

Dialogic Words to Teach By

Current status of classroom discourse in American middle and high school English classes:

On average, in the eighth-grade classes Nystrand and his colleagues studied (Nystrand, 1997), 85% of each class day in both eighth- and ninth-grades was devoted to a combination of lecture, question-and-answer recitation, and seatwork. Discussion and small-group work were rare. On average, discussion took 50 seconds per class in eighth grade and less than 15 seconds in grade 9. Question-answer exchanges, which dominate instruction in American English Language Arts instruction, occupied 30% of class time in the eighth-grade classes Nystrand and his colleagues studied and 42% of the ninth-grade classes. They play a key role in both accommodating and excluding student voices in the public, authoritative discourse of the classroom, and they are the central instructional mechanism in American classrooms for assigning epistemic roles to students. As such, they significantly regulate the extent to which teacher-student interaction can be dialogic. The bottom line for instruction is that the quality of student learning is closely linked to the quality of classroom talk. Martin Nystrand, *Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning in the English Classroom*. 1997.

The Dialogic

Meaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding Only the current of verbal intercourse endows a word with the light of meaning. Valentin Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 1973

The word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee. Valentin Vološinov.

The linkage of human to human is, in the final analysis, the groundwork of all ethics as a reflection on the legitimacy of the presence of others. H. R. Maturana & F. J. Varela, *The Tree of knowledge*, 1998.

Dialogic Instruction

When teachers ask questions about what students are thinking (and not just to see if they have done their homework), and when they ask them questions about their previous answers, they promote fundamental expectations for learning by seriously treating students as thinkers, i.e., by indicating that what students think is important and worth examining. Martin Nystrand, *Opening Dialogue*

Starting a discussion is a little like starting a fire. With enough kindling of the right sort, accompanied by patience, ignition is possible, though perhaps not on the first or second try. Martin Nystrand in Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long. Questions in time: Investigating the structure and dynamics of unfolding classroom discourse. *Discourse Processes*, 2003.