (Female Speaker): Your back.

Facilitator: Your back. S?

S (Male Speaker): Your derrière. Doesn't hurt there.

[Multiple students laughing.]

Facilitator: K?

K (Male Speaker): Um, your back.

Facilitator: Your back. Okay, well, the correct area actually is your thigh, which is right here. Okay? And they have to get it in a tough place and what they do is, you can't really, you know how they . . . ? They always have to clean the area first, and if you're wearing long sleeves, they make you roll it up and everything.

Male Speaker: [Inaudible.]

Facilitator: Usually. Because of EpiPens, because you have to do it quick and because it's so big, you have to pass through something. So they always go through the skin or through your clothing. …You know how doctors and nurses when they're giving you a shot, they go like this, okay, and do it very gently, so you barely feel anything?

Multiple Students Speaking: [Inaudible.]

Facilitator: What happens when with an EpiPen is that person usually is, you know if that person is having an allergic reaction that means you have to lay the person on their side, and you literally [makes a jamming gesture]. . . .

Example 2 illustrates an episode of exploratory talk, which begins *after* the teacher asks the question and includes the requisite three uninterrupted student turns. In this example, the teacher's interjections are unobtrusive because they serve only to nominate the next speaker. Students are able to co-construct arguments for the use of comic books in the classroom by offering cogent reasons. The episode ends once the teacher makes a substantive contribution by saying, "Yup, we have it here for 5th grade; we just don't use it."

Example 2

S (Female Speaker): I think that we should start using comics here 'cause it does help with your writing and your reading.

Facilitator: Can you explain why you think that?

[Episode of Exploratory Talk Begins]

S (Female Speaker): Because you have, um, say like you don't like fiction stories, and you only like non-fiction stories. And then you start reading comics, and it's like a fiction story. So you're gonna learn what they're all about, and then you'll learn how to read a comic. You'll like comic books and with writing, you'll learn how to actually write one and see how you're writing. **[Turn 1]**

Facilitator: Um, another comment, T? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

T (Male Speaker): I think we should make comics, I think we should make comics in our own head of what we think of like some adventures that we think of, and we should put 'em in from our head to the comics. **[Turn 2]**

Facilitator: Comics. Um, K? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

K (Female Speaker): I think we should use comics because like J said Miss G. has comics and in 3rd grade our teacher Miss R. also had comics. She had it, and everyone had this book. It wasn't like a book; it was like a portfolio, and it had all these, all these stories. It wasn't like a comic book for like fun and with adventures; it actually teaches us something about the lesson. Like last time we were talking about measuring things, so it

was a story about a family of mice and they were trying to get through and then they were trying to run away from this guy. So they went on top of the ramp, and they were trying to go up so they would all fit and be able to go back into their mouse hole. So they had to, they had to compare all the mice weight, and they figured out which mice should go on which balance beam and then they can get back. **[Turn 3]**

Facilitator: M? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

M (Female Speaker): Um, also I agree with S because it does help you with writing. Like it helps you write creative. And also I know what K's talking about because it was a math comic book that we looked at. **[Turn 4]**

Facilitator: Yup, we have it here for 5th grade; we just don't use it. **[Substantive interjection, which ends episode of exploratory talk.]**

In Example 3, the beginning of a new episode is marked by T's question. The episode is comprised of 7 uninterrupted student turns. The facilitator's interjections serve to nominate the next speaker but neither disrupt nor contribute substantively to the content of, or redirect the talk.

Example 3

Facilitator: You have a question, O.K., T?

T (Male Student): Um, I know that they didn't want to tell the questions or like what Maya said, but why did they spank him? He's just a kid. Kids were not like us. Kids sometimes asks stupid questions, but that's what they do 'cause they want to know what they're doing. So why'd they have to spank?

Facilitator: K? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

K (Female Student): Well, I kind of agree

Facilitator: Hold on a second, K has the floor. Go ahead. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

K (Female Student): I kind of agree with Maya because I think the only reason why they didn't they were trying to question they spanked him because they didn't really know how to answer him. They didn't know what to say because maybe they don't know what crocodiles eat or maybe they do, and they just don't want him to know at such a young age.

Facilitator: S, sit up for me, please. A? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

A (Male Student): I disagree with K and M. The only reason they didn't tell him is because the crocodile eats them.

K (Female Student): I just said that.

A (Male Student): You just said you agree with M.

K (Female Student): And then I said at the end that maybe they might spank him because they don't want him to know that crocodiles might eat him at such a young age.

Example 4 is an episode of exploratory talk in which students respond to the facilitator's statement about thinking being a fundamental function.

Example 4

Facilitator: So, thinking is actually totally fundamental.

[Beginning of Exploratory Talk]

Female Student: Actually, you wouldn't just be standing there if you think 'cause you sort of just move, and they give you a problem you don't know and by just sitting there, you wouldn't be doing anything; you'd just be looking at the problem doing nothing.

Male Student: But you'd probably be thinking to try to solve it.

Female Student: I know, but . . .

[Multiple Students Speaking.]

Facilitator: Let's talk one at a time. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

Female Student: I'm saying you'd just be sitting there.

[Multiple Students Speaking.]

Facilitator: I'm going to take these up now and leave copies for you guys if you want to use them for your journals. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

[Multiple Students Speaking.]

Female Student: You have to think because that's the only way to solve a problem.

Facilitator: Let me remind you or actually . . . I don't know if we've talked about this, but let's make the order of the group first one person talks at a time, which is kind of obvious right because then things get chaotic. And also, I don't necessarily want to be the center of the discussion, so one person talk at a time and if you want to respond . . . We had a response here from M, for example. M could raise his hand, and whoever is taking, for example, if it's R, calls on him. And then you call on the next person. Or Y. Alright? Alright, so C, do you have your hand up? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

C (Female Student): No.

Facilitator: No. Where were we now? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

Female Speaker: We were talking about thinking. Like, do we need to think?

Facilitator: And what had been said, and what had been sort of argued? **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

R (Female Student): Um, I think M wanted to say something.

Facilitator: Okay. So let's give it to M. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

M (Male Student): R said if you're . . . if there's a problem in front of you and you can't figure it out, then you're just gonna sit there. But you wouldn't necessarily try to solve the problem.

Y (Male Student): But if you can't think, how are you supposed to solve?

Facilitator: Wait, Y. Let's try to keep to this protocol just so we get used to it. Now, somebody raise their hand and M, you pick them, and they're gonna respond to you. Either R or Y. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

M (Male Student): Y.

Y (Male Student): But if you can't think, then how are you going to solve the question?

Facilitator: And now you pick. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

Y (Male Student): I don't know.

Facilitator: I just saw K. Go ahead. Pick somebody. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

Y (Male Student): R.

R (Female Student): That's why you sort of need to think because you need to think if you want to answer a problem. K.

K (Female Student): I think what M was trying to say was if you just stand there and look at the question, you will be thinking to solve the problem. R.

R (Female Student): I think what she's saying is since you can't think if you don't have the [Inaudible] to think, you can just figure it out on a piece of scrap paper.

K (Female Student): That's what I was saying.

R (Female Student): Yeah.

Facilitator: Okay. We have some new hands, R. **[Procedural interjection; does not add to talk.]**

R (Female Student): Um, T.

T (Female Student): I think that maybe I agree with K and M. If you're working at something, it's a problem,

unless it's a math problem and then you're probably reading it or thinking about it or thinking of its meaning, why it's there. But if you have a problem in front of you, your brain, usually you are thinking about what you're staring at, but if you're not then you're thinking or you're working on another problem you have on your mind. Not always necessarily if you're looking at something, you have to be thinking about it.

Facilitator: But, what I'm hearing here is that you think because there is a problem. **[Substantive interjection, which ends episode of exploratory talk.]**

T (Female Student): Well, not always.

Facilitator: Like if you're driving and there's no problem, you don't really think about how you're driving.

The episode in Example 4 begins when the student responds to the facilitator by replying,

> Actually, you wouldn't just be standing there if you think 'cause you sort of just move, and they give you a problem you don't know and by just sitting there, you wouldn't be doing anything; you'd just be looking at the problem doing nothing.

Students proceed through a number of turns, which are punctuated by procedural interjections by the facilitator, such as, "Let's talk one at a time," ". . . let's make the order of the group . . . one person talks at a time . . . ," "So, let's give it to M," "We have some new hands, R" and "Let's try to keep to this protocol just so we get used to it." One might even argue that, "Where were we now?" and "And what had been said, and what had been sort of argued?" are procedural as well because they require students to engage in a cognitive assessment of the group's progress, but they do not contribute to the substance of the talk or (re)direct it in any way.

Expanding the Parameters of Exploratory Talk

The rules used to code instances of exploratory talk in Example 1 to Example 4 are consistent with previous research and existing literature (Mercer, 2002; Mercer et al., 2007; Soter et al., 2007). The examples that qualify as instances of exploratory talk assume a "procedurally strong" but "substantively weak" facilitator (Kennedy, 2004; Splitter & Sharp, 1996), which captures the paradigmatic archetype of the facilitator in a dialogic discussion. Facilitators promote the powerful cognitive and social dispositions whose outcomes follow from the rigor associated with reasoned inquiry. They cultivate the symbiotic impact that co-inquirers can have on each other by divesting themselves of the trappings typically associated with being the classroom content expert and deliberately assume a level of humility and "scholarly ignorance" (Reed, 1992; Splitter & Sharp, 1996). However, a newly articulated coding system that treats the facilitator as an equal participant in the dialogue who models good inquiry and recalibrates power relations warrants exploration. By expanding the parameters of exploratory talk , the facilitator's utterances would be coded to indicate that, in these utterances, he or she is behaving as an equal participant whose contributions are substantive and not disruptive. Therefore, the facilitator emerges as both procedurally *and* substantively strong and shares with the community's other participants the responsibilities associated with both procedure *and* substance. Example 5 illustrates an excerpt that was coded using the expanded coding parameters.

Example 5

T (Female Student): I think that maybe I agree with K and M. If you're working at something, it's a problem, unless it's a math problem and then you're probably reading it or thinking about it or thinking of its meaning, why it's there. But if you have a problem in front of you, your brain, usually you are thinking about what you're staring at, but if you're not then you're thinking or you're working on another problem you have on your mind. Not always necessarily if you're looking at something, you have to be thinking about it.

Facilitator: But, what I'm hearing here is that you think because there is a problem. **[This substantive interjection would end this episode of exploratory talk if the conventional rules of exploratory talk were applied. However, a new coding structure could consider this utterance part of exploratory talk.]**

T (Female Student): Well, not always.

Facilitator: Like if you're driving and there's no problem, you don't really think about how you're driving. **[This utterance would not be included in this episode of exploratory talk if the conventional rules of exploratory talk were applied because it happens after the substantive interjection, which ends the episode. However, a new coding structure could consider this part of exploratory talk.]**

[Multiple Students Speaking.]

Facilitator: Okay, I broke the rule and messed things up. I'll raise my hand next time just like everybody else.

T (Female Student): If you don't concentrate on reading you're not concentrating because there's a problem, you *will* cause a problem. It's that simple. You have to think what you're doing at the moment. Not just because there is a problem ahead of you because if you don't think about it, your problem might get bigger.

K (Female Student): Pick someone.

Female Student: Pick someone!

Male Student: I had his hand up.

T (Female Student): I.

I (Male Student): I'm talking to R. But if you're solving a problem, don't you have to think to write on the piece of paper?

The non-procedural facilitator contribution in Example 5, "But, what I'm hearing here is that you think because there is a problem," would, under conventional coding rules of exploratory talk, effectively disrupt and, thus, end the episode. If, however, this teacher utterance was coded according to an expanded conception of equal participation, the episode would not end when the facilitator utters, "But, what I'm hearing here is that you think because there is a problem." Instead, the dialogue could conceivably continue for the duration of the excerpt in Example 5.

Educators engaged in a critical, pedagogical approach are urged to approach education as transformative intellectuals rather than functionaries and serve as emancipatory models of authority (Giroux, 1997). Example 5 offers a specific move by the facilitator in the service of the emancipation and liberation of the community's participants: "Okay, I broke the rule and messed things up. I'll raise my hand next time just like everybody else." The facilitator's procedurally strong move works to eliminate the hierarchical structure inherent in most classrooms by articulating his non-authoritative role as equal participant. Reinforcing his words by modeling procedurally strong actions, he empowers his students to call on each other, co-construct meaning with one another and even call on him, suggesting a level of structural equilibrium within the group. This cultivates a community in which he can be procedurally strong and substantively strong; in the case of the latter, substance refers not to knowing and providing the right answers to "known answer" questions, but by contributing to the co-construction of robust, emergent discourse.

Evaluating the Presence of Liberatory Practice

Encouraging students to call on, or nominate, speakers within the community of inquiry becomes a way in which to assess the collaborative license and participatory liberties the group has assumed and internalized. Thus, nomination is one dialogic element that can help to corroborate the presence and the effects of liberatory practice within a community as manifested by its discourse. This is critical for determining whether or not discourse is eligible for coding using the new rules for exploratory talk; it is only when power has been effectively and successfully redistributed, that discourse qualifies for analysis under the new coding structure, and nomination is a sociolinguistic element that can suggest the degree to which the facilitator shares his or her power with the students. In a teacher-dominated classroom setting, the power to nominate may reside exclusively with the facilitator. However, a facilitator who shares the power to nominate other speakers can be seen as redistributing that power among all members of the classroom community.

Data from the previously aforementioned data set shows that in addition to nominations by the facilitator (Example 6), four additional categories within nomination emerged in the P4C group that were not present in the group receiving regular instruction. These categories are the facilitator prompting student to nominate the next speaker (Example 7), one student nominating another student (Example 8), one student prompting another student to nominate the next speaker (Example 9) and a student nominating the facilitator (Example 10).

Example 6

Facilitator: J, you have a question? What grabbed you?

Example 7

Facilitator: Okay. So R has offered us a kind of a synonym, you know, a word that means the same. You call on the next person, R.

Example 8

I (Male Student): R.

Example 9

M (Female Student): Pick someone.

Example 10

E (Female Student): . . . .You don't have any conscious of what's around you or what your surroundings are or anything. Nothing. Dr V.

The second and third types of nomination—the facilitator prompting a student to nominate the next speaker (Example 7) and a student nominating another student (Example 8)—are regularly promoted by the P4C facilitator. The interesting trend emerges in the final two actions: a student prompting another student to nominate the next speaker (Example 9) and a student nominating the facilitator to speak (Example 10). Students seemed to appropriate and elaborate the technique used by the facilitator to distribute nominations. A student prompting another student to nominate the next speaker seems to signal that (1) the student has internalized the behavior of fairly and equitably nominating the next speaker, which has been modeled by the facilitator within the social setting; and (2) the student has taken that behavior, enhanced it as illustrated in Examples 9 and 10 and begun to use it as part of his or her repertoire of behaviors. In the absence of a negative response from the facilitator, this behavior could eventually, according to Dewey (1997a), become a habit. Thus, the results suggest that nomination was present in the P4C group in a more varied sense and that students in the P4C group, who were encouraged to *do* nomination, reinterpreted their roles as nominators by changing the surface structure of the move.

This is important for (dis)qualifying an episode of exploratory talk as eligible for coding using the new rules based on the role of the participants of the dialogue. Adopting and adapting the original function of nomination implies deeper internalization of the roles of discussion participants, and student nominations can indicate the development of important disposition, such as respect for another's right to be given "the floor" as primary speaker, the fairness that is integral to acknowledging this right and the caring involved in making certain the individual is given "the floor." Following Vygotsky (1978), these behaviors are all are generated during the socio-cultural exchange. First, they were modeled by the facilitator. Then, they were reflected upon, cognitively accommodated and then incorporated by the other participants in the community. Thus, learning led to development through the use of the language tool called nomination. The literature on the community of inquiry asserts that, "...the commitment to engage in a community of inquiry is a political commitment...It is only to the extent that individuals have had the experience of dialoguing with others as equals, participating in shared, public inquiry that they will be able to eventually take an active role in the shaping of a democratic society." (Sharp, 1993, p. 343) The facilitator not only models these democratic dispositions, but shares his power with the group, thus enabling participants to practice and, ultimately and ideally, internalize these behaviors. Sharing the process of nomination in the P4C group represents an important step toward the redistribution of power. If the relational imbalance that exists between teachers and their students should be recalibrated toward an equality of power and praxis (Freire, 1994, 2006), nomination in the P4C group seems to align with Freire's theoretical assertion because it sanctions the redistribution of power to *all* participants.

Exploratory Talk within a Liberatory Pedagogy

Changing the complexion of exploratory talk becomes *necessary* when examined within the domain of an instructional approach (1) that engages in discussions around contestable questions for which not even the facilitator knows the 'right' answer, (2) whose facilitator is committed to participation by *all* participants and (3) whose facilitator creates a community (of inquiry) where authority is fluid and shared. Liberatory, democratic and steeped in the dynamics of dialogical inquiry and socio-cultural theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1981), P4C (Lipman, 2003; Lipman et al., 1980) is a pedagogical model that promotes the cognitive, aesthetic and affective development of children through teacher-facilitated group inquiry and dialogue (Lipman, 2003). P4C uses structured philosophical dialogue not only to sharpen critical-thinking skills (e.g., Banks, 1989; Camhy

& Iberer, 1988) but to cultivate a sensitivity toward and understanding of others' values, interests and beliefs (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980).

With the facilitator as co-inquirer, guide and model, the community of inquiry functions as the arena for inquiry, dialogue and concept exploration. These attributes also serve as requisite tenets of exploratory talk around contestable questions and promote the move from the "logic of general notions" (Dewey, 1985, p. 187), which proposes a universal, immutable Truth to a logic of inquiry, which "help[s] men solve problems in the concrete by supplying them [with] hypotheses to be used and tested in projects of reform" (Dewey, 1985, p. 189). Thus, the epistemology of knowledge moves from seeking an immutable Truth to seeking a temporal truth that develops organically out of the testing and reconstruction of a proposed solution; one arrives at a set of tentative results to solve a concrete problem that may have to be reconstructed based on new information and developments. It is only through a thoughtful, intelligent method of experimentation that a logic of inquiry can take place. This marks a shift from the staid practice associated with a didactic, monological approach, which, at its best, does not assist inquiry and, at its worst, inhibits inquiry, toward a method of inquiry that strives to (re)construct a theory that makes a positive difference and cultivates "initiative, inventiveness, varied resourcefulness, assumption of responsibility in choice of belief and conduct" (Dewey, 1985, p. 1191). The implications for a shift of this nature are substantive because "it is only [through the conversion of classrooms into communities of inquiry] that the next generations will be prepared socially and cognitively to engage in the dialogue, judging and on-going questioning that is vital to the existence of a democratic society" (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 343).

This is consistent with Freire (2006), who argues that educators should create an environment within which teachers and students use dialogue to learn and solve problems together. By inviting students to be equal contributors, the facilitator strives to redress the imbalance of power that is inherent in traditional classrooms. Dewey (1997a) also argues that democracy depends on the willingness of educated global citizens to engage in social interactions that serve to improve the larger social good.

Freire's (2006) seminal work with Brazil's poor farmers focuses on writing literacy. McLaren's (1998) observations of students, parents and teachers from an inner-city Canadian elementary school provide "insights into school life as it is lived by students and teachers" (p. 112). While critical pedagogy grows out of the need to resist oppression in very extreme circumstances, it also has wider implications for, as McLaren (1998) argues, classroom practice. Specifically, critical pedagogy is integral to equalizing power relations and delimiting inequalities and injustices by redistributing authority and recalibrating the disequilibrium that can exist in traditional classroom. Thus, it can be argued that it is critical for a teacher to be reflective of his or her practice in order to successfully create a liberating, educational environment. "Education can only be liberating if everyone has a part to play in its development…This implies that all voices should be heard and all contributions are legitimate" (Humphries & Martin, 2000, p. 282). The coding structure for exploratory talk that I propose incorporates the contributions of *all* participants within a democratic, liberatory dialogue. Specifically, it preserves the critical co-reasoning that exploratory talk suggests should take place amongst students, and it recognizes the dialogical and dispositional accessions modeled by the facilitator.

The facilitator's involvement in episodes of exploratory talk as an equal participant provides a context within which he can model critical, reasoned co-construction of knowledge (dialogical) *and* begin to shift power to all participants (dispositional). Nomination, once again, emerges as an exemplar. By sharing the responsibility of nomination, or selecting, students to speak, the P4C facilitator, as model and mediator, accomplishes three crucial objectives: He introduces students to the inherently democratic practice of sharing the responsibility of nomination; by inviting students to facilitate the process of nomination, by taking an important step toward redistributing the power dynamic within the group, and by shifting it to all members of the community. In addition to inviting participants to share the responsibility of electing the next speaker, the facilitator can also invite students to negotiate and navigate turn-taking amongst themselves, which is also a critical component of explora-

tory talk. These aforementioned strategies are instrumental in redistributing power amongst the community's participants, and the sum total of the facilitator's actions suggests a willingness to share his power and authority with the group (Kennedy, 2004). By shifting power from himself to all members of the community, the facilitator redefines the relationship among all the group's participants, recalibrates the imbalance that can manifest itself in classrooms and, ultimately, inspires the group's participants to consider him an equal participant. In this capacity, the facilitator moves well beyond the role of transmitter of knowledge and becomes responsible for "embody[ing] in [his] teaching a vision of a better and more humane life" (Giroux & McLaren, 1989, p. xiii).

The supposition that the facilitator is an equal participant rather than supreme arbiter presumes that the facilitator will be able to escape the role of authority figure. It can be argued, though, that acknowledging the possibility of such a re-characterization (i.e., the facilitator at least temporarily becoming equal to the rest of the individuals in the community) is vital because it enables the facilitator to recalibrate the potentially inherent power disequilibrium that can exist in classrooms. For example, the facilitator, who shifted his power to invite students to share in the process of nomination, could be seen as functioning in the capacity of a more experienced peer mentor as opposed to teacher-as-authority-figure. This, in a sense, permits him to be part of exploratory talk normally reserved for students. Thus, shifting power is not only important for the rich co-construction of meaning to which the facilitator-turned-participant can substantively contribute but for modeling the actual process of power redistribution from within the framework of critical pedagogy, which "signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities..." (Giroux, 1994, p. 30).

In conclusion, one could argue that the three criteria (contestable questions, inclusive participation and shared, fluid authority) render the conventional coding rules for exploratory talk deficient. First, students do not interact with 'known-answer' questions, which are characteristic of traditional classroom discourse, but engage, instead, with open-ended, contestable questions. Second, the facilitator as the more experienced "peer" (Vygotsky, 1978) is modeling good inquiry for the other community members and identifies himself as just another participant rather than supreme arbiter. The conventional iteration of the coding rules (Soter at al., 2007) disregards the role of facilitator as a co-inquirer dedicated to concept exploration, meaning creation and pedagogical emancipation, who guides and models for participants by asking good questions, posing alternative views, seeking clarification, questioning reasons and supporting claims with valid reasons. As a result, the facilitator's substantive inquiry moves and procedural contributions, which are integral to a liberatory pedagogy, remain unacknowledged under Soter et al.'s (2007) rules for coding exploratory talk.

In order to address this shortcoming, I proposed expanding the parameters of exploratory talk. I argued that it should recognize the substantive, dialogic contributions by the facilitator, who, as model and mediator, assumes the role of equal participant and enables him to enhance robust dialogic contributions with procedural contributions that not only propel the inquiry forward but can begin to recalibrate the power disequilibrium inherent in many classrooms. Thus, expanding the parameters of exploratory talk befittingly acknowledge the efforts of all the community's participants and provides a transparent mechanism through which to understand the dialogic interaction and group processes that are critical to inquiry and a more equitable power structure. In addition, a newly construed set of coding rules for exploratory talk could be used as a tool to help teachers analyze their own classroom discourse. By evaluating where they reside on the spectrum, they could begin the transition from a traditional, monological discussion style to a more dialogic approach to classroom discourse.

References

Banks, J. (1989). Philosophy for Children and California Achievement Test: An analytic study in a Midwestern suburb. *Analytic Teaching*, 9(2), 7–20.

Bonk, C. J., & Cunningham, D. J. (1998). Searching for learning-centered, constructivist and sociocultural components of collaborative education learning tools. In C. J. Bonk & K. S. King, (Eds.), Electronic collaborators: *Learning-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship and discourse* (pp. 25–50). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Brown, K. L. (2003). From teacher-centered to learner-centered curriculum: Improving learning in diverse classrooms. *Education,* 124, 49-54.

Camhy, D., & Iberer, G. (1988). Philosophy for children: A research project for further mental and personality development of primary and secondary school pupils. *Thinking*, 7(4), 18–26.

Cazden, C. B. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Cuban, L. (1984). *How teachers taught: Constancy and change in American classrooms*, 1890-1980. New York: Longman.

Dewey, J. (1985). *Reconstruction in philosophy.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Duffy, T. M., & Cunningham, D. J. (1996). Constructivism: Implications for the design and delivery of instruction. In D. H. Jonassen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology* (pp. 170–198). New York: Macmillan.

Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of hope.* New York, NY: Continuum.

Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world.* Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

French, P., & MacLure, M. (1981). Teachers' questions, pupils' answers: An investigation of questions and answers in the infant classroom. *First Language*, 2(4), 31–45.

Giroux, H. A. (1994). *Disturbing pleasures: Learning popular cultures.* New York: Routledge.

Giroux, H. A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture and schooling.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

Giroux, H. A. (1998). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning.* Granby, MA: Bergin and Garvey.

Giroux, H. A. & McLaren, P. (1989). *Critical pedagogy, the state and cultural struggle.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gregory, M. (2007). A framework for facilitating classroom dialogue. *Teaching Philosophy*, 30(1), 59-84.

Humphries, B. & Martin, M. (2000). Unsettling the "learning community": From "dialogue" to "difference?" *Community, Work and Family*, 3, 275-299.

Kennedy, D. (2004). The role of a facilitator in a community of philosophical inquiry. *Metaphilosophy*, 35(5), 744–765.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in education* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Lipman, M., Sharp, A. M. & Oscanyan, F. S. (1980). *Philosophy in the classroom.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

McCombs, B. L., & Whisler, J. S. (1997). *The learner-centered classroom and school: Strategies for increasing student motivation and achievement.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McLaren, P. (1998). *Life in school: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education.* New York: Addison-Wesley.

Mercer, N. (2002). Developing dialogues. In G. Wells & G. Claxton (Eds.), *Learning for life in the 21st century: Sociocultural perspectives on the future of education* (pp. 141–153). Oxford, England: Blackwell.

Mercer, N., & Littleton, K. (2007). *Dialogue and the development of children's thinking: A socio-cultural approach.* London: Routledge.

Mercer, N., Wegerif, R., Dawes, L., Sams, C., & Fernandez, M. (2007). How computers can help children think together about texts. In C. Kinzer & L. Verhoeven (Eds.), *Interactive literacy education* (pp. 245–268). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Reed, R. F. (1992). On the art and craft of dialogue. In A. M. Sharp & R. F. Reed (Eds.), *Studies in Philosophy for Children* (pp. 147-157). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Reznitskaya, A., Kuo, L., Clark, A., Miller, B., Jadallah, M., Anderson, R. C., & Nguyen-Jahiel, K. (2009). Collaborative Reasoning: A dialogic approach to group discussions. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 3(1), 29-48.

Sharp, A. M. (1993). The Community of Inquiry: Education for Democracy. In M. Lipman (Ed.), *Thinking Children and Education* (pp. 337-345). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Soter, A., Wilkinson, I. A. G., Murphy, P. K., Rudge, L., & Reninger, K. B. (2007). *Analyzing the Discourse of Discussion Coding Manual, Version 21.* Unpublished manuscript.

Soter, A., Wilkinson, I. A., Murphy, P. K., Rudge, L., Reninger, K., & Edwards, M. (2008). What the discourse tells us: Talk and indicators of high-level comprehension. *International Journal of Educational Research, 47, 372-391.*

Splitter, L. J., & Sharp, A. M. (1995). *Teaching for better thinking.* Melbourne: ACER.

Splitter, L. J., & Sharp, A. M. (1996). The practice of philosophy in the classroom. In R. F. Reed & A. M. Sharp (Eds.), *Studies in Philosophy for Children: Pixie* (pp. 285-314). Madrid: Ediciones De La Torre.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1981). The genesis of higher-order mental functions. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 144-188). Armonk, NY: Sharpe.

Wegerif, R., Mercer, N., & Dawes, L. (1999). From social interaction to individual reasoning: An empirical investigation of a possible sociocultural model of cognitive development. *Learning and Instruction*, 9(6), 493-516.

[i]*A new coding structure would still need to preserve the distinction between the students and the facilitator because differentiating between teacher and student moves in classroom discussions can be seen as one of the key objectives in analyzing classroom interactions. Thus, facilitator utterances would not be classified using the same codes employed for students, nor would the facilitator be coded the same way as a teacher who is not participating as an equal contributor.*

Address correspondence to:
Monica Glina
University of Oslo
Dept. of Educational Research, Post-doctoral Fellow
m.b.glina@ped.uio.no