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Abstract:
Proponents of dialogic teaching argue for changes to classroom interaction to promote student language use and higher-order thinking. An under-researched aspect of dialogic approaches is the way students initiate and manage disagreement during their talk with each other. This article examines interaction in whole-class talk during a literacy lesson in a Grade 5/6 classroom, focusing on the ways students disagreed with each other during discussion of a controversial topic and visual text. Conversation analysis delineates methods used by students to disagree with the perspectives of some students and align with others, and to diffuse disputes that sometimes arose out of disagreements. Methods discerned in the analysis include quoting previous talk of a student and formulating prior thoughts, aligning and dis-aligning with others using words and gestures, and use of laughter to respond to marked verbal and non-verbal displays of opposition. Discussion considers how students made use of interactional practices found in disagreements in ordinary conversations and in more formal argumentation, how their interpretive work informed the literacy lesson and interactions with each other in this multi-party setting, and how the teacher’s action research project promoted opportunities for students to try out more academic and institutional ways of engaging in disagreement.
Proponents of dialogic teaching argue for changes to classroom interaction to promote student language use and higher-order thinking. An under-researched aspect of dialogic approaches is the way students initiate and manage disagreement during their talk with each other. This article examines interaction in whole-class talk during a literacy lesson in a Grade 5/6 classroom, focusing on the ways students disagreed with each other during discussion of a controversial topic and visual text. Conversation analysis delineates methods used by students to disagree with the perspectives of some students and align with others, and to diffuse disputes that sometimes arose out of disagreements. Methods discerned in the analysis include quoting previous talk of a student and formulating prior thoughts, aligning and dis-aligning with others using words and gestures, and use of laughter to respond to marked verbal and non-verbal displays of opposition. Discussion considers how students made use of interactional practices found in disagreements in ordinary conversations and in more formal argumentation, how their interpretive work informed the literacy lesson and interactions with each other in this multi-party setting, and how the teacher’s action research project
promoted opportunities for students to try out more academic and 
institutional ways of engaging in disagreement.

Introduction

Central to dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2010), or dialogic approaches, is talk that 
“encourages students to assume control, initiate and challenge ideas and contribute to 
shaping the verbal agenda” (Newman, 2016, p. 108). Through greater participation in 
classroom interaction, students are thought to co-construct meaning making, leading to 
the development of higher order thinking and the promotion of substantive knowledge 
(Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013, p. 114). Teo (2013) asserts that dialogic talk requires 
“students' resistance, reshaping and re-accentuations of these meanings by populating 
them with their own intentions, accents, and appropriating them by adapting them” 
(p. 92) to their own intentions. Alexander’s (2010) consideration of dialogic teaching 
refers to the need for “an extent of mutual challenge” (p. 107) in talk by students and 
their teachers. This may lead to individual and group outcomes that encompass the 
development and employment of argument schema (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013)— an essential outcome of inquiry dialogue.

Studies of dialogic teaching and collaborative learning highlight the need for 
students to learn to reach agreement through experiences of difference and divergence. 
According to Newman, “in striving for agreement, speakers must also strive for and 
explore difference: the polarities of agreement and disagreement, difference and 
synthesis, as dynamic and interdependent.” (Newman, 2016, p. 109). To achieve a
consensus, collaborative approaches provide group rules that guide students towards reaching mutual understanding and agreement.

In a consideration of small group collaborative activity, Mercer (1996) outlines three types of talk: disputational talk; cumulative talk and exploratory talk. Disputational talk features disagreement and a focus on decision making by individuals. This contrasts with cumulative talk where students build on the contributions of others but do so uncritically. Exploratory talk occurs when “partners engage critically but constructively with each other’s ideas” (Mercer, 1996, p. 375). Mercer makes the point that talk cannot be neatly categorized using these types, however, since they are typifications for analytic purposes. Nevertheless, Mercer argues strongly for the importance of developing argumentation in groups, since students rarely question or “challenge explanations or interpretations of events” (Mercer, 2009, p. 182) that are proffered by their teachers.

Brown (2016) examines the emergence of more formal argumentation in older high school students, linking argumentation with dialogic instruction for critical literacy. During examination of exploratory talk using Socratic circles, Brown (2016, p. 93) highlights that “making knowledge publically accountable, sharing opinions, and examining information critically is part of explaining, justifying, and evaluating a claim”. She emphasises students’ experiences of the interplay between informal and formal argumentation practices (p. 93).

In studies of dialogic teaching in literacy lessons, Reznitskaya and colleagues directly consider children’s experiences of disagreement and their perspectives on it (Reznitskaya & Glina, 2013; Reznitskaya, Glina, Carolan, Michaud, Rogers, & Sequeira,
Based on interviews with elementary school students who had experienced dialogic approaches in classrooms, Reznitskaya and Glina (2013) find that:

- the reasons behind students’ discomfort with disagreement seem to vary and possibly include personal preferences, uneasiness or unfamiliarity with novel classroom practices, a lack of understanding of the legitimate role that disagreement plays in inquiry dialogue, or an unsuccessful teacher’s facilitation that led to the frustration and hurt feelings. (p. 60)

The authors note the absence of studies that can “reveal more about the effective use of disagreement in elementary school classrooms” (p. 60), highlighting the centrality of disagreements to dialogic teaching, especially to how students learn to manage opposing viewpoints.

This article draws on data from a Critical Participatory Action Research study of dialogic practices and examines disagreement between Grade 5/6 students during a literacy lesson. Analysis establishes ways that students interacted to disagree, and sometimes to escalate disagreement, by aligning with perspectives of some students and challenging talk of others. The article highlights the need for dialogic approaches to literacy instruction to acknowledge existing interactional practices of students and foster institutional talk that allows students to harness and build on their existing competencies.

**Perspectives**

The study is informed by ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA), related sociological approaches. Ethnomethodology’s program (Garfinkel, 1967) is to
examine the methods that people use to produce “practical action and practical reasoning” (Hester & Francis, 1997, p. 97) as “witnessable” and orderly. CA describes and explicates the specific features of interactional encounters (Sacks, 1995). Sacks and his colleagues (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) explicated the rules for turn-taking in ordinary conversation and the mechanisms for conversational repair. Later work by conversation analysts examines both ordinary conversation and institutional talk, showing how institutional talk accomplishes institutional goals and identities by providing more restricted options for talk (Schegloff, 1992).

Much of the CA classroom research focuses on whole-class talk or how talk is organised in the teacher-led large group (Mondada, 2012). Studies establish the predominance of two-party talk between the teacher and individual students; most students are overhearers to the conduct of that talk although must always be ready for selection by the teacher as next speaker. Interaction constitutes students as a single-party and the teacher is the main participant (Mondada, 2012). Classroom turn-taking, as with interaction in other institutional settings, is considered to be reduced and constrained, in comparison to turn-taking in ordinary conversation. For example, the teacher most often determines who will be next speaker (McHoul, 1978).

From the perspectives of EM/CA, disagreements are built through sequential actions and exhibit recognizable, methodic features. These enable core understandings of the ways that disagreements are produced in ordinary conversation and may escalate into full blown disputes. Disagreement is frequently a dis-preferred action in ordinary conversation. This is shown through the employment of interactional
resources which mitigate the impact of disagreement. These include delaying disagreement or prefacing it in some way, for example through use of hesitation markers. Disagreement by children has been the focus for numerous EM/CA studies (see Davidson, 2012; Hester & Hester, 2010; Maynard, 1985, 1986). These show that children do not necessarily mitigate their disagreements as adults do.

Methods

Data are drawn from a Critical Participatory Action Research project (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014) that involved twelve teachers changing classroom talk practices (Edwards-Groves & Davidson, 2017). Each teacher developed and refined their particular focus using cycles of action. We provided professional learning activities related to talk, dialogic approaches to literacy instruction and action research. Data included teachers’ written reflections, interviews with teachers, and video/audio recordings of lessons. Phase 1 of the study encompassed thematic analysis across the data. Phase 2 involved analyses of recordings, using EM/CA, to provide rigorous description and explication of talk. This article draws on analysis from Phase 2.

Data are drawn from a classroom recording of one teacher, Aaron, and his Grade 5/6 students (aged 11–12 years). Aaron was in his second year of teaching. The school is in a large Australian capital city and is located in a low socioeconomic area. At the time of recording, the school had a population of approximately 120 students. The school has a culturally diverse community with well over eighty per cent of students from a language background other than English.
Aaron’s project focused on what he called “developing rich dialogue for writing”. He implemented a number of actions to promote student talk in literacy lessons before students produced individual written texts. Although not teaching formal argumentation per se, Aaron focused on selecting topics for discussion that were controversial and systematically using a variety of groupings of students within literacy lessons to generate student talk. The groupings occurred in a specific sequence. First, in the whole-class setting, students were asked to indicate any words they were unfamiliar with in the given topic. Then students talked in pairs, then shared their thoughts in a whole class talk session (referred to as “the forum”). During this time, students would sit in one circle and share ideas. Then, students worked in small groups to record their perspectives on the topic onto a large piece of paper. Finally, each group presented to the class, providing an opportunity for each group member to speak to the class drawing on written comments recorded previously. After each group presentation concluded, other students were able to question or provide comments in response. The teacher and students referred to the presentation time as “the lecture”. These various groupings, and consequent talk, later led to individual writing by students.

The topic addressed in the lesson analysed here was “Are children consuming too much digital technology?”. When Aaron introduced the topic, the question was written on the board and accompanied by a digital image. The image showed a woman standing at one end of a clothesline. At the other end sat a boy using a digital device of some kind. The clothesline was hung with clothes. The question and image were a
point of reference for the ensuing talk in various groupings; some children returned a
number of times to look more closely at the digital image.

This particular recording was selected because of students’ orientations to
disagreement during the lecture and escalation of disagreements into disputes at
certain points. The recording was viewed by us numerous times and several sequences
of interaction selected for detailed transcription using Jefferson notation (Atkinson &
Heritage, 1999). Transcripts included the use of pseudonyms for the teacher and
students. Transcription symbols can be found in Appendix 1. Readers not familiar with
Jefferson notation will find it helpful to read over the symbols at this point.

Analysis

The analysis establishes the methods used to initiate disagreement with the perspective
of another and to manage disagreement. Methods include quoting previous talk,
formulating prior thoughts, aligning or dis-aligning with others through words and
gestures and laughing in response to very marked use of verbal and non-verbal
displays of opposition. Seven extracts are examined.

Amelia’s stance

During the final part of the lesson, the lecture, groups presented their perspectives to
the entire class. The final group consisted of four girls. Amelia was the second last
speaker for the group. When it was her turn to address the class, she produced an
extended turn that encompassed her perspective on the image of the boy and his
mother.
Extract 1: Amelia’s stance

01 Ame: alright >my turn< okay so::: (1.0) from the picture
02 I think that as a Mum is hanging the towels I think
03 the towel (0.6) represent a flag of time (0.4) so:::
04 (0.4) while the Mum is like doing the chores and
05 (0.4) you know (0.2) all the boring stuff (0.4) the
06 kid is (0.2) playing the game (0.6) and you know
07 when you play game (1.0) time passes by really quick
08 and as she hang up she hangs another towel up (1.0)
09 another (0.4) another time (0.4) like (0.4) another
10 time is wasted (0.4) from (0.4) from him playing
11 his (0.6) putting all his attention (0.4) into the video
12 game
13 Tch: ((nods))

From the perspective of CA, stance can be understood as “a sequential and dynamic activity in which interlocutors evaluate and assess, and position themselves in relation to their co-participants, objects of talk and the surrounding world” (Haddington, 2006, p. 77). In her extended turn, Amelia produces a complexity of ideas encompassing what can be seen (“the towels”), her interpretation of what objects in the image represent (“represent a flag of time”), assessment of activities (“all the boring stuff”), and she draws on her experiences of playing games. Her stance is formulated strongly in her reference to the boy wasting his time through attending to the video game.
Indicating disagreement as next action

Following the individual presentations by all four members of the group, the teacher opens up the floor for questions and responses from other students. What develops over the ensuing talk is a dispute between Amelia, and Labib who is a Grade 5 student. Central to their dispute is whether or not Labib has correctly reported Amelia’s position when he presents his opposition to it. As the students disagree, others are drawn into the interaction to align with speakers or to diffuse the escalating dispute.

Extract 2: Indicating disagreement as next action

01 Tch:  OKA::Y one boy (0.4) one girl
02          (2.0)
03 Tch:  [Labib
04          [((pointing))
05 Lab:  o↑kay so I’m going to disagree with Amelia!
06          (0.4)
07 Ame:  yep!
08          ((students laughing))
09          (0.6)
10          ((Amelia nods several times))
11 Lab:  okay=
12 Tch:  =>are you sure you wanta< do that?=
13 Lab:  =ļye::s I ↑do!
14          [((teacher laughing))

10
After being nominated by the teacher to speak, Labib’s initial comment sets up a proposed course of opposition. Labib states that he is going to disagree with Amelia (line 05). These words are uttered enthusiastically (as indicated through use of ! in the extract) and without hedging. In turn, Amelia’s verbal and non-verbal actions acknowledge her acceptance of Labib’s challenge.

The teacher inserts a question directed at Labib which queries his proposed course of action (line 12). The question insinuates that Labib may be making a mistake in challenging Amelia and is designed to provoke a humorous response. The teacher himself laughs following his question. Labib’s response is emphatic indicating his certainty about what he is proposing to do (line 13). The teacher’s utterance (“oh”) acknowledges the seriousness of Labib’s response and shuts down his talk with Labib with the sequence third-turn closing, “okay” (line 15)

Disagreeing

Labib’s own position is articulated in two phases. An initial one where he agrees with part of Amelia’s previously articulated point and then where he differs from her position. The analysis suggests that the initial agreement works to mitigate the disagreement that is to come. When challenged by Amelia, Labib particularly employs use of speech markers or quotatives (Holt 1996) to report back to Amelia what she has said previously.

Extract 3: Disagreeing

Lab: okay be↑cause (1.0)
Lab: because it ↓I know games >are a waste< of time (((nods head)))

Lab: = it does go fast

Lab: BUT (1.0) [it doesn’t= (((laughter)))

Lab: =waste (((Labib pointing))

Lab: > the mother’s time<

Pip: isn’t that=

Ame: = I never said [it was]

Lab: [it only] yeah but you said

↑THIS ↓this is what you said (0.4) you said that ev- a peg that it she puts a clothes on

>the line< you said a time will go past for her

Ame: no (0.2) for the child
Labib’s initial comment provides his stance on the matter of games—that time goes fast and that games are a waste of time (lines 19–20 and 22). In making reference to waste of time, Labib ties his comment to Amelia’s previously articulated position (“time is wasted”). Amelia responds to Labib, noting quietly that Labib is stating what she has already said (line 24). Labib continues and the completion of his turn produces the point on which he disagrees with Amelia. He signals the opposing view to come with his use of “but” (line 25). He then articulates his stance on the matter of the mother’s time. Labib’s pointing at Amelia emphasises that his opposition is directed at her.
Amelia’s next utterance provides a denial that she has claimed that the mother’s time is wasted. The talk of both students at this point is direct and unmitigated in its opposition. Amelia’s turn (line 33) makes Labib’s previous comment an “arguable” event (Maynard, 1986). That is, she takes issue with his final comment, denying that it is what she said and making Labib’s comment now a point with which she disagrees.

In his opposition to Amelia’s denial, Labib employs several speech markers followed by talk that he asserts is what she said (lines 34–35). In this way, Labib attempts to recruit (Antaki & Leuda 2001) Amelia’s own words in order to establish he has provided an accurate formulation of her position. Labib’s opposition has escalated a little as seen in this utterance which is produced with emphasis on “this” and repetition of “you said”. Following the use of the speech markers, Labib provides a paraphrase rather than a verbatim account (lines 36–37).

In line 39, Amelia, counters this with the direct negative and a correction (“no (0.2) for the chi::ld”). Labib asserts again that he has repeated what she said (line 41) and Amelia reacts with a loud in-drawing of breath, audibly indicating a frustration with Labib’s continued claim to have repeated her words. The teacher intervenes to give Amelia speaking rights (line 43) and Amelia responds in a strongly worded extended turn (lines 44–50). It is loud and emphatic. She also employs speech markers, putting up front that what is to come is what Labib has said, but casting her earlier talk as “clearly stated” (lines 45–46). Her use of the words “I clearly stated” can be heard to imply that the cause of the trouble in their talk is Labib. Pippa, a group member,
directs that she calm down, thus indicating her interpretation of Amelia’s action as escalating (lines 51–53).

**Challenging Labib’s claim to know**

Amelia has strongly opposed Labib’s reporting of her perspective; she maintains that it is not accurate. Over the course of interaction that follows, other students step into the talk to align with Amelia. Pippa aligns with Amelia. She challenges Labib, asserting that Amelia should know best what she said.

*Extract 4: Challenging Labib*

54 Lab: at the same time you said that (0.4) I- I’m
55 pretty sure you said that
56 (1.0)
57 Tch: it’s like a courtroom in [here
58 [(Pippa raises her hand)]
59 ((laughter))
60 Lab: I’m pretty sure you said that
61 Ame: "I’m pretty sure that ( )"
62 Tch: okay hold on let Pippa have a go
63 Pip: Labib don’t you that it’s this is her body does
64 she know (0.4) don’t ↑you think that she knows
65 what she is talking about not you?
66 Lab: okay so w- so I- okay
67 Kar: okay [guys we’re off topic okay
Labib repeats his position although in the second part of his utterance he can be heard to be hedging or backing down a little (lines 54–55), since he is now only “pretty sure”. The teacher’s comment is hearable as an assessment of the talk—it is adversarial, so like a courtroom (line 57). The teacher’s words produce laughter from other students (line 59) thus they acknowledge the thrust of the teacher’s remark and the situation is diffused a little. Labib repeats his previous words (“I’m pretty sure you said that”), thus maintains his opposition. Amelia partly echoes his words (line 61); although not clearly heard on the recording, it is apparent that she is still directly opposing Labib.

The teacher selects Pippa to speak next as she has had her hand in the air. Pippa directs her comment at Labib through use of his name in the turn-initial position. Pippa’s utterance is in the form of a question which makes relevant agreement from Labib that since it is Amelia’s body she would know what she is talking about better than he would (lines 63–65). Pippa’s comment challenges Labib’s right to assert that he
knows what Amelia said and indicates her own alignment with Amelia. This utterance results in a response in which Labib searches for words (line 66). Kara, another group member, intervenes and formulates the previous talk as being “off topic” (line 67). So, she seeks to stop the interchange which now involves three students. The teacher likewise, directs that they move on from what they are talking about and selects and cues two next speakers (lines 70–73). Labib, however, persists with his assertion about what Amelia said, in fact asserting “I have to do it” (line 69). In this way, Labib claims moral ground.

**Adiba’s disagreement and agreement**

Adiba produces an extended turn that encompasses disagreement with Labib and agreement with Amelia. In formulating her actions in this way, Adiba is heard to challenge Labib and to align with Amelia. Her action also puts the previous dispute between the two back on the agenda and shows how student actions across the course of the lecture may be reharnessed by students who have been listeners, or overhearers, to the interactions of others. As well, Adiba accounts for Labib’s actions in a way that returns talk to the over-arching question that is the focus for the lesson itself—digital technology use by children.

**Extract 5: Adiba’s disagreement and agreement**

78 Adi:  yeah> okay fine< (1.0) I actuall::y

79   [have

80   [((Adiba turns to look back to Labib

81 Adi:  to >disagree with< [Labib
[(Adiba pointing pencil at Labib)]

((students laughing))=

Adi: = [I’m so sorry=

[[(looks in direction of teacher)]

Adi: AND I have to agree with [(04]

[[(looks back towards Labib)]

Amelia because [(0.4) NOW [(0.4)=

[[(looks towards teacher)]

= he’s always being negative not po(h)(h)sitive=

((Adiba laughs))

Tch: ((laughs))

Sts: ((laughing))

Adi: ( ) always aggressive when you play- sorry

(0.4) a game (0.6) AND he’s ↑clearly proving that

he’s always playing the game because >he’s always<

negati:::ve

Sts: [((laughing))

Adi: [(

Tch: there’s some future lawyers in here

Lab: the truth is [that the truth is

Adi: [and wait until=

I’ve finished=

Tch: >hold on< >hold on<
Adiba’s statement of disagreement is direct as she turns to face Labib and to point at him (lines 80–82). Through use of “have to” Adiba now asserts her contribution to the dispute as one of necessity. Her brief apology (“I’m so sorry”), said in the direction of the teacher, adds to the sense of her proposed disagreement with Labib being one of necessity (line 84). Adiba then makes a complaint about Labib (line 90). The force of her complaint—an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 2000)—is mitigated by her laughter which produces shared laughter from the teacher and from students (lines 92–93).

Adiba goes on to produce her masterstroke—linking Labib’s negativity to his own game playing. Her comment again produces laughter from students but also another formulation by the teacher of what is going on—“there’s some future lawyers
here”. The comment is hearable as being tied to his earlier comment about the classroom being like a courtroom (line 57). The teacher’s comment acknowledges Adiba’s argument linking Labib and his negativity to his own use of games, thus inferring that Labib consumes too much technology.

Labib’s response is to refer again to the truth (line 101); indicating that he knows the truth about what had been said previously by Amelia. Adiba claims speaking rights because she hasn’t yet finished and she turns her talk to the provision of agreement with Amelia. She ties her comment to Labib’s through mention of “truth”, at the same time as she aligns with Amelia through indicating her own assessment of Amelia’s stance as being true (line 107). Adiba then returns to her complaint about Labib being negative however she mitigates the force of the complaint with her acknowledgement that Labib can be positive. The teacher agrees with this assessment of Labib, however, Labib is heard to make his final *cri de Coeur*—he is “telling the truth”—a claim which casts him as calling it as it is, rather than being negative or positive (line 116).

*Soroya’s complaint and advice*

Soroya uses her interaction to make Labib accountable for more than just his misrepresentation of what Amelia said. She asserts that he has also misrepresented Adiba on a previous occasion in the lecture. In this way, Soraya upgrades the complaint against Labib as more than a one-off thing. This complaint holds Labib accountable for listening and remembering accurately what others have said and attributes his questionable actions to not listening to what others say.
Soroya's complaint and advice

Extract 6: Soroya’s complaint and advice

117 Sor:  um excuse me Labib you have utterly
118 mistaken Adiba as well before (1.0) Adiba
119 and Amelia okay? (1.0) now [(04)=
120 Tch: [Labib
121 Sor: make sure before you speak =
122 ((looks to the teacher))
123 Sor: =I’m not being rude okay this is like okay ( )
124 ((turns to face Labib)
125 Sor: okay this ((starts laughing)) okay (1.0) you did
126 mistake [(0.6) =
127 [((looks at teacher))
128 =Adiba and Amelia [okay
129 [((looks at Labib))
130 Sor: li::sten before you speak [okay
131 Lab: [(
132 Sor: shhh ((holding finger to her lips))
133 Sts: ((laughter))

Following on from Labib’s claim to be “telling the truth” (line 116, previous extract), Soraya responds with a strongly worded complaint that he has been wrong about Adiba as well as Amelia. Her complaint, encompasses the extreme case formulation
“utterly mistaken” raises the matter of Labib’s on-going action, not just a mistake with Amelia—he was also wrong about what Adiba said (lines 117–119). This complaint upgrades the seriousness of Labib’s actions. In what follows, Soroya gives advice to Labib (line 121). Her comment to the teacher (“I’m not being rude okay”) anticipates a possible assessment by him about her actions. In denying that she is being rude, she takes account of that possible interpretation. She retraces her complaint or accusation that Labib made a mistake with both students. Soroya then delivers her directive, following by the exaggerated “shhh” sound (line 132) as she holds her finger to her lips. This dramatic action results in laughter from other students.

**Labib attempts to turn the tables**

In this final extract, Soraya continues to maintain with her complaint against Labib. Both of the students make public what they can or cannot remember. Labib queries Soraya’s affiliation, formulating her actions as agreeing with him. In the final interchange between them, Labib requires that Soraya report the talk from Adiba that is in question.

*Extract 7: Labib attempts to turn the tables*

134 Sor: you said something ![0.6]

135 Tch: ![ ]

136 Sor: Adiba didn’t say and you also said ![something Amelia didn’t say]

137 ![something Amelia didn’t say]

138 Lab: okay I remember what Adida said Amelia

139 as well
Sor: okay I I I can’t remember what Adiba said

I think something=

((Soroya looks at Adiba and Adiba waves her hand))

=yeah something

((students laughing))

Sor: and then

((students laughing))

Sor: ((laughing)) and then you said something opposite of what she said when she didn’t say

that thing

Lab: then why were you agreeing with me when she

(0.4) then why are you agreeing with me (0.4) instead

of [disagreeing

Sor: [but when did I agree with you ((laughing))

Sts: ((laughter))

Lab: she was agreeing with [me the whole time

Sor: [ ( )

Sor: that was Xan’s part

Lab: ( )

Sor: not Adiba’s part

Lab: okay then tell me [what Adiba said

Tch: [okay three two one

Sts: ((talking at once))
Soroya repeats her accusation again—that Labib has said things that others didn’t say (lines 134–137). Labib denies the accuracy of Soroya’s account of his actions by asserting that he remembers what Amira and Amelia said. Soroya’s response indicates her hearing that Labib is challenging her. Her false starts hedge but then she admits not being able to remember what Adiba said. She looks to Adiba but her appeal is dismissed by Adiba who doesn’t supply the words that Soroya is seeking (line 142). This interaction between the two girls brings laughter from other students (line 144). Soroya cannot substantiate what it was that Adiba said and Adiba herself cannot remember. This leaves no counter account to put to Labib and Soroya can only repeat her accusation, which has been weakened by her inability to remember what Adiba said (lines 147–149).

At this point, Labib attempts to turn the tables with counter accusations against Soroya, which she denies by asking him to tell her when she was agreeing with him. Her laughter and that of the other students indicates that the situation is now becoming funny rather than serious. Labib maintains his assertion about Soraya (line 155) with his extreme case formulation “she was agreeing with me the whole time”. This utterance is not directed at Soraya but is uttered about her to everyone else. Soroya denies and explains. Labib again calls for Soroya herself to provide Adiba’s words. At this point, the teacher calls a halt by beginning the countdown that signals the end of the lecture (line 161).

Discussion

Analysis shows how “mutual challenge” (Alexander, 2010) was accomplished by
students in the lesson. Much of this talk made use of interactional features that can be found commonly in ordinary conversation. For example, use of speech markers is found in children’s disputes (Goodwin, 1980, 1990) and is a way to introduce another’s talk into conversation (Holt, 1996). During the lecture, students used the markers to indicate an orientation to something said previously in the lecture and to introduce that talk into their own utterance. As the disagreements showed, it was important for the reported speech that followed to be an accurate recall. Not surprisingly, this was challenging given that numerous students made contributions throughout the lecture. However, use of reported speech was essential for producing student-student interaction where students engaged seriously with the perspectives of each other.

Students proposed courses of action where opposition was very salient. Often, students prefaced such talk with use of “I am going to disagree with ….” or “I have to disagree with …”. Thus, they foregrounded that the social action forthcoming was disagreement with a previous contribution by a particular student, not just with a specific idea. Use of language in this way is known to be important in institutional forms of formal argumentative talk where producing and managing differing perspectives on a controversial topic is core activity (Haddington, 2006). Students in this literacy lesson were using this language during their interactions with others, both to initiate that interaction and to accomplish it as the beginning of disagreement.

The use of open-ended questions is considered central to dialogic teaching, promoting genuine inquiry that entails judgements by students of the “strength of arguments” (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013, p. 117). The analysis of the interaction in this literacy lesson highlights the interpretive work that resulted from the interactional
tasks the teacher had set encompassing an open-ended question and an accompanying image. Interaction enabled students to produce interpretations consistent with literacy curricula such that discussion encompasses multiple perspectives on texts and consideration of these through expression of individual opinions and through aligning with or rejecting the opinions of others. That is, rather than being the recipients of an authoritative version of the visual text, and the answer to the focus question, the students were experiencing the “collective enterprise” [Skidmore, 2000, p. 293] of producing and evaluating various interpretations, including through disagreement and agreement with the perspectives of others. Such talk is difficult to achieve in literacy lessons where teachers assume the main evaluative role on the correctness of contributions made by students (Baker & Freebody, 1993; Barnes, 2008).

Perhaps more importantly, the analysis reveals the interpretive work necessary for students to successfully interact with others at all – to reveal their interpretations of the talk of others, of their meaning making and so on. Although the teacher was still central to some allocation of turn-taking, and to monitoring of appropriate participation, according to the “ground rules” (Mercer, 1996) for the lecture, students were seen and heard to interact on numerous occasions without selection from the teacher. They produced numerous sequences showing student-student interactions contributed to the shaping of the course of what was talked about, its control, and to collaborative meaning making, both hallmarks of a dialogic approach (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013).

The social actions of aligning and dis-aligning with others was exhibited in the multi-party setting of the whole-class discussion. This setting was consequential for the
ways that students interacted, particularly when they agreed or disagreed with each other. Students needed to take account of the ways that disagreement were being overheard, and the potential for affiliations to support or counter their participation. Similarly, complaints were made to and about co-present others. The analysis showed that students were evidently taking account of their talk and interaction as being produced for and with numerous others—an important aspect but under-addressed aspect of public accountability (Sohmer, Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2009) in the classroom.

Through his action research project, the teacher created opportunities for students to “try out” more institutional, or formal, ways of disagreeing and agreeing involving “consideration of ideas, evidence and argument” (Osbourne, Simon, Christodoulou, Howell-Richardson, & Richardson, 2013, p. 315). Talk and interaction of this kind is particularly crucial in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms and schools (Mercer, 1996; Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008). The lesson enabled students to take extended turns, to speak with some authority and to explore difference, with potential benefits for individuals and for the classroom group overall (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013). In turn, the production of extended turns by students, and interactions between students, provided opportunities for the teacher to witness how fostering a dialogic approach enables students to “clearly explicate their reasoning so that others can understand and build upon or critique their ideas” (O’Connor & Michaels 2007, p. 284). Such observations are not always possible when teacher talk is driving interaction (Barnes, 2008) throughout whole-class literacy lessons.
Conclusion

This article contributes understandings of how students orient to the differing perspectives of others during whole-class talk and how differences are produced and explored through disagreement. This orientation resonates with various objectives of dialogic teaching approaches, importantly that: “speakers make an effort to get their facts right and make explicit the evidence behind their claims and expectations. They challenge each other when evidence is lacking or unavailable” (Michaels et al. 2008, p. 283). It is important for proponents of dialogic teaching to foreground the ways students can contribute more effectively to whole-class talk, building on their existing competencies and extending those to encompass powerful forms of engagement and thinking. Through changing classroom talk, and enabling the exploration of difference through agreement and disagreement, educators may move closer to the creation of more equitable educational opportunities in schools.

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References


interaction in the dialogic classroom. Newtown: Primary English

Teaching Association Australia.


**Appendix 1: Transcription conventions**

<p>| || Utterances that begin at the same time |
| [] | Overlap in speakers’ talk |
| [] | Point where simultaneous talk finishes |
| == | Talk between speakers latches of follows without a break |
| ( ) | Indicates length of silence e.g. (0.2) |
| :::: | Indicates that a prior sound is prolonged e.g. li::ke |
| - | Word is cut off e.g. ta- |
| &gt; &lt; | Words enclosed within are said at a faster pace than surrounding talk |
| ? | Rising inflection |
| ¿ | Rising inflection but weaker than ? |
| . | Stopping fall in tone |
| , | Continuing intonation |
| ! | Animated tone |
| ↑ | Marked rising intonation |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Annotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>Marked falling intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>no</strong></td>
<td>Underline indicating greater emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CA</strong></td>
<td>Upper case indicates loudness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>°</td>
<td>Softness e.g. It’s a °secret°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hhh</td>
<td>Aspiration or strong out-breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(it is)</td>
<td>Words within are uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Indicates that some word/s could not be worked out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(( ))</td>
<td>Verbal descriptions e.g. ((sits down))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(adapted from Atkinson & Heritage, 1999)

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