Does it Say That? How Teacher Questions Mediate Dis/Ability in an Era When the Text and Test Have the Final Say

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Does it Say That?

How Teacher Questions Mediate Dis/Ability

in an Era When the Text and Test Have the Final Say

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B.S., Greenville College, 2002

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This dissertation entitled:
Does it Say That? How Teacher Questions Mediate Dis/Ability in an Era When the Text and Test Have the Final Say
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The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Abstract

Boelé, Amy L. (Ph.D., Special Education)
Does it Say That? How Teacher Questions Mediate Dis/Ability in an Era when the Text and Test have the Final Say
Faculty Advisor is Janette Klingner

Using sociocultural concepts of authoritative and dialogic discourse, I sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do classroom teachers’ questioning practices during reading comprehension instruction differ between “low” and “average” groups, especially with respect to Accountable Talk questions (AT; Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2010) and Assertive Questions (AQ; Koshik, 2005) and with students with learning disabilities? And (2) In what ways do classroom teacher questioning practices during small group reading comprehension include AT and AQ? Qualitative observations, video and audio transcripts, and teacher interviews were used for my analysis of questions. In this study, I also examined quantitative differences in teachers’ questions between the student groups by comparing frequencies of question types and by conducting significance tests. Findings show how teacher questioning practices can be imbued with tensions when questions are designed to transfer responsibility of thought to the students, as in Accountable Talk, but work to maintain the location of knowledge within the teacher, as in Assertive Questions. These tensions are situated within broader tensions of the activity, including the model of reading comprehension employed, teachers’ conceptualizations of student dis/ability, and global problems within systems of accountability that have led to high-stakes systems of evaluation, what counts as learning, and whose knowledge is privileged.
For Janette
You have been with me every step of this journey, and your spirit will continue as a guiding source of inquiry, scholarship, passion, and love.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“[I]t is in interpersonal relations that symbolic meanings are ascribed to the words, gestures, and actions of others; the interpretive work done in classrooms and schools every day can have consequential effects for diverse students, such as a wrong answer on a test, a missed opportunity to contribute to classroom discussions, or a discipline or special education referral.” (Artiles, Bal, & King Thorius, 2010, p. 254)

As Artiles and colleagues describe in the above quote, relationships through interaction are a cornerstone in learning. Dialogue, in all its various forms, is a tool that can be used to build, rebuild, design, and evaluate, but it can also be used to disable and destroy. Interactions need to be structured in such a way to ensure a “shift in emphasis from special needs students being consumers of curriculum to producers of meaning” (Mariage, Englert, & Garmon, 2000). Yet far too often, educators are unaware of the fact that a child’s learning disability is as much of a product of the social organization of his environment as it is a product of some kind of neurological difference. This leads to a preoccupation with fixing the problem within the child, rather than fixing the problem with his instructional environment. A remedy centered mindset inadvertently leads to reductive treatment of a child with a disability. Teachers often think that because a student’s brain is “wired differently,” he is unable to perform complex tasks and therefore should not be asked to do so. The ways in which they assess students’ learning is influenced by their perceptions of the location of the problem, as within the child.

Understandings of student ability occur not only through the use of tests, surveys, checklists, and other written forms, but also in ephemeral moment-to-moment interactions and observations of students (Jordan & Putz, 2004) and can be used in everyday learning activities (Ruiz-Primo, 2011). The nature of teachers’ questions influences the nature of students’ answers, which in turn influences teachers’ perception of students’ ability, and
cyclically, perceptions influence the questions asked. Furtak and Ruiz-Primo (2008) state, “Formative assessment prompts need to be well designed in order to make students’ conceptions explicit” (p. 801). If certain types of questions are not asked, then certain student knowledge and understanding will not be known. McDermott (1993) similarly explains, “If a particular kind of learning is not made socially available to us, there will be no learning to do” (p. 277). Too often, preconceived notions or biases of students’ abilities determine the level of knowledge elicited from the student, and those preconceived notions can limit what is elicited, especially for students with learning disabilities. Much of what is communicated is done so implicitly (Grice, 1975), and messages about students’ capabilities as teachers perceive them can be imbued within the discourse.

Further, when a narrow view of learning is employed in assessing learning, then students’ cultural practices are likely to remain hidden, especially students whose practices are different from the mainstream norm. Uncovering abilities requires an understanding of the student’s culture and experiential learning background, which unfortunately, isn’t traditionally found in educational settings. If teacher assessments of student learning through discourse are not open, flexible, and allowing for continued student learning, then students will not have adequate opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities. Students’ strengths may remain hidden or even become stifled, thus resulting in negative perceptions of students. As outlined above, these perceptions may result in labels, such as disability, deviant, or semi-lingual, among others, and ultimately, in the construction of a student’s identity and position as a learner.

So-labeled low readers have withstood a long history of instructional approaches that reduce reading to a mastery of basic skills and menial meaning making (Cole & Griffin, 1983). Various studies have revealed differential practices of classroom discourse with respect to high and low readers (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Collins,
These studies have explored timing of teacher corrections or interruptions, types of corrections, and kinds of cues provided, and they have shown that teachers’ presumptions about student ability are manifested in the types of meaning making activities the students are afforded. In this study, I similarly examine differential discourse practices among average and low readers.

In this study, I draw upon both qualitative and quantitative methodology to examine 5th grade teachers’ questioning practices and whether they differ according to groups of students organized homogenously by reading level and if so, in what ways and to what extent. Further, the purpose is to understand how teacher questions function as assertions within teacher and student interactions during small group reading instruction, as well as how teachers use questions that elicit collaborative, evidence-driven, and cogent claims. Qualitative observations, video and audio transcripts, and teacher interviews were used to analyze questions directed toward both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. In this study, I also examined quantitative differences in teachers’ questions between the student groups by comparing frequencies of question types and by conducting significance tests.

This study contributes to the field of special education by showing how certain talk moves (i.e., teacher questions) index larger global layers of the instructional interaction. It further examines how disability can be constructed in the learning environment when the text is privileged as the object. In using the concept of Assertive Questions (Koshik, 2005) from the field of Conversation Analysis, I examine authoritative discourse in an educational setting in ways that have not been done prior. Finally, I present a nuanced comparison of teacher talk in low and average groups, one that examines the talk as interacting with other mediational tools within the activity system.
I first have outlined the problem that this study seeks to address and the primary purpose of the study. I now move to a discussion that provides the importance of the study, as well as definitions of three major concepts in this study: processes of reading, questions, and learning disabilities.

**Importance**

As they engage in dialogue with students, teachers make rapid decisions in a moment-to-moment basis. What to say, when to say it, to whom to say it, and for what reasons to say it will influence the direction of learning for both the individual and collective. Dialogue, a primary mediator in the learning process, plays an important role in shaping students’ learning orientations to the content being learned. Structure with flexibility and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) with improvisation (Cazden, 2001; Erickson, 2004; Sawyer, 2004) is necessary to accommodate student contributions, especially when drawing upon students’ background knowledge and cultural practices.

On a regular basis, teachers collect information about their students, whether they do so purposefully or not. Because questions are a primary tool in assessing students’ knowledge, they are an important discursive means by which to analyze how those assessments get enacted in moment-to-moment classroom interactions. This data may be gathered systematically and intentionally, or it may be ephemeral and unrealized, much in the way that mediation can be explicit or implicit (Wertch & Toma, 1995); nonetheless, judgments and evaluations are an inherent part of social interaction (Jordan & Putz, 2004) and can result in positive or negative instructional learning outcomes for students (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Elaine Kintsch (2005) demonstrates the interactive nature of instruction and assessment with respect to questions: “If the usual demarcation between instructional situations and testing situations becomes blurred in this account of question design, it is due to the very nature of thoughtful questions, which should always provide opportunities to
advance learning, whether used in instruction or to assess (or self-assess) academic progress” (p. 52).

In contrast to one-size-fits all approaches, good instruction and assessment will necessarily require differentiation that is tailored to students, both as individuals and as collective learners. If differentiation is treated as a mere collection of a variety of tools to use, then regardless of the quantity or sophistication of that collection, they will be rendered useless if not used strategically. Asking students different questions can either be a supportive or reductive practice depending on a host of contextual features, including student responses, the episode of talk, established classroom discourse, teachers’ and students’ history of discursive practices, and the activity setting, among others. Cazden (2001) emphasizes the importance of attention to students’ particular repertoires of cultural practices when tailoring instruction: “Differential treatment can be helpful as well as harmful, and a focus on generalized cultural differences can detract from the close observation of individual learners and from attention to the perception, attitudes, and expectations of the dominant group of students and teachers” (p. 137, italics added).

Instead of thinking of culture as static monolithic traits that are inherent in individuals, students should be understood as having repertoires of practice that interact with the classroom learning environment. My working definition of culture places utmost importance upon the practices individuals use in order to create meaning and understanding of the world. These practices are shared by other individuals and mutually constitute a social and historical context. Within this theory of learning, engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and as we become who we are. Understanding regularities of practices within groups should extend beyond notions of culture in which individual traits are a product of an individual’s culture. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) call for an understanding of these regularities that does not conceptualize the common characteristics
among cultural groups as static traits: “A cultural-historical approach can help researchers and practitioners characterize the commonalities of experience of people who share cultural background, without “locating” the commonalities within individuals” (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 21). Instead, learning through culture should be understood as drawing upon repertoires of practice. The learning style movement led to the belief that instruction should be differentiated on these so-called inherent cultural traits (e.g., visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning). However, individuals are not carriers of culture, but instead they orient themselves to learning based on their individual collections of histories and experiences (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). These experiences provide context for interactions in classrooms and the ways in which discourse is and can be differentiated.

An example in which differential treatment is clearly harmful, even with the existence of a significant mediational tool (Vygotsky, 1978), lies in the application of technology. Cole (1989) outlined the ways in which the onset of computers in schools did nothing to alleviate existing inequities between social and cultural groups but instead exacerbated them. More computers were provided to students of middle- and upper-class backgrounds than poor. Regardless of class or ethnicity, females used computers to a lesser degree than males; and finally, computers were used by poor students for basic skills practice while being used by middle- and upper-class students for enrichment activities. The addition of a powerful mediational tool in the toolkit is futile if the tool is not used to move beyond reductive educational practices that already exist.

Because talk is also a powerful mediational tool, it is important to examine whether it is used to perpetuate disparities or to eliminate them. As Cazden astutely notes:

Classrooms are the ultimate site for learning, and classroom talk constitutes a critical part, and the most exposed edge, of the enacted curriculum. No matter how learning groups are constituted in a curriculum area as crucial as literacy, we have to be sure
that what happens within them contributes in the end to what Clay calls “different paths to common outcomes.” (Cazden, 2001, p. 145)

To contribute to the literature regarding differential discursive practices employed in classrooms, this study attempts to examine teachers’ questioning patterns with low and average readers, especially for students with learning disabilities.

**Defining Processes of Reading**

Classroom literacy events, specifically, small group reading instruction, will provide a backdrop for this investigation of questioning practices. As previously discussed, studies have pointed to differential discourse patterns in which teacher talk is geared toward meaning making processes for high readers and correct decoding for low readers (Cazden, 2001).

When examining the trends in computer distribution and usage, Cole (1989) described the pervasive adherence to Level 1 and Level 2 thinking. This refers to the idea that basic skills (Level 1) should be mastered before moving to higher levels of thought (Level 2) in a bottom-up manner. Students with disabilities are especially susceptible to receiving instruction that requires the mastery of basic skills. Cole challenges this practice, and argues not for top-down approaches, but instead for both top-down and bottom-up processes for mature academic skills.

**Historical movements.** In the 1970s and 1980s, a subskills movement had taken hold, in which it was common practice to measure, and thus teach, the acquisition of discrete, decontextualized skills of reading. However, when it became evident that students who were able to master the subskills were unable to transfer the skills to more contextualized contexts, a shift in the conception and assessment of comprehension took place. In the 1990s, the Center for Reading Research at the University of Illinois began to conceptualize reading comprehension as an integrative interaction between the reader and the text. Just a year after Cole’s chapter, Adams (1990) wrote a seminal piece that described this interaction, focusing
on the interrelated processes of word level skills with higher order cognitive processes. Pearson and Hamm (2005) extended upon this notion to include that comprehension is comprised of metacognitive abilities, along with factors of interest, habit, and attitude. Similarly, Pressley (2000) thinks of reading comprehension as the combination of word-level skills, background knowledge, and the application of strategies to create meaning from text. Duke and Carlisle (2011) focus on the construction of meaning, rather than mere acquisition of meaning, as primary in comprehension.

**Cognitive processes in comprehension.** In the field of reading comprehension, much attention is devoted to the cognition and thinking skills involved. One such view, the simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), considers reading comprehension as the product of word recognition and linguistic comprehension. Although reading processes certainly involve word level processes, such as phonemic awareness and phonics, as well as linguistic skills, such as fluency and vocabulary, this view neglects the importance of the social and cultural acts involved in reading. Further, this view fails to consider the role of text in reading the world and the role of variables such as background experience, interest, and social action. The text is seen as a static target to be reached, as readers consume the information in it, rather than a tool for engaging in an interaction that produces new ideas. However, not all cognitively oriented approaches to reading comprehension neglect the interactive process between a reader and his social world.

In his quintessential work in the field of reading comprehension, Kintsch (2007) provides insight into the relationship between the text and the reader, and the cognitive processes that are employed throughout the interaction of reading. Although I privilege sociocultural theories in my understanding of the construction of meaning with the text as a mediational tool, below I present understandings of Kintsch’s work that inform my investigation. These understandings support sociocultural understandings of comprehension
because they attend to the significance of the reader’s cultural experiences in the process of making meaning.

Kintsch (2007) outlines various types of mental representations that occur cognitively when processing information. As a whole, mental representations are shaped by our experiences and environment, our sensorimotor and emotional inputs, and our cultural community. The mental representations we use also include our general knowledge, word meanings, and personal experiences. When reading text, our mental representations are formed based upon our knowledge and experiences, and thus we create schema structures to form clusters of information with which we can readily adapt new information. Our schema structures are fluid, not static or fixed, and are context-dependent and culturally bound.

In effective comprehension processes, the reader uses episodic mental representations to connect to the text in order to make new meaning and add to existing schema structures. It has been estimated that when students’ comprehension is measured based upon their background knowledge of the topic, their scores have the potential to improve by more than 50% (p. 327). This confirms the intertwined relationship between the reader and the text in reading comprehension. Text alone cannot be objectified, just as the reader cannot be subjectified; the two cannot be separated.

**Comprehension as engagement and critical thinking.** Although the term reading comprehension has traditionally been tied to work that privileges the cognitive sciences (e.g., Kintsch, 2007), I expand the cognitive notions of what it means to comprehend text. In defining reading comprehension for this study, I first draw from the work previously mentioned, to include the following reading comprehension researchers and theorists: Adams, Pearson, Duke, Pressley, and Kintsch. Yet I will also use literature with sociocultural orientations to reading and literacy. Luke, Dooley, and Woods (2010) argue that comprehension is a cognitive, social, cultural, and intellectual process. It is a departure
from what Street (2003) calls autonomous models of literacy, that reading is a set of generic and neutral skills that are autonomously transferrable across contexts. Further drawing from Street (2003), it is the idea that the sole acquisition of these skills, whether basic or decoding or even higher comprehension, influences a person’s cognitive and social practices, such as citizenry and productivity. In contrast, ideological orientations to reading and reading comprehension are institutionally and culturally situated. Reading comprehension is always a social practice, even when reading alone; it includes elements of problem-solving and critical evaluation, and it is a move toward cultural engagement and community life that incites social action. It is tied to conceptions of what it means to know, to do, and to be, and therefore, it is a contested practice, as power relationships imbue its inherent ideologies.

Finally, literacy is defined by events, or practices, instead of just conceptualizing literacy as an independent, autonomous entity.

**Defining Questions**

Instead of focusing only on traditionally thought-of questions that explicitly seek information from students, I consider all utterances that prompt a student response. This includes utterances with a grammatical form of question, as well as other informal ways to elicit student talk. I have made this choice because assessments in a discursive setting are not only overt but also covert; thoughtful and ephemeral; intentional and unrealized.

I have defined questions as utterances that end with a rising intonation; begin with interrogative words; begin with a verb (e.g., “Can you…?”); end with a tag (e.g., …, right?”); or have a disjunctive form (e.g., “You do or do not…”); contain embedded questions (e.g., “I’m curious if you …”); or used alternative forms (e.g., “The question is …”) (van Zee & Minstrell, 1997, p. 234). Although various formats of questions can elicit a student response, different formats serve different functions and hold various implications. These distinctions will be discussed below.
Language is a powerful mediator (Diaz & Flores, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978), and thus it is necessary to focus on its contribution to student development. Questions can be a particularly useful mediator during both assessment and instruction. They allow teachers the opportunity to gain insight into students’ levels of understanding, and they can be used to guide student thinking. Questions have a multitude of functions and forms. Below I provide my conceptualization of questions, their definition, functions, types, and approaches in classrooms. I will draw from cultural-historical activity theory, cognitive sciences, and discourse fields in framing my ideas.

I have characterized questions in multiple ways: their underlying goals, functions, types of knowledge elicited, student’s response/uptake, and ethnographic setting (or activity setting). Through examining the variation in teachers’ elicitation patterns from multiple angles, I analyze a wider range of patterns and understand the issue through a broader context.

**Goals.** Although teacher questions have been classified as having two primary goals, to instruct and to assess (see Graesser & Person, 1994; Kintsch, E., 2005; and Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), I will conceptualize teacher goals by the extent to which teachers want the students to give a pre-specified answer. As previously discussed, instruction and assessment is too much of a false dichotomy to disentangle when considering the goals of teachers’ questions. When questions are thought of as either assessment in nature or instructional, the nuance of the dialect relationship of instruction and assessment is missed. Consider the following question, “Who remembers what irony means?” In asking this question, the teacher is first trying to gauge the students’ understanding of a concept previously learned, perhaps to assess whether or not further instruction is warranted. At the same time, the teacher might also be using students’ answers to instruct the remainder of the class (Philips, 1972), and if she is seeking the correct answer from an efficiency perspective, she may be
selective in whom she calls upon, choosing a student who is likely to give a correct response. In this way, the question is used as a tool to instruct; however, the nature of a question-answer adjacent pair makes the interaction seem more like a dialogue than a monologue. As previously discussed, efficiency and correctness may be a necessary goal (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), depending on the context of the instructional setting, but far too often it is the primary, or even sole, interactional goal.

**Functions.** The function of teacher questions depends upon, to a great extent, the goal or desired response, the social and cultural context, and the setting. For example, a question might imply a directive. A teacher may say, “Can you fix your spelling?” The question holds an underlying directive, telling student to perform an action. Although these types of questions have essentially the same function as the statement (i.e. to direct), there is a slight difference. Questions may require a language response, which is a different cognitive demand than merely thought; albeit, the two systems mutually inform and develop each other (Bialystok, 2001).

Questions can be used to get students’ attention (Graesser & Person, 1994), to tell or assert information (Cazden, 2001; Koshik, 2005; Ruiz-Primo, 2011), to provide hints or cues (Billg, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, & Radley, 1988; Koshik, 2005), to direct or command (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2002; Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007), to make connections between ideas (Chin, 2007), to request additional information (Gallas, 1995; Graesser & Person, 1994), to elicit student thinking (Mehan in Cazden, 2001; Ruiz-Primo, 2011), and to challenge thinking (van Zee & Minstrell, 1997), among others.

**Questions and reading comprehension.** Questions can target various levels of reading comprehension processing (E. Kintsch, 2005). First, text-based questions can highlight specific information within the text, whether that information is a main idea or detail. These questions require the respondent to recall information, to search memory, or to
use the text as a reference. Second, questions might require an inference or problem-solving, which encourage learners to think beyond information that is explicitly stated in the text. These types of questions promote novel connections between ideas and allow for the application of the text material to a novel problem. Students’ answers give information as to the extent to which students understand the text. Ideally, teachers will ask questions that tap all levels of comprehension. Questions that evoke thoughtful responses will address the cause or goal of an event or process (questions that ask why, or how, or what was the result).

**Traditional and Non-traditional Classroom Discourse**

Classic discursive patterns of assessment, Initiation Response Evaluation (IRE) and Initiation Response Feedback (IRF; Cazden, 2001) can be found in many traditional classroom settings. The teacher calls on a student, the student responds to the question or initiation, and the teacher then makes a comment. Both IRE and IRF forms have been criticized for mirroring traditional assessment patterns, in which the teacher asks display questions, or questions to which the teacher already knows the answer, thus truncating learning. Further, knowledge is presumed to be located as primarily within the teacher, inhibiting changes in participation of students to occur. In traditional contexts, questions and their answers are planned in advance, before the question is posed. Correct answers are valued to the extent that contemplation and struggle are not considered to be integral in facilitating learning.

Teacher and student dialogues that are non-traditional tend to involve complex questioning practices in which the teacher is asking for students’ opinions, bases for agreement or disagreement, thought processes, reactions, connections, and any other information that positions the learner as an emerging expert in the content of talk. In non-traditional approaches, both teachers and students pose questions, and students talk to the teacher as well as to each other. Students hypothesize and consider evidence and counter-
evidence of claims, and the teacher spends a far less time proportionally providing direct instruction than in traditional classes. They become positioned, and position themselves, as learners and constructors of knowledge. In these approaches, teachers need to have a sophisticated level of pedagogical content knowledge so that they can better interpret students’ thinking, at all levels of conceptions and misconceptions, based upon their answers (Cazden, 2001). They adjust their questions and instructional agenda based upon students’ ideas, and they do not act as the sole authority to judge student answers (van Zee & Minstrell, 1997).

Some types of questions, such as metaprocess questions (Cazden, 2001), elicit longer and more complex answers than traditional known-answer questions. These are typically rare in classrooms (Gall, 1984). While these questions imply authenticity, or a question to which the teacher does not know the answer, they also may imply a degree of correctness. Ball (1991) describes how she realized the function of her metaprocess questions. When she asked, “How did you know that?” it was in response to a student’s correct answer or idea. However, when she asked, “What makes you think that?” it was in response to a student’s incorrect idea. Student talk may be interpreted as summative understanding of concepts (whether they know the concept or not), or formative understanding (the process through which they undergo transformation in their understanding of concepts).

Instead of thinking of traditional and non-traditional discourse as a dichotomy, Cazden (2001, p. 46) calls the criticisms of traditional classroom discourse oversimplifications and points to the importance of understanding both discourse structure and function. In many instances, inauthentic questions do reflect traditional summative assessment patterns, especially when it appears that the primary goal of the teacher is to elicit the right answer, rather than privileging the cognitive processes necessary to arrive at the right answer. Yet this distinction is not a clear one, and talk serves various forms of
functions, regardless of the teacher’s goal. Furthermore, known-answer questions, although they generally refer to literal, fact based, display questions, are extremely ambiguous in definition. Even higher order questions have answers that are known, or in essence, desired, by the teacher. The IRE pattern is one tool for assessing student learning and does have relevance in some contexts. For example, it is a way in which teachers and students can establish an agreed upon account of learning. However, IRE should not be the primary discourse tool for assessing learning (Cazden, 2001), as is currently the privileged practice.

**Learning Disabilities**

In this section, I describe prevailing perspectives and definitions of learning disabilities (LD). Learning disabilities are considered to be high incidence disabilities, which are disabilities that have a relatively higher diagnosis rate than other types of disabilities. They are considered a “soft” kind of disability (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001) because the nature of the disability cannot be identified solely by a biological marker. According to recent counts, the percentage of students with learning disabilities, or specific learning disabilities, of total student enrollment is approximately 5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This is not a comprehensive examination of all of the issues surrounding the practices of identifying and instructing students with learning disabilities, but I hope to highlight important tenets of learning disabilities as a construct in schools as relevant to this study.

The definition and method of diagnosis of learning disabilities has undergone important changes over the past forty-five years. The term learning disability was coined by Samuel Kirk, and in 1977, it was included as a category of disability in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142). In 1975, individuals with disabilities and their families won an important fight to ensure that they would receive a free and appropriate public education, as safeguarded by the law. Public Law 94-142, which became the
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, defined LD as, “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations…including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia” (Section 602.30(a)(b)). A learning disability is not to be primarily the result of other factors, such as the students’ environment, culture, or economic status, or of other disabilities, such as visual, hearing, motor, emotional, or intellectual disabilities.

From its early conception to the mid-1990s, a learning disability was diagnosed using the discrepancy model, which worked to identify an unexpected underachievement, usually according to a discrepancy between students’ cognitive potential and their academic achievement. IQ tests and standardized academic achievement measures were used to determine whether enough of a difference between what was expected (i.e., IQ scores) with actual achievement (i.e., reading, writing, or math scores). A student’s processing difficulties, based on IQ tests, were also considered in determining eligibility for special education services under the diagnosis of a learning disability. Of course, the use of these tests has been criticized due to their monocultural orientation to what intelligence and achievement is and how it is measured (Banks, 2006), as well as teachers’ misapplication of the discrepancy and a general lack of knowledge of the psychometric properties that make one test better than another (Davis & Shepard, 1983).

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized to include multi-tiered prevention models as viable alternatives for determining whether students have a learning disability. The achievement and IQ tests, which had provided professionals with security and certainty, that their diagnosis was accurate, had been questioned and were continually regarded as controversial approaches to diagnosing a learning disability. Thus, Response to Intervention (RTI) emerged as a model
for identifying learning disabilities that is designed to reduce the possibility of the learning problem as being located within the instructional environment. Evidence-based practices are intended to be implemented in the general education classroom, or core instruction, and if a student is still identified as having a learning problem, the problem is analyzed and a plan is developed and implemented. Students then may receive a Tier 2 intervention for a relatively short amount of time, their progress being monitored, and if they are not making adequate progress, they may receive a more intensive and restrictive intervention (Tier 3). If students still do not “respond” to the intervention, then it may be determined that they are eligible for special education services. The instantiation of the model varies widely across schools.

The fact that the definition of learning disabilities is not hard and fast is important to understanding the varied characteristics of the students in this study. Students with learning disabilities in reading typically struggle with language-based practices, such as phonological processing (Stanovich & Siegal, 1994), oral language (Catts & Kamhi, 2005), vocabulary (Gersten et al., 2001; Stahl et al., 2006), inefficiency in reading (Gersten et al., 2001), working memory (Swanson & Alexander, 1997) background knowledge (Gersten, 1998), and awareness of text structures (Englert & Thomas, 1987; Wong & Wilson, 1984), among others. However, many of these characteristics of the types of difficulties students have in the reading process point to the cultural nature of learning and thus are less about what lies within the child and more about how schools are organized to locate and remediate deficiencies (Artiles et al., 2010; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). In identifying these difficulties, I do not intend to promote deficit views of these students, focusing on what they cannot do. While reading challenges are certainly very real for students with learning disabilities, an understanding of the difficulty should not solely be placed as problems the children “have.” Instead, problems are always co-constructed between the participants and their environments. When students’ strengths are fostered, and instruction capitalizes on
them, and when competence is understood to be socially assembled (Mehan, 1979), students’ struggles become less relevant to the activity of teaching and learning.

Interventions that focus on engaging students with LD in language-rich and socially mediated contexts are limited (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2011; Gersten et al., 2001). Additionally, students with learning disabilities tend to receive instruction that is focused on decoding prior to engaging students in rich comprehension activities, which results in approaches that focus on literal questioning (Klingner, Urbach, Golos, Brownell, & Menon, 2010; Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, & Bos, 2002).

Students with learning disabilities need access to rigorous and rich discussions about text. Although instructional approaches for students with learning disabilities are often focused on explicit and direct instruction, these students also need access to opportunities to be active constructors of meaning, rather than passive recipients of meaning. Classroom teachers have been found to provide students with opportunities to practice strategies for higher levels of engagement with text, but with little explicit connection to authentic reading acts (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hamston, 1998). Instructional strategies for reading comprehension can become contrived, manufactured, decontextualized, encapsulated tasks when reading comprehension is understood as meaning making at the literal and even inferential level.

Reading comprehension intervention research for students with learning disabilities has covered areas such as metacognitive processing, text structure awareness, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, and active reading (Gersten, et al, 2001), but it largely neglects to examine how talk instantiates the learning. The mutually constituting relationship of talk and the learning environment is a crucial factor in understanding how learning disabilities become realized in moment to moment real time. Further, the predominant approaches to instructing students with learning disabilities generally fail to understand learning as
organized within a system, a system in which multiple factors play a role in the development of reading comprehension: the participants’ interactions, the distribution and rules of the talk, and the tools employed so as to achieve a shared object in the activity.

In sum, much of reading intervention research for students with learning disabilities is built upon the premise that some sort of problem needs to be fixed based on a student’s fixed set of characteristics as a learner, and it does not adequately take into account how the interactive learning environment creates contexts in which the disability becomes apparent, or even constructed. In the research on reading comprehension instruction and students with learning disabilities, discourse is considered as an ancillary by-product of the instructional approach, if considered at all. However, discourse is precisely the site of the “whence and how” (Klemp, McDermott, Raley, Thibeault, Powell, & Levitin, 2008) learning takes place.
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

To make visible the connections between questions, discourse, texts, and authority as they relate to teachers and students, I primarily draw on sociocultural notions of authoritative and dialogic discourse as kinds of mediation that can be made available (Bakhtin, 1986; Scott, Mortimer, & Aguiar, 2006; Wertsch & Toma, 1995). Because interaction is the learning environment (Erickson, 1996), the concepts of authoritative and dialogic discourse offer a way to describe the extent to which meaning can be communicated adequately (Wertsch & Toma, 1995), and they allow for me to situate teacher questioning practices within broader characterizations of discourse. As I will explicate in this chapter, authoritative and dialogic discourses generally refer to opposing modes and patterns of classroom talk (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007), differing by the extent to which varying ideas are acknowledged and considered (Scott, Mortimer, & Aguiar, 2006). A primary purpose of authoritative discourse is to focus the students’ attention on just one meaning or interpretation of a concept. This kind of talk often functions to establish a collective account of meaning. In dialogic discourse, the teacher creates a hybrid mix of the students’ views and the school view. Talk includes open discussion, authentic teacher questions, questions with uptake, attempts at clarification and elaboration, greater symmetry in teacher and student talk, and efforts to encourage students to respond to and build upon each other’s ideas (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Scott et al., 2006).

As will be discussed below, these characterizations of talk align with the premises of Accountable Talk® and provide a helpful lens for identifying places within conversation that have authoritative or dialogic characteristics. I situate the concepts of Accountable Talk® (Michaels et al., 2010) and assertive questioning from conversation analysis (Koshik, 2005) as ideas that fall along the authoritative-dialogic continuum, with Accountable Talk allowing for more dialogic talk and assertive questions as allowing for more authoritative talk, in
general. However, this distinction is not so easily made (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). All talk is both authoritative and dialogic (Wertsch & Toma, 1995), and either/or dichotomies are not especially helpful in characterizing talk (Cazden, 2001; Lotman, 1988; O’Connor & Michaels, 2007; Wertsch & Toma, 1995). Further, communicative approaches should shift as the purposes of interaction shift (Burns & Myhill, 2004; Wells, 1998; Scott et al., 2006), and thus classroom conversation often ebbs and flows between talk that is primarily authoritative and primarily dialogic. It is important to situate talk within a contextual understanding of how forms of talk might function authoritatively or dialogically, so as to examine how utterances can marshal multiple voices and imbue underlying meanings.

I place authoritative and dialogic discourse within other overarching arguments from sociocultural theory that inform this study, including the idea that questions mediate learning (Cole & Levitin, 2000; Wertsch & Toma, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978), and learning dis/ability is understood as an interaction between the individual and the social and cultural environment. Further, I explain the relationship between remediation and re-mediation, which holds similarities to the authoritative and dialogic discourse relationship that stems from a Bakhtinian perspective. Finally, I discuss my conception of reading comprehension, with the text as an important mediational tool. I principally view questions as mediational tools that teachers use as they collect minute-to-minute information about their students’ abilities.

**Mediation**

Mediation is a concept that allows me to understand the ways in which teachers engage students’ reading comprehension and how the practices are differentiated across groups of students. Questions are a primary mediator in teachers’ understandings and constructions of students’ abilities. The types of responses they elicit are very dependent upon the types of elicitations posed. If students never have the chance to respond to questions that prompt higher-level processes, such as inquiry, experiential connections,
critical analyses, and novel ideas that motivate deeper meanings of text, then they will likely be limited to displaying only low-level comprehension. Ultimately, they will not be afforded the opportunity to be seen as competent learners. Thus, questioning is a key tool that mediates the ways in which students’ abilities are perceived. Questioning also dictates the extent to which students are able to both develop and display their capabilities.

Through the use of signs and tools, mediation is inherent in mental functioning (Engeström, 1999; Wertsch & Toma, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Mediational tools, which are socially, culturally, and historically situated (Cole & Wertsch, 1996), not only facilitate mental processes, but they also transform them and shape the activity in which they are applied. These tools are not used to make an action easier, but they “create possibilities for action that would not have existed otherwise” (Collins, 2003, p.10). Just as a blind man’s stick changes the boundary of the man’s mental functioning (from his head to his hand to the edge of the stick, to the pavement, buildings, etc.) and expands possibilities that he otherwise could not do (Cole & Levitin, 2000, p. 72), questions have the potential to expand teachers’ conceptions of students, as well as to expand the opportunities to learn for students with disabilities. If certain questions are not asked, then certain student abilities will not be made known. Questions are tools that teachers use to gather information about their students, whether implicitly or explicitly, and they fundamentally change teachers’ mental functioning about student capabilities. These tools are necessarily situated within the activity setting and function as a relationship between the speakers and hearers. Within each activity, it is important to consider the available tools and how the student interacts with them (Collins, 2003). Thus, questions’ functions as tools are understood only as within a relationship between the teachers and students.

When examining the role of mediational tools, Vygotsky privileged semiotic tools (Collins, 2003; Roth & Lee, 2004), capitalizing on Bakhtin’s conceptions of the
interconnected nature of language and humanity. According to Bakhtin, words are not merely one’s own; they are appropriated from others. He states, “Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin, 1981 as cited in Collins, 2003, p. 7). Luria describes language as the “tool of tools” in mediation (Cole & Engeström, 1993), and language facilitates the meaning of time. Therefore, questions in classroom discourse, serve as important mediators in teachers’ assessments of students’ abilities. In many ways, the practices of questioning are derived from intentions of others: whether from underlying external systemic pressures or from an appropriation from the teacher’s own schooling experiences.

In addition to semiotic tools, humans also use physical tools and cultural practices to make sense of their worlds. In this sense, culture is not defined as a noun, but as a verb. Culture refers to the practices we adopt in the process of navigating our social worlds. Learning and development occur as individuals actively participate in practices defined by culture (Gutiérrez & Stone, 1997). Changing participation in cultural practices leads to growth. This growth is not limited in a dichotomous individual and social. Activity of the individual and the collective simultaneously co-evolve in an expansive cycle (Engeström, 1999; Stetsenko, 2009); when growth occurs in the individual, it also occurs in the group, and likewise, changes within the group are indicative of changes within the individual.

Mediational tools should be viewed as having the potential to both constrain and facilitate, so it is essential to consider both possibilities (Gee, 2001). As such, questions that facilitate higher-level processing may be useful and appropriate in some contexts, while questions that elicit low-level types of knowledge may be necessary in others. Additionally, practices that evoke recitation and authoritative stances can be used to instruct or check understanding, while discussion-based and dialogic stances incite creativity, inquiry, and
deep notions of learning. Just as instructional practices should be varied (e.g., not always employing direct instruction, and not always employing a Socratic inquiry approach), so too should questioning practices. Although differentiated practices are necessary to accommodate the needs of learning differences, the problem is when differential practices are based upon a reductive assumption about student capabilities.

**Remediation, Re-education, Authoritative, and Dialogic Discourse**

Differences between the notions of remediation and re-education inform an understanding of the kinds of questioning practices that are sensitive to students’ individual and collective development. A cultural-historical approach to addressing difficulties in learning is to employ re-education, instead of the traditional response of remediation. Similarly, authoritative and dialogic discourse share a kind of tension in which the two are not diametrically opposed. As will be explored in the following section, a combination of these two approaches to understanding talk affords a rich theoretical underpinning to this study.

**Remediation.** The word remediation is a derivation of the Latin word *remedium*, or remedy, which essentially means to cure or fix. It is connected to concepts of disease and deficiencies. The idea of remediation is intended to facilitate the learning of students who are “behind,” but it usually employs generally reductive practices, such as a focus on basic skills (Cole & Griffin, 1983), individual instruction, scripted instruction, low level forms of assistance, homogenous groupings, readiness models, generic assistance, and English-only instruction (Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009). Practices of remediation fail to consider students’ strengths and repertoires of practice as beneficial toward learning (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), and it is the preferred strategy for teaching students who differ from the dominant norm. Further, Gutiérrez, Morales, and Martinez (2009) claim that “[i]deologies of difference are indexed in pedagogies, practices, and assumptions about students from
nondominant communities” (p. 224). Remediation strives to fix those students who are not easily molded into the mainstream educational practices. Under this notion, disability is something within individuals that needs to be cured or remedied. Rather than an inherent trait assigned to individuals, disability is instead a product of an interaction between an individual and his social surroundings, not just merely a phenomenon to be discovered in one’s head (e.g., neurological chemicals, “wiring of the brain”); thus, remedial approaches lack systemic understandings of how disability operates.

Although I certainly do not dispute the realities of neurology and biology when considering human functioning, my focus is less about cognitive skills and more on the social activity of talk. McDermott describes this position, referring to Adam, a focal student of analysis with a learning disability: “disability was not just visible in the sense that the world was a neutral medium for what he could not do, but that the world was precisely organized for making his disability apparent” (McDermott, 1993, p. 273).

When remediation is the dominant epistemic instructional stance, the teacher’s intended outcome is correctness through means that are efficient. In their studies of classroom discourse, Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, and Radley (1988) arrive at the conclusion that some teachers privilege the right answer so much that their instruction merely becomes a matter of students reading the teacher’s communicative hints. They state:

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the students were engaged in an exercise of trying to read all the cues, prompts and signals available from the teacher in an elaborate guessing game in which they had to work out, more by communicative astuteness than by the application of any scientific principle of measurement, what it was that the teacher was trying to get them to say. (p. 53)

Within classroom interactions, teachers all have objects, or places at which they want their students to reach to some degree, and inherent in these objects is a “correct answer.”
The primary issue at hand is how teachers help students to arrive at this place and the extent to which the activity is jointly constructed. If students’ cultural practices are not privileged through hybrid (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999) or heterogenous learning spaces, then teaching and learning becomes a matter of passive transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. Gallas (1995) discusses this dilemma as she reflects upon her own work:

My goal was to … fully explore and act upon those materials while also posing questions that I thought would provoke growth in their thinking. In effect, I was always prodding without a clear sense of where “further” was for the children. I knew where I thought their thinking was going, but my ability to assess the real path of that thinking was limited by my own conceptualization of how to direct and guide it. (p. 9)

Gallas characterizes the problem as a limitation of the ability to assess students’ understanding in the moment and then having the tools for guiding their thinking so as to help them arrive at a certain learning objective. Within this dilemma is the embedded assumption that the role of the teacher is to facilitate a degree of student discovery, rather than the traditional approach of information transmission from the teacher. She continues:

I perceived that in spite of my prodding, I was not always challenging the children’s potential as thinkers and their natural ability to consider complex and difficult questions in ways that were useful to them. I had always been in charge of the questions, asking them and often answering them, and deciding which of the children’s questions should be heard. (p. 10)

An epistemic stance when guiding students’ thinking can derive from a felt need to direct students to the correct answer. Teachers thus “prod,” as Gallas describes above, using
questions or suggestions. Students’ uptake of the teacher’s prodding provides insight as to the effectiveness of the means used to guide students in their understanding of concepts.

It is tempting to think that teachers should have a pre-specified answer in mind when asking a question. That is, if teachers are collecting information about their students, formally or informally, they need to be in a position to judge student responses as right or wrong. Therefore, it would seem as if known-answer questions should be asked when assessing student ability. Known-answer questions are traditionally thought of as literal, low-level, fact-based questions within strict recitation. However, even higher-order question types can be used as a recitation practice if the answer is predetermined (Dillon, 1990). Yet regardless of the cognitive level that a question yields, using questioning non-strategically as strict recitation can stifle student reflection, deliberation, and discussion, as students concern themselves with answering correctly. When teachers intend to solely yield correctness and efficiency in their questioning practices, students’ full competence cannot be realized.

Re-mediation. In contrast to traditional notions of remedial instruction, the sociocultural concept of re-mediation seeks to reorganize the learning environment, offering diversity and heterogeneity as a resource (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). The word re-mediation implies the act of mediating again, whereby mediate is derived from the Latin word, mediatus, meaning to come between. Re-mediation is a “shift in the way that mediating devices regulate coordination with the environment” (italics in original; Cole & Griffin, 1983, p. 70) when any initial mediators are proving to be unhelpful toward the process of learning. As mediation devices become available in the activity, the environment and purpose for the activity constitute the devices that become relevant (Cole & Engeström, 1993). For example, a blind man’s stick becomes less relevant when he sits down to eat his lunch, and forks and knives become primary tools. Similarly, a change in setting or purpose for a reading activity
constitutes a change in the questions made relevant and available to the teacher (Dewitt & Hohenstein, 2010). A known-answer question, or display question, may be relevant when the purpose is to establish an agreed-upon account of learning, for example (Cazden, 2001). It may not be as relevant when the purpose is to assess a student’s deeper process of meaning derived from interaction with text. When the activity system becomes re-mediated, higher-order and strategic forms of assistance and mediation become available, and heterogeneous groupings characterize the instructional setting, placing importance on the co-construction of knowledge (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009). Strategic forms of assistance are mutually constitutive of strategic forms of assessment. When a teacher asks a question, she is not only providing assistance in an instructional sense, but is also using the question as a tool for assessment, whether consciously assessing or not. Judgments about others can occur ephemerally in ways that are not explicit (Jordan & Putz, 2004). Through strategic forms of assessment, teachers and students co-construct a portrait of student capabilities.

Joint activity is privileged within re-mediation as individuals participate in social practices together (Gutiérrez et al., 2009). When re-mediation occurs, the system is re-conceptualized and changed, and in the context of this study, that system is classroom reading practices during small group instruction. The division of labor shifts from the teacher being the primary person responsible for thought processes in an interaction to the student sharing in that responsibility. With stark rejection of English-only approaches, re-mediation necessarily recognizes the immense cognitive resources when drawing from hybrid language practices. It involves the concept of basic activity, rather than basic skills, as is so often prevalent in remedial instructional settings (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009). Cole and Griffin (1983) describe the complexity of basic skills and basic
activity, first describing typical practices in schools when learning is attempted to be remediated:

The system of re-mediation most commonly used is one that goes back to the system of the basic unit again. It doesn’t re-mediate the overall understanding of what reading is or is for; it instantiates the reductionist theory and the analytic strategy that grew up with the alphabet: start with the small, the simple, and proceed to the complex. Of course you start with the simple. Only you’ve kidded yourself by calling letters of the alphabet or simple words simple forms of reading material...What a socio-historical point of view shows us is that we should be trying to instantiate a basic activity when teaching reading and not get blinded by the basic skills. Skills are always part of activities and settings, but they only take on meaning in terms of how they are organized...Re-medial reading instruction requires social system’s reorganization. From this perspective, you can teach kids to read who otherwise couldn’t be taught.” (p. 73)

As the authors describe above, basic skills of reading are typically thought to include “simple” forms of reading. However, alphabetic principals and decodable texts are not so simple, nor are basic skills necessary before proceeding to more complex forms of reading. Similarly, literal questions may be considered basic skills to some, while higher-order questions may be considered more advanced skills, with an assumption that literal understandings must precede more complex understandings. Yet, both basic and complex functions of reading occur simultaneously and mutually develop each other (Adams, 1990).

Rather than viewing a deficit as an inherent trait within the child, re-mediation considers learning problems as deficits as within the environment and context (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). In this way, “a sociocultural approach challenges long-standing views that disability is located within individuals; it instead redirects the focus on
developing situated notions of competence, ability, risk, disability, and difference as being culturally mediated” (Gutiérrez et al., 2009, p. 223). Trent, Artiles, and Englert (1998) argue that perceptions of children’s learning disabilities lead to a misunderstanding of the children’s full abilities, largely due to labels and tests. Questions can function in a similar manner, mediating the perceptions about students’ abilities, especially when questions are operating out of a reductive presumption. Lee (2007) describes a “pervasive culture of low expectations, to deficit models of student capacities, and to a myriad of misunderstandings within classrooms” (p. 25).

With all of the pervasive influences of high-stakes testing in classrooms and pressures to cover content, getting students to the right answer and in the right way has become a prominent goal of teachers. However, if struggles and mistakes are not valued as important processes of learning, then students are likely to be perceived as only passive recipients of knowledge, rather than active producers. Ball (1991) explains her approach toward correct student answers: “When we hear right answers simply as representing understanding, we miss opportunities to gain insight into students’ thinking” (p. 45). Similarly, “[W]hen children do not have opportunities to make mistakes as they test assumptions or opportunities to try out strategies and display their thinking, it is difficult for a more experienced student or adult to determine appropriate assistance strategies” (Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007, p. 49).

Although I have previously outlined the negative consequences of remedial approaches, I do not advocate for the elimination of explicit instruction, nor do I think that teachers should not desire efficiency and correctness. In some situations, it is necessary to overtly direct students toward a particular learning goal, while in others, it is better to take more open-ended approaches. The beauty of mediation is its heterogeneity and the multitude of options available for teachers to place in their repertoire that can be adapted according to
the student and to the context. However, when a teacher’s toolkit is constrained to one approach, especially those that are remedial toward students with disabilities, students are confined to limited and sometimes reductive ways of learning. It is important for teachers to effectively differentiate the ways in which they mediate student learning, adapting the approaches to students’ orientations to learning and to the instructional goal at hand.

**Authoritative and dialogic discourse.** Despite their various conceptions and applications, authoritative and dialogic discourses generally refer to opposing modes and patterns of classroom talk (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). In authoritative discourse, a primary purpose is to focus the students’ attention on just one meaning or interpretation of a concept; in dialogic discourse, the teacher works to value various points of view, and meaning might be negotiated and contested. Scott, Mortimer, and Aguiar (2006) theorize that the two are not ever a true dichotomy, but rather, each contains a seed of the other as the teacher works to create a hybrid interaction between the students’ understandings and the larger, established, disciplinary knowledge base.

Talk is dialogic when it includes open discussion, authentic teacher questions, questions with uptake (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003); it is often confused with mere interaction (Scott et al., 2006). Bakhtin (1981) privileges heteroglossia, which is the plurality of voices and experiences, and discourse is always informed by what has already been said before. Table 1 outlines the various features of authoritative and dialogic discourse, obtained from Scott and colleagues (2006, p. 628).
### Table 1

**Key Features of Authoritative and Dialogic Discourse**

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<th>Authoritative Discourse</th>
<th>Dialogic Discourse</th>
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<td><strong>Basic definition</strong></td>
<td>focusing on a single perspective, normally the school view.</td>
<td>open to different points of view</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Typical features</strong></td>
<td>direction prescribed in advance</td>
<td>direction changes as ideas are introduced and explored</td>
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<td></td>
<td>clear content boundaries</td>
<td>no content boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no interanimation of ideas</td>
<td>variable (low-high) interanimation of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more than one point of view may be represented but only one is focused on</td>
<td>more than one point of view is represented and considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher’s role</strong></td>
<td>authority of teacher is clear</td>
<td>teacher assumes a neutral position, avoiding evaluative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teacher prescribes direction of discourse</td>
<td>greater symmetry in teacher-student interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teacher acts as a gatekeeper to points of view</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher’s interventions</strong></td>
<td>ignores/rejects student ideas</td>
<td>prompts student contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reshapes student ideas</td>
<td>seeks clarification and further elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asks instructional questions</td>
<td>asks genuine questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>checks and corrects</td>
<td>probes student understandings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>constrains direction of discourse, to avoid dispersion</td>
<td>compares and contrasts different perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>encourages initiation of ideas by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demands on students</strong></td>
<td>to follow directions and cues from the teacher</td>
<td>to present personal points of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to perform the school science language following the teacher’s lead to accept the school science point of view</td>
<td>to listen to others (students and teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment Features</strong></td>
<td>focus is correct answer</td>
<td>to make sense of others’ ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>demonstrating understanding – same for all students</td>
<td>to build on an apply new ideas through talking with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>attention to processes of arriving at a (scientific) idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>much differentiation/many opportunities to show understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the introduction to Bakhtin’s *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, (1986), Michael Holquist writes, “Working as always with a specular subject (a self derived from the other), [Bakhtin] makes it clear that speakers always shape an utterance not only according to the object of discourse (*what* they are talking *about*) and their immediate addressee (*whom* they are speaking *to*), but also according to the particular image in which they model the
belief they will be understood, a belief that is the *a priori* of all speech” (p. xviii).

Questioning practices are appropriated from infancy, as children become socialized to language, literacy and learning (Heath, 1982; Ochs, 1992). Those children, who then become teachers, appropriate the discourses of their parents, their teachers, and “the other,” when they shape their utterances with students. A complete understanding of these discourses moves beyond mere recipient design (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), when teachers tailor their speech according to their perceptions of the intended recipient. Every utterance evokes a history of meaning that includes multiple voices. So when teachers ask a question, that question and its form, function, and content are situated within a cultural-historical context of educational practices, largely shaped by monolithic perpetuations of the dominant culture. A question such as, “What color is the girl’s wagon” is indexed in cultural assumptions about the students’ histories with girls having wagons, about answering questions to which the teacher can easily answer herself, about why it is necessary to even talk about a wagon’s appearance, and ultimately about what it means to derive understanding from text. These assumptions represent the *a priori* beliefs of teachers that they will be understood.

Similarly, Wertsch and Toma (1995) describe a dialogic function as an assumption that it is possible to generate new meanings through different perspectives or voices, which result in a transformation of ideas, rather than a simple transmission/reception process. In contrast, a univocal function assumes a correct transmission of information. Under this assumption, it is possible for one meaning to be transferred directly from one individual to another. In a teaching and learning context, this means that it is possible for teachers to transmit knowledge directly to students, like a conduit. The conduit metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981) represents the idea that speech and interaction happen in a step-by-step manner, with one interlocutor’s meaning being sent, carried, or transferred to another
interlocutor. This notion of communication is deeply embedded in everyday speech (e.g., “I’d like to get this idea across to them,” or “He can’t seem to put his ideas into words,” or “Those words carry a lot of meaning.”) and is especially prevalent in classroom discourse. This idea of learning does not allow for the understanding that knowledge is co-constructed through joint activity. Bakhtin (1986) notes: “With explanation there is only one consciousness, one subject; with comprehension there are two consciousnesses and two subjects...Understanding is always dialogic to some degree” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 111). Even when two speakers are in agreement and speak the exact same utterance to each other, they are “two utterances belonging to different voices and not one, are linked by dialogic relations of agreement” (p. 125). However, even though language is always dialogic, the participants using that language do not necessarily construct it as such.

Table 2 outlines connections between the authoritative/dialogic tension and the relationship between remediation and re-mediation.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authoritative/Dialogic Tension</th>
<th>Remediation vs. Re-mediation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assumptions about the division of authority</td>
<td>assumptions about the division of labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assumptions about the distribution of ideas and points of view</td>
<td>assumptions about the distribution of cognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assumptions about the availability of discourses</td>
<td>assumptions about the availability of tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assumptions about what it means to comprehend text – one voice or meaning vs. multiple voices or meanings</td>
<td>assumptions about what it means to comprehend text – correctly answer questions vs. social, cultural, historical interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importantly, under both sets of concepts, teachers’ approaches and purposes in asking questions may be driven by the object of correctness and efficiency or by the object of a shift in where the authority of knowledge is assumed to be located or divided. As ability becomes constructed, the source of the “problem” might be assumed to be within the child or the
environment, or a combination of both, depending upon the nature of the talk and the extent
to which it is dialogic or authoritative, or whether the approach is remedial or re-mediation.

**Accountable Talk®.** Accountable Talk® (Michaels, O’Connor, Hall, & Resnick, 2010) is a framework for discourse that has been shown to yield rigorous classroom discourse across age levels and disciplines. By holding students accountable to the learning community, to accurate knowledge, and to rigorous thinking, Accountable Talk® works to “sharpen students’ thinking by reinforcing their ability to use and create knowledge” (Michaels et al., 2010, p. 1). I use it as a frame for understanding the kinds of opportunities that students with learning disabilities have to engage with text. Table 3 provides a brief description and some examples of each category of Accountable Talk. I explicate the categories of Accountable Talk in this chapter because I intend to show how each reflects dialogic forms of talk.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountable Talk Categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Accountability to Learning Community | Students respectfully engage with each other, building upon ideas (e.g., agreeing and disagreeing). | “Do you agree?”  
“Who wants to add?”  
“Who can paraphrase what Jeremy just said?” |
| Accountability to Accurate Knowledge | Students support their claims with evidence from the text or with ideas that had been previously established. | “Where did you find that information?”  
“How do you know that?” |
| Accountability to Rigorous Thinking | Students provide cogent reasoning and justification to their claims. | “Why do you think that?”  
“So what does that tell us?” |

*Accountability to the Learning Community.* When holding students accountable to the learning community, teachers will encourage students to effectively listen to their peers’ statements and build upon each other’s ideas. Students attend respectfully to what is being said and make efforts to follow the line of reason, asking for clarification when necessary and agreeing or disagreeing when given the opportunity. Certainly, classroom norms would
provide a climate in which these kinds of discursive activities could take place. Teachers may ask students whether they agree or disagree, or if they have anything to add, question, or challenge.

**Accountability to Accurate Knowledge.** Accountability to accurate knowledge involves providing sound evidence that supports one’s claims, whether using the text or a prior understanding developed by the group. The speakers work toward accuracy, but not just for accuracy’s sake. Speakers want to engage in ideas that can be supported by established understandings, whether from the discipline of study or from concepts that have been learned within the classroom community, so that they can work toward larger inferences and claims. Under the notion of accountability to accurate knowledge, I conceptualize the text to be used in service of the claim, rather than as solely the claim itself. For example, asking students a question that can be found directly in the text (e.g., “What is the name of the man who takes the pictures?” or even “What happened next?”) with the correct answer as an endpoint in the discourse is not accountability to accurate knowledge, as I have conceived of it. Instead, accurate knowledge is used to leverage an argument, to support a claim, or to move forward with an idea. The teacher will ask students where they can find evidence to support their claims, as opposed to merely asking them to use the text in order to correctly answer the teacher’s question. Too often, accurate knowledge is the end goal in classroom conversations, rather than a tool that indexes a broader understanding of the topic at hand.

**Accountability to Rigorous Thinking.** Finally, when students are accountable to rigorous thinking, they justify their claims by using a cogent line of reasoning. A clear and logical line of thought is established, and the teacher works to ensure that students are marshaling accurate facts that are sufficient and relevant in constructing an argument. The teacher asks for justification or elaboration of student ideas so as to draw conclusions together. Michaels and colleagues note, “In classroom talk that is accountable to generally
accepted standards of reasoning, students use data, examples, analogies, and hypothetical “what-if” scenarios to make arguments and support claims” (p. 6). These types of ideas will move beyond literal and inferential comprehension of text, into a realm in which the reader can position himself as an analyst or creator of meaning. Of course, the three categories of Accountable Talk will overlap during rigorous classroom discussions.

The developers of Accountable Talk call for a better understanding of the relationship between talk, activity, and the nature of knowledge (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007), as two utterances with the same form may function very differently in different contexts (Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008). Likewise, multiple forms can accomplish the same function. Because much in conversation is implicit, interlocutors have to read between the lines to interpret meaning (Grice, 1975) based on contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982), and these cues play an especially significant role in learning through teacher-student interactions. Conversational cues can be so entrenched in classroom discourse that students attend to these cues in order to provide the “correct” response (Billig, Condor, Edward, Gane, Middleton, & Radley, 1988) rather than responding purely to the content of the question. These imbued meanings shape and are shaped by the situations, institutions, and social structures that contextualize the interaction, and power asymmetries can exacerbate the extent to which underlying meanings in play a role in the discussion (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

**Assertive Questions.** As much is read between the lines in conversation, questions that are syntactically designed as such do not necessarily function to elicit new information, but rather, to make an assertion. Assertive questions from Conversation Analysis (Koshik, 2005) provide a generally contrasting frame to Accountable Talk, as the speaker asserts or imposes meaning in the form of a question. As a methodology, Conversation Analysis seeks to understand what participants are doing in their talk. Koshik (2005) studied assertive questions in various settings and contexts, including with tutors of university students.
learning English during writing conferences. The tutors used questions as assertions for multiple purposes and functions, and Koshik categorizes them in several ways. I use her categories of assertive questions as part of a dual frame for characterizing the kinds of questioning practices that teachers employ. Because assertive questions work to challenge or impose meaning from the teacher, they are more likely to represent the kinds of questions that index authority in the interaction. In the framing of my study, I use assertive questions to understand the extent to which the location of knowledge is assumed to be within the teacher, versus the extent to which knowledge and the responsibility of thought is transferable to the students. Table 4 provides a description and example for each of the categories. I do not explicate the categories here, but rather in my methods and findings chapters so as to show how they function with my data.

Table 4

**Assertive Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertive Question Types</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Polarity Questions</td>
<td>The preferred response is the opposite polarity (Koshik, 2002; 2005a)</td>
<td>“Did he really do that?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Alternatives</td>
<td>In error correction, the first alternative is the problem, and the second is the solution (Koshik, 2005a; 2005b)</td>
<td>“Is the sky green, or is it blue?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designedly Incomplete Utterances</td>
<td>Fill-in-the-blank (Koshik, 2002a; 2005a)</td>
<td>“because he wa::s (pause)?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wh- Questions</td>
<td>Designed to request an account for a prior claim, but the negative assertion suggests that there is no adequate account</td>
<td>“Why would you think that.” “Where’d you get that idea?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag Question</td>
<td>Statement followed by a tag</td>
<td>“We talked about that last week, right?” “He’s in a lot of trouble, isn’t he?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ancillary Concepts**
Other concepts will be helpful in framing teacher questions as mediational tools that both facilitate and constrain students’ opportunities to interact with text. These concepts exist largely within notions of authoritative discourse and remediation, and include scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), hypermediation (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2002), and next-step assistance (Griffin & Cole, 1984). Generally, these concepts work to frame how teacher support may overly direct or interfere with students’ learning.

**Scaffolding.** Scaffolding is a common metaphor when referring to assistance, especially with respect to the zone of proximal development (Wood et al., 1976). This metaphor has been criticized for its conceptualization of learning as occurring along a fixed trajectory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Griffin & Cole, 1984). Additionally, the scaffolding metaphor does not allow for the consideration of an individual’s creativity within the learning process (Griffin & Cole, 1984). Although I agree with the criticisms of the concept of scaffolding, the term, to me, still holds some credence. It insinuates an act of teacher and student(s) co-constructing knowledge through joint activity. Furthermore, it is a very pervasive term used among educators for the ways in which teachers act as facilitators in the learning process. Concepts of remediation are akin to scaffolding in the sense that they are orientated toward a fixed trajectory of development. Griffin and Cole (1984) describe their challenges to the metaphor in saying, “To capture the important way in which adult understanding of goals structures the sequence of activities, we would need to add architects and foremen to the building process that scaffolding indexes…The scaffold metaphor leaves open questions of the child’s creativity” (p. 47).

Scaffolding is a very common approach to providing means of assistance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) that teachers use when differentiating instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. The teacher remains the key locus of knowledge; she wants the student to achieve a specific object; and provides support in order to assist the student’s
achievement along a pre-specified path. In terms of assessments through questions, scaffolding might occur when teachers provide additional contextual information to help the student reach a certain conclusion. “If the adult support bears an inverse relation to the child’s competence, then there is a strong sense of teleology – children’s development is circumscribed by the adults’ achieved wisdom” (Griffin & Cole, 1984, p. 47).

**Hypermediation.** I conceptualize hypermediation (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2002) as a form of remediation because of the way in which it assumes knowledge to be located primarily within the teacher. Hypermediation refers to the ways in which teachers use assistance strategies that are non-strategic and that actually impede student learning. Hypermediation can be thought of as interference when assistance is unnecessary (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In an investigation of an elementary classroom, Gutiérrez and Stone (2002) observed a teacher hypermediating the learning context, even though she designed the learning activity - Author’s Chair - as an enriching activity because of the authority given to the students. This classroom narrative activity is co-constructed, with lots of turn-taking and ongoing talk among participants. In this activity, the students were intended to be the expert while fielding and answering questions from peers about their narratives. The study’s focal student had forms of participation and narrative practices that were different from the normative practices of classroom participation; however, the researchers had evidence that she had high capabilities. They observed the teacher taking over the student’s role, thus constraining the opportunities for the student to be the expert in the learning activity. Additionally, they described her as doing unnecessary scaffolding by reformulating the children’s talk and as she provided suggestions and elicitations that were, in essence, directives that the students unquestionably followed.

Hypermediation is operationalized as a shift in discourse roles and authority, as the group of students align themselves with the teacher and her direction of talk, rather than the
student. Gutiérrez and Stone further describe it as something that “can take several different forms and can range from assistance that is undifferentiated across contexts of use and tasks to scaffolding strategies that interfere or complicate learning, for example” (2002, p. 27).

**Next-step assistance/parsing of tasks.** Next-step assistance was first described by Griffin and Cole (1984). This is a traditional approach to scaffolding and driven by a goal of efficiency. The underlying assumption is that the source of knowledge is within the teacher or somewhere in the environment, rather than the idea that children construct new knowledge as they change their participation and co-define the problem (Griffin & Cole, 1984; Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007). Next-step assistance is “provided in a lock-step fashion in ways that limit opportunities for children to produce complex (mathematical) understandings and, further, limit opportunities for children to become self-regulated learners” (Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007, p. 49). If students are continually exposed to next-step assistance strategies, then that exposure influences their perceptions about their role as a learner to one who follows external directives. Thus, they begin to think that there is no room for mistakes, student initiation of ideas, or their own creative problem-solving strategies in the learning process. Serials are a type of next-step assistance, and they refer to problems that are segmented into discrete parts. The teacher holds the primary responsibility for organizing the talk and reasoning, and she determines the order of the segmented tasks. Additionally, tasks are broken into several smaller tasks or subgoals that require the student to produce the correct answer, and the problem is scaffolded in ways that define both the means and the outcome. Figure 1, taken from Stone and Gutiérrez (2007), characterizes serials and the ways in which adults determine the exact steps to take in solving a problem.

| Presented problem [elicitation] | subtask 1 adult determined | subtask 2 adult determined | … | subtask n adult determined | completion of presented problem |

*Figure 1.* Next-step assistance serials (Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007)
**Reading comprehension and culture.** Three key elements are present in the social, historical, and cultural activity of reading: the reader, the text, and the activity of reading. The combination of these elements is socioculturally situated, and the practices shape and are shaped by the reader (Rueda, 2011). The text is a mediational tool, rather than the object within an activity system (Engeström, 1991). The text mediates a reader’s interaction with heteroglossic ideas, full of multiple voices and meaning. Even when readers are alone, the act of reading is a social process.

Individuals bring their cognitive capacities, interests, motivations, and experiences to the activity of reading. They are meaning producers and not just meaning consumers (Gee, 2001). This has implications for the ways in which reading comprehension is defined and assessed. Traditional assessments privilege the consumption of text, rather than the production, especially for students who are considered low readers. Reading as a process of interpreting the world is not generally included in remedial reading instruction; instead, the focus is on correctly reading aloud and answering comprehension questions that can be copied from the text (Cole & Griffin, 1983). Remedial approaches to reading often increase, rather than reduce performance gaps in reading achievement.

The ways in which children are socialized to language and literacy begins in the home. Children come to develop ways of knowing (Heath, 1982) that inform the systems with which they use to construct meaning through language. Unfortunately, the ways of knowing that are privileged in schools reflect the dominant, mainstream culture (Diaz & Flores, 2001; Heath, 1982), and a cycle of failure perpetuates for children from non-dominant communities because of the mismatch of cultural practices (Au, 1995).

To disrupt this cycle, it is imperative to use students’ ways of knowing and experiential backgrounds to facilitate learning (Diaz & Flores, 2001; Heath, 1982; Lee, 1995). It is also important to use children’s funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994),
which refers to the cultural and home practices that are prevalent within the student’s community, drawing from experts within that community as primary sources of knowledge. Schemas that are familiar to students will lighten the cognitive load when approaching novel problems and information (Kintsch & Greene, 1978; Rueda, 2011). Discourses are the predominant ways of thinking, believing, valuing, reading, listening, and understanding the world (Gee, 2001), and are inherent means through which individuals learn.

A cultural-historical approach to understanding reading comprehension places culture at the center of its interests, and seeks to understand the ways in which cultural practices mediate learning and development. Culture is typically defined as the systems of meaning that mediate our understanding of the social world. Cultural practices develop over time and are socially situated. These practices are ever evolving and dynamic, and individuals come to participate in practices that are overlapping among cultural groups. Understanding cultural practices can lead to a recognition of regularities within cultural groups (Lee, 2002; Rueda, 2011), but regularities should not be used to essentialize. Cultural practices are not inherent traits within individuals, and culture is not something that is carried (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Culture is used as we come to learn and develop within our social worlds.

At a time in which cognition was privileged in understanding literacy, sociocultural theorists concluded that literacy is preeminently cultural, as opposed to being psychological. In a seminal study by Scribner and Cole (1978), the common belief that literacy was responsible for the great cognitive divide was disputed. They studied the Vai cultural group, which had their own system of language and literacy used for everyday purposes without the influences of schooling. The authors found that schooling has a greater effect on cognition and that literacy is first and foremost a cultural activity.

Because I want to understand how students are afforded opportunities to display their potential through teacher questioning practices, I understand questions to be used as tools to
incite not only student learning, but also teachers’ understandings of student learning. With respect to all of the functions of questions, the teacher may ask the questions in order to assess students’ levels of understanding or to instruct, or both. Especially in whole class or small group settings, questions, and their accompanied answers, may be posed for the benefit of all of the listeners, and are thus used as instructional tools. Equally important, the questions may be posed in order to assess the extent to which further actions from the teacher are warranted. These goals are not easily disentangled, and instruction and assessment represent dialectic and mutually constituting relationships.

The interactional tools used in the process of assessment are inherently related to the conception of the outcome to be measured (Bachman, 2002; Shepard, 1993). Changing the method of assessing reading comprehension potentially changes the very idea of what reading comprehension is. If reading comprehension is materialized solely by requiring students to read a text and answer a series of multiple-choice questions, then comprehension is conceived of as the ability to correctly answer those questions. However, if reading comprehension is conceived of as the process of interpreting one’s social world (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Gee, 2003), then a variety of heterogeneous methods will be employed in the assessment of reading comprehension. All will be used in conjunction with each other to create a combined picture of students’ ability to interpret and interact with text.

Assessing reading comprehension through discourse can be understood as the ways in which students take on new roles through their changes in footing and participation (Gutiérrez & Stone, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir, 2002; Nasir & Hand, 2008; Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007) and through shifts in the division of labor in the meaning-making process (Mariage, et al., 2000; O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). In contrast to next-step assistance practices that segment and decontextualize tasks (Griffin & Cole, 1983), assessment should be used creatively, employing a variety of ways for students to demonstrate their competence
(Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007). Furthermore, the very act of assessing requires the use of meditational tools. These tools are drawn from and situated within the various time spaces discussed previously. Assessing student learning should not be limited to the extent to which a student can complete a particular task. It should also draw upon the context of the situation. When we view students’ thinking as summative representations of understanding, we miss out on insights into their learning processes (Ball, 1991).

Gee (2003) describes the ways in which current practices of assessments fail to consider students’ opportunities to learn. Students are frequently asked to read and understand texts with which they have little experience and knowledge of the social practices from which they come. When students lack the understanding of the semiotic domain represented in the specific genres of text, they have difficulty comprehending the fullness of the text. Therefore, traditional standardized assessment practices serve to reveal disparities in students’ opportunities to learn and opportunities to be assessed.
Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

In an effort to understand how teachers’ questioning practices related to reading comprehension are differentiated across students according to dis/ability status and their perceptions of students’ ability, I explored multiple fields of study. I approached my purview by seeking out literature that addressed one or more of the following categories: 1) classroom discourse and questions, 2) students with learning disabilities, 3) perspectives that use mediation as a conceptual frame, 4) reading comprehension, and 5) perceptions of ability.

After examining pertinent relationships within the literature, I identified four important themes that will inform my study. First, teachers’ questioning practices are dominated with literal or low level questions. Second, authoritative discourse is highly pervasive in classrooms; however, it should not be excluded from a teacher’s toolkit of talk, nor is it mutually exclusive from dialogic discourse. Third, formative questions incite a shift in the division of labor from teacher to student. Finally, teachers tend to engage with students in a manner consistent with their perceptions of the students’ capabilities. I conceptualize each theme as having implications for the ways in which informal assessment occurs in the day-to-day practices of classroom talk, especially related to talk in the context of reading comprehension.

In this review of the literature, I examine each theme in terms of its applicability to my study and how it informs my work. The literature provides an important backdrop for contextualizing my research questions, and it also paves the way for pointing toward the importance of my study. In some ways, my approach to this review involves tracing a field of study’s historical lineage, and in other ways, I discuss the literature by integrating overall themes across time.

Low Level Questions

*Theme 1: Teachers’ questioning practices are dominated with literal or low level questions.*
In this section, I will outline three relevant concepts related to teachers’ questions that elicit low levels of comprehension: the prevalence of teachers’ literal questions, the relationship between levels of questions and student achievement, and questions as next-step assistance. The literature tends to dichotomize questions in terms of levels (Cole, 1989). Level 1 typically refers to a bottom-up approach to reading, and level 2 is a top-down. However, in the process of reading, both are required (Adams, 1990; Cole, 1989). Theories about levels of questions that dichotomize cognitive thought processes (e.g., literal vs. higher-order) miss important complexities of the way cognition is integrative, contextualized, and distributed, which is an important point that I will attend to later. Questions cannot be easily characterized as either low-level or high-level. Despite my overt attention to “low level” questions in this section and my classification of questions as being either high or low level throughout this chapter, I intend to give an accurate portrayal of the extant literature. Further, a classification of high and low questions is helpful when critically examining and describing the patterns experienced by students with disabilities; in essence, it helps to highlight contradictions.

**Prevalence of teachers’ literal questions.** It has long been known that the predominant kind of question found in classrooms is one that focuses on literal, factual information (Bintz & Williams, 2005; Burns & Myhill, 2004; Gall, 1984; Graesser & Person, 1991; Parker & Hurry, 2007). According to Gall (1984) only 20% of all teacher questions require thoughtful responses that are not strict recitations of literal facts. Consistent with Gall (1984), Bintz and Williams (2005) found that approximately only 20% of teacher questions require some sort of higher level thought process. In a study that examined teacher questioning practices during reading comprehension strategy instruction, Parker and Hurry (2007) found that a significant portion (70%) of the teachers’ discursive behavior during the lessons involved direct questioning. They concluded that two-thirds of teacher questions
were concerned with factual recall of information, and approximately 87% of the questions were known-answer questions.

**Cognitive levels of questions and student achievement.** Over the past four decades, the literature on cognitive levels of questions and their relationship with student achievement has been a near tug-of-war. Multiple meta-analyses have been conducted, re-conducted, analyzed, and reanalyzed, resulting in an inconclusive understanding of whether or not researchers should even be concerned with various levels of questions and their influence on learning, due to the complex nature of how questions are situated within the learning environment. In 1976, Rosenshine reviewed correlational studies of teachers’ questions and student achievement, and concluded that students learn best when they are expected to know the answer and when teachers emphasize the answer’s degree of correctness. Thus, he determined that teachers’ questions should be narrow and factually driven. Then in 1979, Winne reviewed 18 empirical studies that examined teachers’ use of higher cognitive questions and found that the type of question, based on its cognitive level implied, made little difference in student achievement. Redfield and Rousseau (1981) re-examined Winne’s analysis, and obtained the 18 studies used in his review. They added two studies that had been conducted since Winne’s analysis. Sixteen of the 20 studies had a dependent variable of an achievement measure and an independent variable of level of teacher questions. Using a different meta-analytic technique than Winne’s, Redfield and Rousseau concluded that higher level questions do in fact have a positive effect on achievement. Samson, Strykowski, Weinstein, and Walberg (1987) further took up the differential findings between Winne and Redfield and Rousseau and decided that Redfield and Rousseau overestimated the effect of higher order questions and achievement measures. They concluded that higher cognitive questioning practices have a small positive effect. More recently, Bintz and Williams (2005) conducted a meta-analysis that reviewed 20 studies on teachers’ use of higher and lower
cognitive questions. They concluded that when higher cognitive questions take a predominant role during classroom discourse, gains can be expected. Interestingly, neither meta-analysis defined the achievement measures used in the studies under examination.

In more detailed examinations of the characteristics of teacher questions and student responses, the length of student responses increased when teachers asked fewer questions per minute, and longer wait time yields greater access to higher levels of thought (Dillon, 1981; Tobin, 1987). However, just because a higher level question is posed does not ensure that the student has performed the same cognitive level of reasoning to answer it, at least according to student uptake. The cognitive level of student responses does not always match the level of the question (Dillon, 1982; Mills, Rice, Berliner, & Rousseau, 1980). Further, in an experimental study, Gall, Ward, Berliner, Cahen, Winne, Elashoff, and Stanton (1978) found that when teachers use an even mixture (50%) of fact-based questions and higher order questions, students became confused about the purpose or function of teacher questions. This proportion was compared to other proportions of fact versus higher order questions, namely 25% and 75%. However, because the study design required teachers to read from a researcher-provided script, the students may have been distracted by the inauthenticity of the discourse. This confusion could have also been magnified in a script with no clear patterns of talk and without the teacher’s improvisational adjustments.

As can be seen, the literature on the relationship between teacher questioning and student achievement is mixed. Some researchers have concluded that learning happens when questions are literal, while others vie for the importance of higher order questions. Still others focus on minute details of questioning practices: seconds of wait time, varying proportions of questions, and the degree to which a student’s response matches the cognitive level of the question posed. All of these approaches to understanding cognitive levels of questions take a process-product approach (Carlsen, 1991), which consider questions as
independent factors that can be individually lifted from transcripts and counted as aggregate totals. However, with respect to questions, and discourse in general, the whole is not the sum of its parts.

Although my study did not examine the relationship between student achievement and teacher questioning, I did consider the ways in which interpretations of students’ needs are different according to the students. Interestingly, the students in Rosenshine’s study were of low socioeconomic status, and he concluded that only low-level, literal questions should be used to promote learning. I have considered students’ group placement, as well as disability status (i.e. a learning disability or not), and whether discourse practices reveal differential treatment of certain students or groups of students. However, unlike Rosenshine, I grappled with both the affordances and constraints of all question types. Additionally, a frequency count of question types will be only one component of my entire analysis. Frequencies can paint a general picture of pervasive discourse patterns in classrooms, but when examined in isolation, they fail to reveal the full purposes and functions of questions within interactions (Cazden, 2004; Schegloff, 1993).

**Questions as next-step assistance.** Teacher discourse practices often involve questions that rigidly guide students toward a particular answer or conceptual understanding. Referred to as next-step assistance (Griffin & Cole, 1984; Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007), these patterns of talk include breaking a task into discrete, segmented parts that disconnect the task at hand from the larger concept. When questions are asked in a “lock-step fashion” (Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007, p. 49), students come to only construct the knowledge that the teacher has directed them to construct. They are limited in their opportunities to initiate their own understandings and meaning constructions. Further, breaking tasks into simpler components to an extreme deprives students of contextual learning (Echevarria, 1995).
Stone and Gutiérrez (2007) studied the involvement of undergraduate college students in an after school program that was designed to be a rich learning environment for the elementary students and for the undergraduates who were learning and applying theories of teaching and learning. They compared the ways in which a novice undergraduate, Jossey, approached a problem-solving task to the practices of more experienced undergraduates who were familiar with the program’s goals. Jossey was working with a young boy as he was playing an addition game on a computer. The game involved pouring liquid in and out of tanks to arrive at a set amount. In this particular problem, the goal was 21, and the two tanks had 9 and 3 displayed on them. Instead of letting the student initiate the problem, Jossey took him through the process step by step. She asked him to figure $9 + 9$, to which he answered, 18. She then asked him to figure $18 + 3$, and the student correctly answered 21. He successfully completed that task in the game. However, all he had to do was answer Jossey’s addition questions. Her oversimplified tasks did not afford the student with an opportunity to perform the complex problem solving that was required by the task as a whole. In this interactional episode, Jossey’s “assessment of mathematics and not the child’s mathematical reasoning became essential for the continuation of this activity” (p. 49).

Although this example highlights next-step assistance in a mathematics context, it informs my analysis of classroom discourse of reading comprehension tasks. When teachers pose questions that directly guide students through an understanding of text, then they will be limiting opportunities for co-problem solving and co-cognizing that is necessary for a dynamic assessment of reading comprehension. Furthermore, competence can only be facilitated when teachers allow for a strategic transfer of responsibility of learning to the student. However, this is not to say that this type of direct teacher guidance or scaffolding should never be used; the problem arises when it is the primary or even sole method of assistance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).
**Assertive questions.** Assertive questions were characterized by Koshik (2005) using Conversation Analysis (CA). CA works to understand how talk is organized and what participants are doing in interaction (Schegloff, 1999). The educational context in which assertive questions were identified was during one-on-one writing conferences with tutors and post-secondary students who were multilingual in an English context. As described previously, Koshik identified various types of assertive questions, such as reverse polarity questions (2002b), alternative questions (2005), wh- questions designed as challenges, (2003), and designedly incomplete utterances (2002a). It is not apparent that other education-based studies have incorporated the work of Koshik, aside from two studies that drew from her methodology of sequential analysis, one that studied conversations between native and nonnative English speakers in a graduate student dorm (Matsumoto, 2011), and another that examined teacher and student talk in three university level ESL (English as a Second Language) courses (Lee, 2006).

**The Tension between Authoritative and Dialogic Discourse**

*Theme 2: Authoritative discourse is highly pervasive in classrooms; however, it should not be excluded from a teacher’s toolkit of talk, nor is it mutually exclusive from dialogic discourse.*

Traditional and nontraditional modes of classroom talk should not be understood in terms of either/or dichotomies, but as both/and hybrids (Cazden, 2001; O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). Scott et al. (2006) describe the mutually constituting relationship between authoritative and dialogic discourse:

The *tension* which we refer to in this article develops as dialogic exploration of both everyday and scientific views requires resolution through unauthoritative guidance by the teacher. Conversely the tension develops as authoritative statements by the teacher demand dialogic exploration by students. So, both dialogicity and authoritativeness contain the seed of their opposite pole in the dimension, and in this
way we see the dimension as tensioned and dialectic, rather than as being an exclusive dichotomy. Following these ideas, we see teaching for meaningful learning in terms of a progressive shifting between authoritative and dialogic passages, with each giving rise to the other. (p. 623)

The authors continue describing this tension by stating that a conversation solely devoted to students’ ideas and views is insufficient to productive learning, as the teacher holds a responsibility to the perspective of the established disciplinary community (Scott et al., 2006). A hybrid space is the center of learning, as students’ experiences and connections are legitimized as vehicles for newly explored ideas. Communicative approaches should shift as the purposes of interaction shift (Burns & Myhill, 2004; Wells, 1998).

O’Connor and Michaels (2007) describe the nature of dialogic and monologic talk and ideologies. In order to understand characteristics of each, they move beyond merely an identification of utterances (e.g., known-answer questions). The authors recognize four orthogonal dimensions that correlate with each other within a framework for understanding dialogic talk: dialogic form, Dialogic stance (capitalization refers to its ideology), locus of knowledge, and power. These dimensions are consistent with the conceptual framework I have outlined for this study. A larger understanding of a classroom’s norms and practices allows for an in depth analysis of the extent to which classroom dialogue is Dialogic. In contrast to Scott and colleagues’ perspective in the quote above, O’Connor and Michaels (2007) argue that teasing out monolingual and dialogic talk in a given statement is futile. They state, “The known-answer nature of the question is not a necessary sign of Monologic status. Only in the context of its sequential positioning and linguistic details can we attempt to judge its Dialogic potential” (p. 279). Even when questions that work to negotiate meaning or encourage student inquiry are adopted in the classroom, the teacher still can hold on to all of the control of the discussion in a triadic dialogue sequence (Wells, 2007).
Instruction in a whole class setting works to increase the tension between the teacher’s role as facilitator and the students’ role as co-constructors in meaning. Teachers are responsible for enacting their given curriculum, within time constraints and under pressures of accountability. Thus, more teacher directive practices are employed, under the auspices of correct ideas and efficiency (Burns & Myhill, 2004).

When considering the prevalent type of discourse in a classroom interaction, student engagement is a relative index. Substantive engagement is characterized by a high level of reciprocity between participants and has been shown to promote learning (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). However, as these authors astutely note, “Substantive student engagement may manifest itself as a twinkle in the eye, or it may not; substantive student engagement may manifest itself as rapt attention for a long period of time, or it may not; substantive engagement may for many students manifest itself only years after they leave school, or it may not” (p. 263). The implications of this conceptualization of engagement for students with disabilities are tremendous. To many, engagement might present itself as a portrait of a student sitting quietly, eyes looking intently at the teacher, hands eagerly raised to answer the teacher’s question. Further, it might be students doing what they are supposed to be doing, talking about what they are supposed to be talking about, saying all of the “right” things. In many cases, students with disabilities do not fit this mold; however, this is not to say that they are disengaged. A student rattling his pencil or wiggling in his chair might be providing himself with the necessary movement or stimulation to stay focused. Another student with eyes glazed and mouth agape might appear to the casual observer as daydreaming, but in reality is deeply contemplating the class discussion. Therefore, a realization of the variety of manifestations that engagement may have implicates a richer understanding of the events that unfold in a classroom.
Dialogic spells (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2001) are episodes of dialogic talk that are characterized by certain indices of engagement. The characterizations are designed to pique student interest and enthusiasm, with utterances building upon each other between people, students asking questions, authentic questions, and teacher’s questions being answered without continual prodding. In some cases dialogic spells are ended when a teacher gives a low-level evaluation (e.g., “Great job.”) or when a teacher ignores students’ comments or questions. Dialogic spells are more likely to occur in small classes of students with higher average SES (Nystrand et al., 2001).

**Student achievement and differential treatment.** Studies have shown a relationship between dialogic discourse and student achievement (Applebee et al., 2003; Collins, 1996; Nystrand et al., 2001). Applebee and colleagues (2003) studied the relationship between types of classroom discourse and literacy achievement of 974 students from five states in diverse levels of middle and high school classes. They found that high academic demands and discussion-based approaches (conceptualized discussion as dialogic) were significantly related to performance on a literacy measure that was administered as a pre- and post-test. In lower track classes, the authors noted less student engagement in dialogic discourse. Further, the observed maximum for average minutes of open discussion per hour in low track classes was 3.7, as opposed to 14.5 minutes in high track classes.

In a study with 872 8th and 9th grade students in English and social studies classes, Nystrand and colleagues (2001) investigated whether some classes, or some teachers, are more likely to engage dialogic patterns of interaction. They also examined precursors to dialogic discussion episodes and the ways in which teacher moves facilitate dialogic discourse. In their analysis of questions, the authors analyzed them according to the a) experience, ability, and prior knowledge of the person answering the question, b) nature of the instructional activity, and c) source of information required by the question. Questions
were considered to be lower-order (i.e. records or reports) if they elicited old information; they were seen to be higher-order (i.e. generalizations, analyses, or speculations) if they elicited new information and could not be answered through a basic activation of prior knowledge. Further, they placed questions on a five point scale, where 1 = a record of an ongoing event; 2 = a report of old information; 3 = generalization; 4 = analysis; and 5 = speculation. A helpful heuristic for these five levels is a continuum of ‘happenings’: what’s happening, what happened, what happens, why does it happen, and what might happen. The authors found that in low track classes, dialogic spells occurred in only 2 out of 196 instructional episodes. They surmise that this was because of a course focus on skill development and test preparation. In many of these classes, the teachers called their recitations practices “discussion.”

In elementary school settings, teachers have been shown to talk to students in low reading groups in different ways than students in high reading groups, even when the same level of text is used (Collins, 1996). Teachers give qualitatively different kinds of assistance to students in lower ability groups. In reading contexts, discourse is typically geared toward correctly reading text aloud (e.g., pronunciation, decoding, intonation). Reading processes do involve decoding and word-level skills; however, decoding and comprehension are always mutually occurring during mature reading, as both processes inform the other (Adams, 1990). As Cole (1989) notes,

[T]eachers who adopt a bottom-up, decoding to comprehension, Level 1 approach to the curriculum on the basis of Level 1-Level 2 educational theories underestimate the intellectual resources that their children bring to the instructional setting and unwittingly create teacher-learning interactions that are unsuited to the children’s pedagogical needs. When they fail, remediation is “more of the same,” worsening an already unfortunate situation. (p. 75).
**Reading comprehension achievement.** When discourse-related approaches to reading comprehension instruction employ an element of critical thinking, analytic and evaluative talk, they tend to influence students’ learning outcomes. Increase in student talk is not merely enough to lead to an increase in reading comprehension (Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, and Alexander, 2009); the type of talk is more influential in reading comprehension outcomes. Lawrence and Snow (2011) outline several discourse features that lead to increased reading comprehension. They include: establishing a purpose for reading, activating background knowledge, eliciting literal and inferential thinking processes, and promoting peer interaction. Authentic questions give rise to deeper comprehension processes, and encouraging elaborated student talk yields an understanding of text at a higher level (Soter, Wilkinson, Murphy, Reninger, Rudge, & Edwards, 2009). As Lawrence and Snow (2011) have described in their review of the research, elements of discourse that are found to lead to better discussion include: asking worthy questions, providing a purpose for the discussion, allowing time for peer interaction, and establishing rules for interaction. Interactive dialogue among peers and with their teacher can enhance reading comprehension of complex texts and access to higher-order processing skills for students with learning disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, Lipsey, & Eaton, 2000; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Swanson, Hoskyn, & Lee, 1999; Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). In discussing text with students with learning disabilities and those without, it is important to root strategies and concepts in authentic engagements with constructing meaning. Too often, teachers design activities to apply a kind of reading strategy (e.g., questioning or summarization) without a framework for how to do so (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2011; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998).

**Students with disabilities.** In studies that specifically examine reading comprehension question and answer practices, students with disabilities have been shown to
have an easier time verbally responding to questions, as opposed to writing (Schmidt, 1989), and they perform better when the task requires listening and choosing answers as opposed to retelling (Westerveld & Gillon, 2008). They have difficulty answering questions that require recalling text information, selecting correct and sufficient cues from questions, and selecting accurate and sufficient background knowledge (McCormick, 1992).

As students progress through the elementary grades, differential reading abilities grow wider with time, as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This “Matthew effect” (Englert & Thomas, 1987; Stanovich, 1986) tends to affect students with reading disabilities who are provided with remedial instruction and nonstrategic forms of assistance. However, in a study that compared third grade students with learning disabilities with age-matched peers, the group with LD answered knowledge, application, and analysis level questions with the same accuracy but scored significantly lower on comprehension level questions, as well as on synthesis questions. In terms of this study, no Matthew effect was apparent. Passage understanding should not be based on one passage and should include the element of student interest, and questions should reflect a variety of levels (Wiig & Wilson, 1994).

Assumptions about the location of knowledge and students with disabilities. Cognition does not reside solely within a person’s head (Rogoff, 2003). It is distributed when people collaborate together, much in the way that a teacher and student work together through interaction. One collaborator, the teacher, interacts so as to facilitate learning; the other collaborator, the student, interacts in a way that displays his understanding, so that the teacher can then assess and further develop his understanding. Further, “cognition is distributed not only across individuals and material objects but also across ideas and communication with other people” (p. 272). It is in this interaction that cognition is distributed, and disabilities become “less the property of persons than they are moments in a cultural focus” (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 324). Instead of placing a focus on the
various preconceived limitations of the so-called disabled mind (cf., Shaywitz, Pugh, Jenner, Fulbright, Fletcher, Gore, & Shaywitz, 2000), I looked for ways in which dis/ability is produced and reproduced through dialogue. Like McDermott, Goldman, and Varenne (2006), I am “less interested in the characteristics of LD children than in the cultural arrangements that make an LD label relevant; [I am] less interested in minds and their moments than in moments and their minds” (p. 13).

As a more knowledgeable member within an interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), the teacher uses a variety of tools to scaffold students’ interaction with literacy. Mariage, Englert, and Garmon (2000) describe this relationship in their investigation of interactions between special education teachers and students with disabilities around literacy events: “[W]hile the purported goals of these literacy events significantly shaped the meaning that was constructed in classrooms, it was the ways that individual teachers enacted the events to assist both the individual student’s and the whole group’s cognitive and social development that determined the effectiveness of various literacy practices” (italics in original, p. 303). In this study, the authors worked to ensure that the students with disabilities were active constructors of new meaning through written and spoken text. The teachers provided just enough support and adapted it to students’ degrees of understanding on a moment-to-moment basis. As they found ways to open discursive slots for the students with disabilities, the teachers began “to internalize increasingly more complex ways of using literacy practices and talk” (p. 305). Initial teacher strategies of modeling, questioning, and thinking aloud later changed to strategies that relinquished control over to the students, including repeating student contributions as a way to acknowledge their thinking. This revoicing move (O’Connor & Michaels, 1993) allows the group to reflect upon ideas that have been presented in the discussion, and it positions ideas as important enough to consider. This move is strategic (Mariage et al., 2000), as it serves as a prompt for the class to initiate, or join in, the meaning-
making process. It is important for the teacher to model discursive moves for students (e.g. asking questions in order to synthesize or construct meaning) and to scaffold complex language by demonstrating, thinking aloud, questioning, and modeling literacy practices.

The authors found that over the course of the study, the students were able to mediate their own interactions in various contexts and for different purposes. Gradually, they appropriated the role of a more capable other as they challenged their peers ideas in discussions about text. Through this model, students went from responding to teachers’ questions with short, unelaborated answers to participating in discourse more broadly, speaking in longer utterances, initiating novel ideas, and viewing each other as sources of important knowledge. “Rather than artificially limit what students could accomplish, [the] teachers grew increasingly aware of the importance of adjusting the scaffolding necessary to accomplish the communicative goal rather than limiting what students attempted before they started” (p. 332). The authors suggest that teachers can transfer several learning features to students: 1) the method of response, 2) how students are expected to participate in the discourse, 3) the resources available to students, and 4) the ways in which procedures are facilitated in the activity. The teachers in their investigation increased the complexity of these learning features over time. Mariage and colleagues conclude:

The teacher’s role as “more knowledgeable other” must extend far beyond one’s knowledge of literacy content. If teachers are to successfully educate students with special needs, they will need to be increasingly able to orchestrate multiple ways of assisting both the cognitive and social development of their students. When teachers choose powerful literacy events and begin to understand how to maximize the learning potential of the event, they can transform the social contexts of classrooms and successfully teach more students, including those with special needs. (p. 334).
I have thoroughly examined this article, as it has important implications for my study. In particular, it provides me with an understanding of the range of possibilities for students with learning disabilities and their teacher. These authors have shown that students with disabilities absolutely can (and will) take on new roles when teachers delicately relinquish their degree of responsibility of thought and discursive action.

In other studies that used a framework based on the social organization of learning, when reading is situated as a socially organized activity, students with disabilities participate and are able to build upon their strengths as readers. Klenk (1994) found that for an eight-year-old girl with LD, engagement in reading was scaffolded by familiarity with text, knowledge of some print conventions, and assistance from an expert reader. The student’s understanding of reading changed over time and as she experienced success. She consistently wanted more challenge and to read “the right way,” rather than using her own narrations of stories based upon illustrations and familiarity. Klenk (1994) concludes that assistance should be tailored to students’ strengths.

In an analysis of writing lessons in primary grade level whole-class settings, Berry (2006) found that different strategies can be used to ensure participation of students with disabilities according to the instructional approach used. She concluded that when instruction is recitation-based, the task needs to ensure that all students can participate by reducing the task demands. When the approach is geared more toward conversations, teachers need to offer response structures that scaffold students’ entry into the conversations. Regardless of instructional approach, both teachers used several strategies for involving students with disabilities in the classroom interactions. They modeled important elements of the composition process, paraphrased student contributions to assist with memory, and incorporated students’ contributions, along with cueing and prompting. Additionally, the teachers offered choices for students to respond to reduce the complexity of the response.
Importantly, this analysis focuses on ways in which teachers can reorganize instruction so as to elicit engagement of all students. It also places importance on having a variety of discussion tools, ranging from recitation approaches to dialogic conversations, as opposed to either-or perspectives.

Palincsar & Klenk (1993) found evidence in case studies that students at all levels of literacy development work to make meaningful and personal connections to print. They state:

[H]ow can special education students who experience tremendous difficulties with the performative aspects of reading and writing still experience the satisfaction and outcomes associated with a repertoire of literacy skills?...Children become literate, not through their interactions with artifacts such as text or computer screens, but rather through their participation in socially organized activities with written language. (p. 20)

Therefore, students with disabilities must be given opportunities to engage with text as a socially situated activity; it is in this organization that responsibilities for reading activities will begin to shift from the “expert” reader to the student with LD.

Shifts between authoritative and dialogic discourse are an inevitable, and necessary, part of teaching (Scott, Mortimer, Aguiar, 2006; O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). Although the teacher takes the role of chief orchestrator in facilitating learning of a certain kind, learning best happens when students are given the authority and responsibility to ask questions, and make proposals and challenges (Scott et al., 2006). Establishing a shared authority in classroom interaction means that students should be encouraged “to be authors and producers of knowledge, with ownership over it, rather than mere consumers of it” (Engle & Conant, 2002, p. 404). Similarly, Kraker (2000) found that growth for students with disabilities is
fostered by a balance of challenge and structure, characterized by explicit corrective feedback coupled with high expectations.

In sum, a common pattern of talk with low level students is strict recitation, which is undergirded by a pedagogical assumption that “struggling learners” need remedial, skills-based instruction. Likewise, as instruction patterns of talk are realized through recitation structures, so are assessment patterns of talk. Only low levels of assessment are thus enacted, inadvertently constructing ability through the chosen discourse. Teachers typically become an exacerbated ‘more knowledgeable other’ when working with students with disabilities, based upon an assumption that the students’ cognition is deficient. However, with intervention, teachers can learn to gradually transfer the responsibility and control of all of the thinking in a jointly constructed meaning making process.

Formative Questions

*Theme 3: Formative questions incite a shift in the division of labor from teacher to student.*

As previously discussed, questions cannot be fully understood in isolation, nor can they, by themselves, characterize larger segments of talk. For example, a known answer question might be an integral move within a dialogic episode of talk (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). Likewise, a higher-order question intended to promote complex thinking might be situated within talk that is recitation based, especially when the answer is pre-specified, rigid, and assumed to be located largely within the teacher or text, or in other words, outside of the student (Dillon, 1990; O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). However, question types and larger episodes of talk can be thought of as dialectic; a characterization of both is helpful in understanding their mutually constituted relationship.

In an assessment of student understanding, questions that encourage a transfer of responsibility for learning from teacher to student are formative in nature. These questions in isolation might be low level, known-answer questions, but in the context of a larger episode
of talk, are starting points for dialogic talk (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). With full recognition that a single utterance might be characterized as either a higher order question or low level question, or even both, I attend to many contextual factors that help to situate the utterance in my analysis. Talk can be both authoritative and dialogic (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007; Wertsch & Toma, 1995), and it can be characterized as more of one than the other. I conceptualize formative questions as largely dialogic, as their fundamental premise is that they facilitate further learning. Furthermore, a shared locus of knowledge typically underlies formative questions because they encourage a distributed division of labor, in terms of responsibility of thought, between teacher and students. This shift in responsibility provides a vehicle for learning and development, and because of it, students have increased opportunities to be considered as more capable than they would be without it. Within an informal formative assessment framework, an assessment does not occur in the traditional paper-pencil format, but “is consistent with the purposes of sound educational assessment: it supports instructional decisions based on inferences made about students” (Ruiz-Primo, 2011, p. 16).

Questions that position students as important contributors to meaning-making process. A greater use of open questions has been used by effective teachers in helping to enhance student learning (Burns & Myhill, 2004; Chi, de Leeuw, Chiu, & LaVancher, 1994; Chin, 2007; Taylor et al., 2000; Topping & Ferguson, 2005; van Zee & Minstrell, 1997; Wells & Arauz, 2006; Yip, 2004). However, asking higher-order questions is a complex and challenging process for teachers (Roth, 1996; Yip, 2004).

In an episode of teacher-student talk, there are moves that work to position students as responsible for a great deal of the cognitive load. For example, teachers might throw a reflective toss (van Zee & Minstrell, 1997), a question posed to a student who has just provided an answer to a previously asked teacher question. Similarly, teachers might ask
Socratic questions, or questions that give a constructive challenge to students rather than direct corrective feedback about incorrect ideas (Chin, 2007). Chin (2007) outlines three additional types of questions that are formative in nature. Verbal jigsaw questions elicit convergent answers to build a relational understanding between disparate ideas from different individuals. Semantic tapestry questions are characterized by a holistic integration of concepts while weaving separate ideas together into a cohesive framework. These questions help students to construct conceptual and procedural knowledge, and they activate students’ prior knowledge and experiences with a topic. Framing questions provide structure to the parameters of a discussion: a preview of the problem, purpose for learning, and summary of important points, which are important scaffolding tools in directing conversation. When students are asked to explain the reasoning for their claims, greater understandings of a concept can result (Chi et al., 1994).

The nature of formative questions and their function might be dependent upon the context (Burns & Myhill, 2004; Roth, 1996; Yip, 2004), the learning activity (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2007), or setting (Dewitt & Hohenstein, 2010). Dewitt and Hohenstein (2010) compared teachers and their students in a classroom and museum setting, looking specifically at triadic discourse and teacher questions. They found a statistically significant difference between type of discourse and setting. Teachers made fewer evaluative statements during the visit to the museum, suggesting that for these teachers, the structure of the activity (whole class discussion in the pre-visit lessons, small group work during the visit and follow-up lessons) may have been a more influential factor than that of the museum setting. The talk at the museum was generally more dialogic and less authoritative, and questions were asked in a more genuine way to create a balanced and interactive relationship, in which the students and teacher supported each other.
Accountable Talk®. Accountable Talk® has been shown to yield dialogic forms of talk amongst students in a variety of disciplines (Alexander, 2010; Bitter, O’Day, Gubbins, & Socias, 2009; Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008; Richardson, 2010; Wolf, Crosson, & Resnick, 2004). It is a framework for talk that allows for teacher and student talk that is designed to deliberately create democratic education through dialogue (Alexander, 2010; Michaels et al., 2008). Students have recognized the importance of the collaborative nature of Accountable Talk (Richardson, 2010), and associations have been made between classrooms where teachers use principles from Accountable Talk frequently and effectively and improved reading comprehension on outcome measures (Bitter et al., 2009; Wolf, et al., 2004). Wolf and colleagues (2004) describe implications of questioning practices in saying, “[T]he students’ responses often rely on the types of questions that the teacher phrased” (p. 48). The import of effective questioning practices in eliciting rigorous engagement with text cannot be overstated.

Instructional conversations. In their description of instructional conversations, Green and Wallat (1981) state, “[I]n order to understand how language operates to produce the multiple outcomes of conversations, the context in which that processing takes place must be considered” (p. 161). They go on to show how messages within classroom interaction are imbued with contextualization cues. Similar to Accountable Talk, instructional conversations were developed as a framework for dialogic talk and have been implemented with students with disabilities, as well as English language learners (Echevarria, 1995; Goldenberg, 1992; Roskos, Boehlen, & Walker, 2000; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Saunders, Patthey-Chavez, & Goldenberg, 1997; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). They are built on a sociocultural framework that views the teacher’s role as a facilitator of student movement through the zone of proximal development (Echevarria, 1995; Roskos et al., 2000). Goldenberg (1992) characterizes Instructional Conversations as:
students engage[ing] in extended discussions—conversations—with the teacher and among themselves. Teachers and students are responsive to what others say so that each statement or contribution builds upon, challenges, or extends a previous one. Topics are picked up, developed, elaborated….Strategically, the teacher (or discussion leader) questions, prods, challenges, coaxes—or keeps quiet. He or she clarifies and instructs when necessary, but does so efficiently, without wasting time or words…Perhaps most important, he or she manages to keep everyone engaged in a substantive and extended conversation, weaving individual participants’ comments into a larger tapestry of meaning. (p. 318).

Instructional conversations (ICs) have primarily been implemented with English language learners (Goldenberg, 1992) and students with disabilities (Echevarria, 1995), and they have been used to challenge the status quo of teachers’ perceptions of ELLs (Perez, 1996). The IC approach has been compared to traditional basal approaches, and has been found to yield higher levels of discourse and greater participation. In terms of achievement outcomes, students in the IC model showed similar achievement on literal comprehension on a short answer comprehension test as students in a more traditional model, but there were differences with respect to students’ conceptions of the passage’s topic (Echevarria, 1995; Saunders, Patthey-Chavez, & Goldenberg, 1997).

Echevarria (1995) studied the effect of instructional conversations on language and concept development of Hispanic students with learning disabilities. She found that even students with disabilities took cues from the participant frameworks of both approaches, the traditional approach and the IC approach. Even when the rules of discourse were not explicitly stated, students were able to take on participant roles consistent with each framework. Importantly, Echevarria concluded that “students with learning disabilities [will use] higher levels of discourse when given the opportunity to do so” (p. 551).
Questions within instructional conversations are intended to elicit extensions of student thought and bases for students’ statements or positions, and few questions should seek responses that allow for only a single correct answer (Echevarria, 1995; Roskos et al., 2000). Further, questions in an IC approach will activate and build upon students’ background knowledge, clarify student ideas, connect the discourse, encourage student participation, and will be indicative of a balance between script and improvisation (Cazden, 2001; Echevarria, 1995; Erickson, 2004; Roskos et al., 2000; Sawyer, 2004). Questioning practices that align with the parameters of instructional conversations are more likely to lead to richer opportunities for students to display deeper levels of thought and interaction with text. This is particularly significant in understanding how perceptions of student ability (or disability) become reified through talk.

**Self-fulfilling Prophesies Work to Construct Abilities**

*Theme 4: Teachers tend to engage with students in a manner consistent with their perceptions of the students’ capabilities.*

Decades ago, researchers found that teachers interacted with students based upon their initial, and sometimes erroneous, expectations of students; in essence, self-fulfilling prophesies were very evident in classrooms in the 1960’s (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Brophy and Good (1970) identified 17 behaviors that teachers used with students for whom they had high expectations and for whom they had low expectations. In brief, when interacting with low-expectation students, teachers consistently were less likely to praise their correct answers. They were more likely to correct their incorrect answers, even when accounting for the fact that high-expectation students gave more correct answers. Teachers less frequently elicited responses from low-expectation students and were less likely to rephrase questions when these students had answered incorrectly. Teachers were more likely to give the answer or call on another child when responding to low-expectation
students’ answers. They gave differential degrees of support and feedback to students for whom they had low expectations, and not by any sort of favorable margin.

Unfortunately, patterns are not much different in more contemporary work. Teachers who generally have high expectations for all of their students use various structures of ability groupings and incorporated choice into learning activities. They also encourage students to take ownership of their learning, have clear learning goals, and are effective at promoting student enthusiasm and engagement (Engle & Conant, 2002). In comparison, teachers who generally have low expectations for all students more frequently provide activities that focus on discrete skills, and students make less progress than in high-expectation classrooms (Rubie-Davies, 2007). In terms of teacher questions, significantly more open-ended questions are found in classrooms in which the teacher has generally high expectations for her students, and in classrooms of low expectations, there are far fewer questions posed, whether open or closed (Rubie-Davies, 2007).

Conversation analysts examine the ways in which individuals tailor their speech according to the listening audience, an idea referred to as recipient design. Sacks et al. (1974) explain:

By ‘recipient design’ we refer to a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants. In our work we have found recipient design to operate with regard to word selection, topic selection, admissibly and ordering of sequences, options and obligations for starting and terminating conversations, etc. (p. 272)

Because we as humans generally do adjust our talk in order to accommodate the listener’s access to the discursive space, teachers are no different. The problem is when that tailoring of speech consistently yields questions that have been reduced to nonstrategic, low-level
questions, based on teachers’ reductive assumptions and expectations of students. A similar notion is applied when teachers adjust their talk with students based upon students’ prior statements. Goodwin and Heritage (1990) explain, “Hearers, faced with the task of coordinating their behavior with speakers’, are motivated to make inferences about future action and emerging meaning by analyzing the unfolding structure of the talk in progress” (p. 290). In this way, teachers might adapt their questions based first upon their conceptions of students’ understanding and second, their goals for future action in the lesson.

**Competence and perceptions of ability.** I fully appreciate situated notions of cognition and learning, if nothing else, for the opportunity they afford students to be competent. Ball (1991) evaluates discourse to “highlight the way knowledge is constructed and exchanged in the classroom” (p. 44). Because cognition is distributed, rather than a trait within an individual (Rogoff, 1998 in Sawyer, 2004, p. 14), learning should be situated within the spontaneous but structured interactions of the classroom. When learning is reduced to merely the production of the correct answer, ability is thus delimited, finite, and constrained, as opposed to emergent, improvisational, and transformational.

Learning can be measured through classroom discourse in both discrete and indiscrete ways. Some traditional, more indiscrete ways, allow for a spoken evaluation, such as in the Initiation Response Evaluation (IRE) form of discourse (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979). As previously discussed, O’Connor and Michaels (1993) note that revoicing can be used to check for an understanding of the student’s utterance, to elaborate upon students’ ideas, and it is also used to model more sophisticated forms of language. However, it can also be an indirect, discrete way in which teachers can indicate the correctness of a student’s utterance while avoiding the blatant ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ evaluation in the IRE sequence. In many cases, the discrete evaluation is only a substitute for the blatant, as the same meaning is likely
conveyed. Assessment of competence is first a matter of students’ abilities to display of what they know and second a matter of knowing how to display what they know (Mehan, 1979).

An understanding of discourse features can help researchers and practitioners index unspoken and underlying meaning in an interaction. Timing of talk (Erickson, 1996), the order in concerted action (McDermott, Gospodinoff, & Aron, 1978), and the participant structures in which dialogue takes place (Philips, 1972) are examples of features that can provide a framework for understanding meaning located within the dialectic individual and social (Gallimore, Goldenburg, & Weisner, 1993: Leont’ev, 1978 as cited in Roth & Lee, 2004).

**Conclusion: Gaps in the Literature**

Several key points are pertinent to an understanding of what is known from prior research. First, teachers tend to use differential discourse practices with students who have been identified as being low readers. Second, teacher questions tend to be pervasively nonstrategic, low level, and at the literal level of reading comprehension. Third, dialogic forms of talk, such as talk outlined in the Accountable Talk model, are related to higher levels of student achievement. Dialogic talk does not exclude low level questions, and it allows for heterogeneity of discursive approaches. Finally, students with disabilities have been shown to take on the role of the more knowledgeable other when given the opportunity, but with teacher training and intervention.

The developers of Accountable Talk call for a better understanding of the relationship between talk, activity, and the nature of knowledge (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007), as two utterances with the same form may function very differently in different contexts (Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008). Likewise, multiple forms can accomplish the same function. Because much in conversation is implicit, interlocutors have to read between the lines to interpret meaning (Grice, 1975) based on contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982), and these
cues play an especially significant role in learning through teacher-student interactions. Conversational cues can be so entrenched in classroom discourse that students attend to these cues in order to provide the “correct” response (Billig, Condor, Edward, Gane, Middleton, & Radley, 1988) rather than responding purely to the content of the question. These imbued meanings shape and are shaped by the situations, institutions, and social structures that contextualize the interaction, and power asymmetries can exacerbate the extent to which underlying meanings in play a role in the discussion (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Studies examining talk within an elementary classroom context have yet to apply notions of questions as assertions as conceptualized by Koshik (2005). These are important features of discourse needing attention, as they can contribute to an understanding of what the talk accomplishes in a teaching and learning context.

Because instructional interventions that focus on engaging students with LD in language-rich and socially mediated contexts are limited (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2011; Gersten et al., 2001), much is yet to be learned about how forms of talk that are designed for accountability actually function in practice, especially with respect to students with LD. There is a need for understanding how question forms and functions may or may not map on to authoritative and dialogic kinds of talk, given how they are situated within a broader system of activity, including the models of reading and models of student ability that are employed across various groups of students.

**Purpose**

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine 5th grade teachers’ questioning practices during small group reading instruction and whether they differ according to groups of students organized homogenously by reading level and if so, in what ways and to what extent. Further, the purpose is to understand how teacher assertions function within teacher and student interactions during small group reading instruction, as well as how teachers use
questions that elicit collaborative, evidence-driven, and cogent claims. Qualitative observations, video and audio transcripts, and teacher interviews were used to analyze questions directed toward both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. This study also examined quantitative differences in teachers’ questions between the student groups by comparing frequencies of question types and by conducting significance tests. Information from each kind of data will be compared to the others, and findings will be triangulated from all data sources.

**Research Questions**

1) How do classroom teachers’ questioning practices during reading comprehension instruction differ between “low” and “average” groups, especially with respect to Accountable Talk Questions (AT) and Assertive Questions (AQ) and with students with LD?

2) In what ways do classroom teacher questioning practices during small group reading comprehension include Accountable Talk questions and Assertive Questions?
Chapter 4: Methods

“Competence, then, is assembled by people in concert with each other. Therefore, we must look to social situations, socially assembled situations, not individual persons as the units of analysis appropriate for the interactional display of interactional competence.”

-Hugh Mehan (1979, p. 4)

The notion that competence is created socially and not solely a property of the individual drove my methodological approach. This study aimed to understand whether and how teachers’ questioning practices differed across homogenously grouped students by reading level, and I took special interest in the kinds of questions students with learning disabilities were afforded. I began my study examining questioning broadly, but with a special attention to the ways in which teachers incorporated Accountable Talk practices (Michaels, et al., 2010) into their questioning. I further began to hypothesize that assertive questions (Koshik, 2005) are situated within authoritative and dialogic interactive tensions. Teacher questioning, then, was the unit of analysis, and teacher and student talk was the unit of observation.

In my examination of the small groups as activity systems, I attempted to understand the relationships between questions as semiotic tools with other material and ideational tools as mediators (Vygotsky, 1978). Although I draw upon both qualitative and quantitative methodology, my primary approaches were qualitative. Specifically, discourse analysis (Cazden, 2001; Tracy, 2005) was necessary in order to understand the tensions and alignments within talk and ideational tools, or espoused ideals and institutionally specific situated ideals (Tracy, 2005). This also allowed me to understand how “people enact and enforce the contexts in which and by which they reflexively organize their next behavior” (McDermott & Raley, 2011, p. 374) by examining the contexts in which questions occurred and the contexts that questions created. Throughout the duration of my data collection and
analysis, I kept important the multilayered nature of classroom interaction, remembering that interaction itself is the context for learning (Erikson, 1996).

**Mixed Methods Design**

In order to converge and confirm my findings from different data sources, I used a mixed methods design that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods. Broadly, quantitative methodology afforded me an understanding of the frequency and density of teacher questioning practices, and qualitative approaches allowed me to characterize teacher and student talk moves in relationship to my research questions. Data sources include (a) 38 video- and audio- recorded lessons during small group reading instruction, (b) 3 audio-recorded semi-structured teacher interviews, (c) 2 audio-recorded video stimulated recalls and 1 written recall, (d) 46 field notes taken during observations of lessons, (e) lesson artifacts, and (f) student records. Qualitative approaches such as taking field notes, conducting interviews, and logging video data sources led me to burgeoning interests and hypotheses that informed my coding scheme, which led me to investigate the codes quantitatively. These quantitative frequencies informed my understanding of the differences in talk across setting, activity, and participants and in turn pointed me toward sections of data sources for in-depth qualitative investigation. This process, described further below, provided a rich, detailed picture of teacher questioning practices in small group reading instructional settings.

**Concurrent nested strategy.** In a concurrent nested strategy approach, qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously in a single phase, and one method is held as primary over the other. The less predominant approach is embedded, or nested, within the more predominant method (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative methods are held primary in this study, as I explored classroom discourse using discourse analysis and drew from ethnographic approaches. Quantitative methods played a small, but important role, and thus
were nested within the qualitative methods. Characterizing teachers’ question types through frequencies allowed me to look for any significant variation between questions directed at students with disabilities and students without. The quantitative analysis allowed me to account for the full scope of my data, but was insufficient on its own without considering larger contexts of talk. Quantitative frequencies helped to provide a basic understanding of the overall picture of questioning patterns. Without the frequencies of question types and more holistic questioning patterns, I was unable to make inferences about whether or not the differences are statistically significant. Employing a mixed methods approach was necessary for this study because in order to answer my questions, I need both. One approach would have been insufficient if done alone.

**Strategy of inquiry: Multiple case study design.** In case study research, cases are not to be analyzed in pure isolation, but understood as an element of a broader context in which the case is situated. A case study “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Contemporary teacher questions that occur in real time and in authentic classroom situations are highly situated within context, such as the episode of talk, the lesson, the activity system, the participants, and the text. A case can provide insight into a particular question or puzzlement (Stake, 1995), and in this study, my three cases provided insight into my research questions about their questioning practices. Case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases, and they do not need to rely on random selection. In fact, Yin (2009) suggests that one case is too few; two is better, and three even stronger, which supported my methodological choice to include three teachers in this study. Stake (1995) describes the case as something “specific, a complex, functioning thing...[It] is an integrated system” (p. 2).
When selecting cases, I considered how the cases might replicate each other, rather than sample a broader population, and relevance to the topic of study to promote a higher opportunity to learn was key (Stake, 2006). Cases in a multiple case study design need to be similar enough in ways that allow for the analysis of patterns, and unique enough to understand how individual cases, and in this study, teachers, act as agents in the context of their activity. In this way, generalization is made to theory, and not to populations (Yin, 2009). In this multiple case study design, each teacher’s questioning practices was my unit of analysis, which is examined within an embedded design (Yin, 2009). The figure below outlines my strategy of inquiry design. Teacher talk was my unit of observation, and teacher questions were my unit of analysis. It is important to note that utterances were not analyzed completely in isolation; they were examined in the context of discursive episodes, as well as broader activity, which will be discussed in depth in the analysis section below.

Because I examined questioning practices within each case, I employed a multiple case study with an embedded design (Yin, 2009). As shown in Figure 2, questions were my unit of analysis, which are embedded within my unit of observation, the teacher and student talk. Kristin and Heather share a similar context, in that they are both 5th grade teachers at Lucas Elementary. They worked collaboratively, making similar instructional decisions, and they were both influenced by similar initiatives, such as using more non-fiction text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pinewood Elementary</th>
<th>Lucas Elementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case - Sharon</td>
<td>Case - Kristin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit of Observation - Talk</td>
<td>Unit of Observation - Talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded Unit of Analysis - Questions</td>
<td>Embedded Unit of Analysis - Questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Basic designs for case studies (Adapted from Yin, 2009, p. 46)*
I looked for similarities, as well as differences among the three teachers’ questioning practices. I identified the following boundaries (Stake, 1995) when selecting my cases: teachers taught elementary students in one school district. They provided small group reading instruction to their students and included students with disabilities in these groups, and they incorporated Accountable Talk practices in their instruction. These boundaries helped me to maximize my research interests and allowed for replication (Stake, 1995). I selected these cases based on how they would predict both similar results and contrasting results for reasons I could anticipate (Yin, 2009), such as their similar grouping procedures of students according to reading level based on informal assessment scores.

**Participants and Setting**

I selected three teachers as participants for my study using a purposive sampling process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I first contacted principals of elementary schools whose special education population was $\geq 10\%$ and ELL population was $< 40\%$. I wanted to increase the possibility that students with learning disabilities would be in teachers’ classrooms, and I was interested mostly, in this particular study, about issues related to questioning practices with monolingual English speakers. I asked principals of such schools to recommend 4th or 5th grade teachers who (a) include students with learning disabilities in their small group instruction, (b) effectively guide group discussions of text so that all students come to talk to each other about the text, (c) effectively facilitate all students’ meaning-making processes during small group instruction, and (d) effectively facilitate all students’ critical and higher-order thinking skills. Of the teachers recommended, I selected three teachers who expressed a willingness to participate in the study and who demonstrated evidence of questioning moves that spanned literal and higher-order thought processes, specifically including Accountable Talk moves, during prescreening observations.
I recruited fourth and fifth grade teachers because based on my teaching experience, by this age, students are typically invited to explore complex topics within text through discussion. All three teachers taught fifth grade; Kristin Spencer and Heather Sanders taught at Lucas Elementary School, and Sharon Phillips taught at Pinewood Elementary School (these names of individuals and schools, as well as all other names of participants are pseudonyms). The teachers selected for this study were similar in that they all taught 5th grade, and they all organized their groups homogenously according to text level. They were unique in their types of activities employed that were brought to bear on the discussion, along with their experiences and histories with teaching. Table 5 provides demographics of the students at both schools.

Table 5

*School Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pinewood Elementary</th>
<th>Lucas Elementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>371</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Ethnicities</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELLs</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th graders</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient/Advanced on state test in reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the two schools are very comparable in the composition of their student body. Interestingly, at Pinewood Elementary, where Sharon taught, the percentage of 5th grade students who were proficient or advanced on the state test in reading was 15 points higher than at Lucas Elementary, where Kristin and Heather taught. These are the scores from the year of the study, or in other words, of the students I observed. Both Kristin Spencer
and Heather Sanders had taught fifth grade for two years before the year of my study. Ms. Sanders had previously taught at the high school level.

After selecting the teachers, I worked with them to decide which groups to observe. First, I asked how the groups were organized, and when I learned that each teacher organized her groups homogenously by text level, I explained that I wanted to observe one group that had students with learning disabilities. In all cases, these students were in the “low” group. In identifying a comparison group, I worked with the teachers to select a group reading text at grade level. If more than one average group existed, I chose randomly, or considered when my availability to observe corresponded with when the group consistently met. As described elsewhere, the terms “low” and “average” groups are mine and not the teachers’. I use these terms to denote how the students were organized into groups to allow for comparisons across teachers. I do not want to perpetuate static descriptions of the students as readers, nor do I want to suggest that the teachers intended to do so.

I chose to observe during small group reading instruction because in small groups, students typically have more opportunities to interact with the teacher and each other. Within instruction that is organized predominately whole group, it is common for students with learning disabilities to experience low rates of interaction with the teacher (McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993). Additionally, I wanted to compare teachers’ practices among different students, and thus small group instruction allowed for such a comparison. Further, whole class instruction geared toward average learners is not effective for students with learning disabilities (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; McIntosh et al., 1993).

**Measures and Procedures**

In validating a multiple case study design, multiple sources of evidence are considered, a chain of evidence is established, and key informants review the researcher’s analysis (Yin, 2009). Yin suggests using the following data sources in case study research:
documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. As previously stated, data sources include (a) 38 video- and audio-recorded lessons during small group reading instruction, (b) 3 audio-recorded semi-structured teacher interviews, (c) 2 audio-recorded video stimulated recalls and 1 written recall, (d) 46 field notes taken during observations of lessons, (e) lesson artifacts, and (f) student records. I collected approximately 20 hours of video- and audio-recorded lessons, which was my primary data source. The study was conducted over a four month period from November 2012 to February 2013 in the following stages:

1. Prescreening and selection of teachers
2. Observations and Interviews of Teacher 1, SP
3. Observations and Interviews of Teachers 2 and 3, HS and KS

Audio- and video-recordings. In order to adequately capture teachers’ questioning practices, I used audio and visual recordings as my primary data collection procedure. In each teacher’s class, the observations occurred over the course of a single unit of study, in consecutive lessons. While video data can be useful in conducting an iterative analysis of a point in time, it omits information (Jordan & Henderson, 1996), such as information written on documents and activities that will be occurring in the rest of the classroom space aside from the small group reading lessons. Therefore, I acted as an observer, taking field notes of my observations, especially attending to information from the activity that may not have been captured by the video recorder (e.g., student writing).

Observations. I supplemented the recordings with observations, interviews, and artifact collection. During the recordings, I acted primarily as an observer, and less as a participant. As an observer, I sat with the small group, but refrained from engaging in “teaching” interactions with the students, aside from one instance in which Kristin had to leave the classroom to handle a behavior issue in the office. Again, this allowed me to
observe actions that were not captured by the audio or visual recording device. I took ethnographic field notes, which included thick description (Geertz, 1973) of my observations, as well as my reactions and initial seeds of analysis. After each observation, I completed an observation protocol, which I adapted from Gutiérrez, Berlin, Crosland, and Razfar (1999) for this particular study in conjunction with my theoretical underpinnings of authoritative and dialogic discourse and remediation/re-mediation. The observation protocol served as a holistic understanding of the nature of the discourse in each of the three teachers’ groups. It corroborated evidence toward my findings, so as to achieve triangulation.

**Formal, semi-structured interviews.** In the middle of each teacher’s instructional cycle, I conducted formal semi-structured interviews with them that were audio-recorded. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into teachers’ questioning practices. The interview questions focused on the teacher’s perceptions of her questioning practices, her perceptions of students’ abilities, and her views on reading comprehension development. Sample questions include:

1) To what extent do you consider questions as informal assessments of your students’ reading?

2) How would you describe the questions you ask of your students?

3) What does reading comprehension mean to you?

4) Is your discussion/questions during this instructional cycle pretty typical compared to discussions about other texts?

5) Describe the blue group’s reading comprehension in general.

6) What expectations do you hold for the blue group in this instructional cycle?

A full protocol for my semi-structured interviews is in Appendix A. The purpose of interviewing teachers about their questioning practices was to triangulate my analysis and interpretation of the video and audio transcript data.
**Video stimulated recall.** Informal interviews were conducted as a part of a stimulated recall approach, similar to that used by Erickson (2004), Mehan (1993), and Pomerantz (2005). First, I asked each teacher to watch the video of one lesson. I instructed her to “stop the tape any time [she finds] anything interesting happening” (Mehan, 1993) and talk into an audio-recorder that I provided. I tailored my questions according to each lesson when instances in the lesson were interesting or seemingly relevant to my burgeoning analysis. One directed question that I asked each teacher was “What evidence do you see that the students are engaging with the text at higher levels?” I selected the lessons to be used in the video stimulated recall technique for multiple reasons. I attempted to choose lessons for each group that occurred relatively close together so that approximately the same amount of time would have passed in remembering the lesson. Additionally, I attempted to select lessons that were relatively recent, not allowing more than a two month time period passing between conducting the lesson and reflecting upon it. I also chose lessons based on whether or not the instructional activities were representative of the activities across lessons, and in some cases in which the lesson was atypical but interesting, I asked the teacher to watch just a clip from that lesson.

While there are many benefits to video stimulated recalls, Pomerantz (2005) offers several limitations to this approach. First, it is difficult for participants to truly verbalize the brief and fleeting thoughts that they had during the actual interaction that was recorded. Their explanations are after-the-fact, and they might not fully exemplify their intentions and thought processes that occurred in the moment. Pomerantz (2005) explains: “[T]here is good reason to conclude that the participants’ comments should not be read as representing or approximating the participants’ streams of thought during Event 1 [the recorded interaction]” (p. 100). Second, teachers will know the outcome of the interaction while watching the video and may shape what they talk about. Third, participants might focus on themselves while
watching the video, thus making them self-aware and lacking attention to other parts of the interaction. In presenting my findings, I keep these limitations in mind. The teachers’ insights from the recalls are used as contextual evidence toward my findings.

Pomerantz (2005) further offers three benefits of using the video stimulated recall approach. The first is that participants may point out relevant points in the interaction that go undetected by the researcher. Second, participants’ comments can provide confirmatory evidence of a certain orientation or thought that the research had developed on his or her own. Finally, participants might offer thoughts or reactions that they had withheld during the interaction, thus providing a more in-depth dimension to the analysis. Each of these three benefits proved to be helpful to my analysis.

**Collection of artifacts.** To provide a rich understanding of the context of teacher and student discourse during small group reading instruction, I collected copies of written work done by students during instruction, copies of text passages read, teachers’ lesson plans and any other written guides for the small group instruction, to the full extent I was able. These documents allowed me to better understand the teachers’ instructional goals and intentions during the interaction. I referred to the text that students read for multiple purposes. First, I read the text during the data collection process. When students were instructed to read chapters in novels before the lesson, I read the same chapters so as to better understand the discourse. I was able to borrow copies of the books from the teachers. Otherwise, when articles or other texts were used, I read the text afterward. Second, I examined the text iteratively throughout my analysis of the interaction. In some cases, I read the text to understand how questions might function, based on how the teacher and/or students were talking about it. Lastly, I was able to get a better sense for how the teachers privileged the text with respect to students’ comprehension of it. I gathered teacher manuals and guides in order to note when questions posed were based upon these documents. Written work
completed by the students during the lesson was also helpful in understanding the activity.

Finally, I examined IEP summary documents that Kristin and Heather were given regarding the students’ disability labels and achievement scores; I did not have access to such documents from Sharon. All of these documents gave me insight into the full nature of the activity, from the students’ perspective, as well as the teacher’s. I used each as contextual evidence toward my findings related to the discourse.

**Analysis and Interpretation: Mapping Multi-layered Activity and Concerted Shifts**

Driven by the relevant arguments from theories and other related literature, I approached my data analysis and interpretation so as to synchronically capture multiple layers of activity that are mutually constituting (Erickson, 2004), from minute details of talk to larger social forces of conceptualizing dis/ability and reading comprehension. Because my conceptual framework organizes talk as situated within multiple layers of activity, I am attempting to uncover the layers in my analysis through both qualitative and quantitative means. Bearing in mind that people contextualize their behavior through communication with each other in concerted action (McDermott, Gospodinoff, & Aron, 1978), I understood teacher questions to be reflexively organized as the teachers and students engaged in interaction.

My analysis procedures were far from a neatly divided or sequential set of activities. Rather, my analytical trajectory was recursive, full of insight but doubts, confidence but hesitation. In a sense, it was messy. The rough timeline of my data analysis is presented in Table 6.
Table 6

**Data Analysis Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Theorized through field notes</td>
<td>October 2012 – February 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Created content logs</td>
<td>November 2012 – June 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Landscape Analysis of selected lessons</td>
<td>May 2013 – September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Refinement of codebook</td>
<td>May 2013 – on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Created a hypothesis/theme log</td>
<td>June 2013 – on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Revisited conceptual framework</td>
<td>June 2013 – on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wrote analytical memo 1</td>
<td>June 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Coded teacher interviews and VSRs</td>
<td>June 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Wrote analytical memo 2</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Selected transcripts from content logs</td>
<td>July 2013 – on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Wrote analytical memo 3</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Wrote analytical memo 4</td>
<td>October 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Coded Content Logs while watching videos</td>
<td>October 2013 – November 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Frequency counts, percentages, significance tests</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Development of chapters</td>
<td>December 2013 – on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Qualitative Analysis**

In analyzing case studies, it is important to show that the analysis relies on all of the relevant evidence, addresses the most important aspect of the case study, uses the researcher’s prior and expert knowledge, and includes all major contradicting evidence to the researcher’s proposed analyses (Yin, 2009). The relevant evidence on which I relied came primarily from video and audio recordings, and my main analytical approach was discourse analysis, and I used primarily deductive coding, as will be described below. Ethnographic data sources served to corroborate and support my findings, and were instrumental in developing my hypotheses and arguments.

My seeds of analysis began to develop during the data collection process. As documented in field notes, content logs, and analytic memos, I began to develop a hunch that the nature of the teachers’ questioning practices was dependent upon the way in which the activity was organized, rather than purely by the level of the group. I bore this hunch in mind in my subsequent analytic techniques.
I reduced my data to a manageable form using content logs, landscapes, and analytic memos. By using content logs to document incremental activity within each lesson, I was able to gain a sense for the broad lay-of-the land of my observations. From the content logs, I documented instances that were particularly relevant, interesting, or troubling in order to analyze more deeply. Observer comments and reflections were not merely focused on teacher questioning practices, but they included my musings related to the discourse, as well as the activity. While cataloguing the activity through the content logs, I looked for shifts, similar to approaches that Erickson (2004) describes. I wanted to first identify big differences in activity in each lesson, moving from whole to part. In the context of studying discourse during a read aloud lesson, Erickson (2004) states:

> But it also seems to me that it usually works better to parse analytically from whole to part and then down again and again, successively identifying subsequent next levels and their constituents at that level of contrast than it does to start by trying to identify parts first and then work up analytically from there. I say this because I think that is what social actors do. In my interpretation, children are not appropriately characterized as aggregating sets of discrete “moves” in the scene of a read-aloud session. Rather, I see them as doing a read aloud session as a whole… (p. 491).

Similarly, I looked for shifts from whole to part. Rather than thinking of teacher questions as merely isolated moves during my initial phases of analysis to be characterized inductively, I set out to capture broader relationships of activity, in which the questions as discrete utterances were situated.

In order to document shifts in activity at various levels within a lesson, I conducted landscape analyses with ten lessons. I selected lessons for the landscape analyses because they presented points of interest and held potential in helping me hone my interests and developing hunches. A landscape analysis is a technique that identifies synchronic shifts in
activity at various levels. Logistically, for each landscape, I used a pen, paper, and a ruler, and drew 3 horizontal lines with tick marks that represented the minutes of the lesson. Each line represented a different level of activity. For example, the top line was typically a broad level, such as the topic of conversation or instructional activity used (e.g., introducing lesson objectives, previewing text, making predictions, reading aloud, writing, etc.) or the shifts in when the text was consulted by the participants. A middle layer typically included the extent to which teachers posed follow-up questions regarding a student’s response to the original responder or to the whole group, and a bottom layer typically included instances of Accountable Talk and Assertive Questions. It was at this phase of my analysis that I started seeing relationships in my data and decided to hone in on how teachers used Accountable Talk and Assertive Questions. I began to notice that Accountable Talk practices seemed to hold a greater density during times when the topic of conversation involved evaluation in some way. I started to see that at times, Accountable Talk Questions were closely clustered with Assertive Questions, and in some cases, questions could be categorized as both. A sample landscape analysis is in Appendix D.

My primary analytical function of these landscape analyses was to hypothesize, theorize, and try on new ideas in looking for relationships among levels of activity. The landscapes were a narrowing of my analytic lens to not only uncover the fine grained verbal and nonverbal accounts of the video segments, but also to begin to recognize major shifts in different levels of activity that acted in concert with the talk. It was through analyzing the landscapes that I was able to think about how Accountable Talk practices and Assertive Questioning practices were situated within other contexts, such as the topic of conversation or the shifts in instructional activities (e.g., introducing the lesson objectives, previewing text, reading text aloud, writing, etc.).
Conducting the landscape analyses provided me with a framework with which to code my data. I approached coding not as a way to inductively characterize teacher questions, but in line with Erickson’s (2004) approaches, I started from whole to part, and then once my analytical focus became refined, I decided to code the corpus of data based on my evolving research focus. I describe my coding procedures in more detail below.

**Primary qualitative data analysis procedure: Discourse analysis.** The tradition of discourse analysis places context as important for understanding how language is used and examines how specific practices are produced. Johnstone (2008) notes: “[T]he basic question a discourse analyst asks is “Why is this stretch of discourse the way it is? Why is it no other way? Why are these particular words in this particular order?”” (p. 9). Specifically, I drew from action implicative discourse analysis (AIDA; Tracy, 2005; Tracy & Craig, 2010) because it is an approach that draws from conversation analysis, anthropology, discursive psychology, and critical discourse analysis. Its features align with the research intentions in this study. AIDA strives to reconstruct practices within a system of interaction, considers judgments as culturally-influenced, recognizes positions of power in all interaction, and operates from an ethnographic perspective, in that the analyst needs a developed “understanding of both how participants talk with each other in the practice (the focal discourse) and how they talk about their practice (meta-discourse)” (Tracy & Craig, 2010, p. 149).

Following AIDA procedures, I located segments of a focal practice that presented moments of tension, the moments at which the teacher’s questions appeared to elicit forms of Accountable Talk® but were assertive in nature. I transcribed these relatively long segments of talk to be analyzed in order to carefully examine the teacher and student turns that characterized my developing findings. I transcribed approximately 40% of my recorded data. In most cases, I used action-implicative discourse analysis (AIDA) conventions (Tracy, 2005;
Tracy & Craig, 2010). In the transcript excerpts presented, an underline indicates emphasis, parentheses containing a period indicate a pause, and left brackets indicate overlapping talk. Some speech was relatively inaudible, so my best interpretation of what was said is inside a set of parentheses.

Transcripts were used in my analysis to locate, or to explore previously located, points of tension in the conversation. For the purposes of focusing on how competence is socially assembled, I focused on those segments of data that represent the ways in which the teacher asserts her own claims while simultaneously asking for a student’s. I additionally transcribed lessons that were used for the video stimulated recall, as well as other lessons of interest. Kristin conducted lessons using the same text and lesson goals with her average and low groups, as well as with three students from the low group who were not present for the lesson initially. These three students included one English language learner and two students with learning disabilities. These lessons allowed for interesting comparisons across the groups, as the primary difference was the students. I transcribed another lesson of interest, based on the interaction between the teacher and the student that exemplified a teacher practice imbued with a tension of asking for details after a student had provided a summary statement, when the lesson’s focus was on summarizing and capturing main ideas.

Importantly, situated ideals are of primary interest in an AIDA approach. They “capture the complex prioritizing of competing concerns and values that not only will, but also arguably should, be operative in actual practices” (Tracy & Craig, 2010). They can be understood through interviews or supplemented with documents or other contextual factors. Situated ideals reflect what is institutionally valued, which may or may not align with individuals’ espoused ideals. Of interest were the teachers’ espoused ideals that they held regarding their models of reading comprehension, models of student ability, and their implications for questioning practices.
In my analysis, I was careful to avoid common pitfalls of discourse analysis, and I frame this discussion based on Antaki, Billig, Edwards, and Potter’s (2002) outline of analytic shortcomings. These pitfalls include: merely summarizing, circular recognition of discourse and ideology, taking sides, misuse of quotations, over generalization, and simply naming features of discourse. I describe some of these below.

Although summaries can prepare the way for the analysis, they are not any kind of analysis on their own. Summaries of discourse lose the detail of the talk and add no new information. Therefore, although descriptions of the talk were necessary for explicating my analysis, I did not leave my analysis at merely a summary of the discourse, nor did I leave it at a characterization of the types of questions asked at the utterance level, nor was it only a description of patterns across episodes of talk. I discussed new insights about how and why teachers produce the questions they produce. Similarly, I made an effort not to think of analysis as a summarization of people’s beliefs or thought processes, even though I compare teachers’ discursive practices with their meta-discourse, as provided in interviews and video stimulated recalls. Discourse analysis has to be “much more than treating talk and text as the expression of views, thoughts and opinions, as standard survey, ethnographic and interview research often does” (Antaki et al., 2002, p. 16). With this in mind, I attempted to move beyond merely a description of what teachers and students were talking about or how the lessons unfolded or what the teachers’ stated views were per their interviews; instead, I attempted to capture the ways in which discourse functioned to convey certain kinds of meaning within the interactional space (e.g., positioning of ideas).

In order to adequately identify instances of Accountable Talk, I studied various sources. Studies involving Accountable Talk (Michaels et al., 2008; Michaels et al., 2010; Wolf et al., 2005) provided me with an understanding, and additionally, I subscribed to the Institute for Learning of Pittsburgh University’s online module of Accountable Talk. This
module consists of an e-book, containing the categories of Accountable Talk, understanding various effective teacher moves, along with video clips as examples, video excerpts of renowned scholars in the field, and case studies on which to practice. I exhausted the website in order to ensure that I had fully understood Accountable Talk, especially as I moved forward in my coding. I used sample questions provided by the developers of Accountable Talk as I created my codebook, which can be found in Appendix C and conceptualized the codes. Additionally, I drew from coding insights from Wolf and colleagues (2005).

Using insights about questioning from conversation analysis (Koshik, 2005), I defined assertive questions as those that do not ask for new information but instead convey a strong epistemic stance of the speaker. Koshik (2005) outlines the myriad of ways in which questions might function as assertions. For example, in the context of a speaker’s frustration, the utterance, “Who cares?” does not typically ask the listener to provide the speaker with a list of names. Instead, it works to convey the idea that the speaker, in essence, does not care about the topic of conversation at hand. In an instructional context, Koshik examined the interactions between tutors and undergraduate second language learners. She identified questions that reverse their polarity from affirmative to negative, asserting that a problem lay in the student’s statement or action (e.g., “Is that really the whole point?”). These questions are indexed in and orient to institutional goals. Her goal in describing these practices in discourse was not to evaluate the pedagogy of the interaction, but rather to describe an institutional practice. I, however, did examine the pedagogical nature of teachers’ questioning practices. I identified such questions that work assertively in my data in order to situate the questions within the broader context of the goals of the discussion, of the lesson, of the instructional cycle, vis-à-vis teachers’ stated models of reading comprehension and student ability.
In order to understand the frequencies of assertive questions across my data set, I deductively coded such questions. Based on my evolving conceptual framework and my developing hunches and theories, I identified assertive questioning patterns to be of importance to consider. Throughout my data collection and analysis, as documented in field notes, content logs, and memos, I began to take interest in how teachers used questions in order to tell, or assert information. It appeared as though with these questions, teachers were working to direct students’ thinking. Under the notion that competence and ability is socially assembled and orchestrated, this practice of teacher-guided thought through assertive questions came to be an essential avenue to explore. Because these questions are designed to mediate student learning and participation in a way that is largely teacher-guided, even teacher-imposed, it was important for me to understand how they index degrees of authoritative or dialogic talk.

Assertive questions became directly related to my research questions, and thus I elected to deductively code for these instances so as to quantify the densities of these practices across groups and teachers. After watching all of the lessons to complete content logs, then some other interesting lessons to capture the landscapes of within-lesson shifts, I re-watched each lesson again, coding for assertive questions and accountable talk questions. I only coded recorded lessons because my field notes were not adequate representations of the talk. At times, I needed to watch and re-watch the video, or reread the transcript to determine the code assignment. I identified the following categories of assertive questions: reverse polarity questions (RPQs), counterpoint justification, two alternatives, designedly incomplete utterances (DIUs), same polarity questions (SPQs), tag questions, and directives. Reverse polarity questions, two alternatives, and designedly incomplete utterances are all defined by Koshik (2002a; 2002b; 2005a; 2005b).
An RPQ reverses its polarity, either from affirmative to negative or vice versa, conveying an assertion that suggests what is problematic about a student’s response. RPQs prefer the opposite polarity of the form of the question. Koshik (2005) studied interactions between tutors of multilingual college students during writing conferences and found RPQs to be used in the context of error correction as a way to point toward an erroneous response made by the student. Here, preference does not mean correct or incorrect responses per se. Preference in the Conversation Analysis literature refers to the structure of the adjacency pair (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Schegloff, 1968), that allows the second part (e.g., the student’s answer) to align with what the first part (e.g., the teacher’s question) seeks to accomplish. An example of an RPQ from my data is as follows: In a lesson devoted to writing summaries, Heather had instructed the students to use big, or main, or general ideas in their summaries. After asking students what else should be included in a summary, Deidra responded with, “details.” Because Heather was trying to help students to move away from detail-specific summaries, Deidra’s response of “details” was problematic. Thus, Heather used a reverse polarity question to point toward this problem, saying, “Do we need to include a lot of details?”

T: okay. What else do we need to include in a summary, [Deidra. D: [details] T: Do we need to include [a lot of details? C: [No:::

Before Heather was even able to finish her question, Collin responded with a hearty and extended, “No.” Her question worked to signal the problematic nature of Deidra’s response, and it was understood as an error correction technique.

Koshik also describes questions used by the university tutors that offer two alternatives to the student. These questions did not merely serve to have students choose between two viable options; they worked to point toward a problem within the student’s work
or response and to suggest a solution in the context of error correction. The first of the two alternatives indicated the source of the problem, and the second provided a solution. I use an example from my data to describe questions that I called, two alternatives. In a separate lesson devoted to summarization, Kristin had just read a section of text to the group and asked the students to underline important information in the text. As students were underlining, she approached Dana individually.

T: So I have a question, Dana, what’s this entire article about in general?
D: lava, or volcanoes
T: okay, who is this article about?
D: oh, um, G Brad Lewis.
→T: G Brad Lewis. And so the focus of this article, is it more on volcanoes do you think or do you think it’s more on this photographer?
D: photographer

Similar to Koshik’s work, the teachers in this study used questions with two alternatives as a way to point toward errors, as well as offer a solution. When Kristin said, “And so the focus of this article, is it more on volcanoes do you think or do you think it’s more on this photographer” signaled to Dana that photographer was the correct response. Because Dana’s initial response of “lava, or volcanoes” after being asked about the main idea of the article was not initially accepted, but instead questioned, the two alternative question further worked to point Dana toward her erroneous response.

A third type of assertive question operationalized by Koshik (2002; 2005) is that of the designedly incomplete utterance (DIU). This type of discourse move is analogous to fill-in-the-blank exercises. The first speaker begins a statement, but does not finish it, and the second speaker understands it to mean that he or she should complete the statement. The tutors during the writing conferences used these to signal to students to self-correct an error, or to elicit a repetition or extension of a student’ prior response, or they were used to elicit a continuation. In this example from my data, Sharon designed her incomplete utterance as a
way to extend students’ thinking. This excerpt comes from the beginning of the lesson, when
the students and the teacher were reviewing the events from the chapter.

T: so what actually happened?
G: he just um wasn’t hungry and
→T: because he was?
G: s::: sick?
T: sick, yeah

Sharon’s DIU, “because he was?” ended with a raised intonation, thus asking Garrett to
extend his response.

Other types of assertive questions that I coded include: tag questions, directives,
counterpoint justification, and same polarity questions (SPQs). Tags primarily work to make
an assertion and then request confirmation from the listener (e.g., “We talked about that last
week, right?”). When teachers used directives, they instructed students to take some kind of
action in the form of a question (e.g., “Can you …” or “How could you summarize that?”). I
defined counterpoint justification questions as those that ask the student to justify a claim that
challenges the student. In these questions, the teacher counters a point that the student has
made, eliciting justification while also imposing a certain stance from the teacher (e.g., “But
why aren’t you on that side of the argument?”). These will be explored in the findings
chapters. Another category of assertive question that I inductively defined was that of the
same polarity question. These questions are similar to Koshik’s (2005) reverse polarity
questions. However, instead functioning as a move to reveal an error in the student’s
response, they pointed toward a solution or desired idea. Like RPQs, they functioned “as an
expression of the speaker’s epistemic stance…that the speaker knows the answer to the
question and knows it with certainty” (Koshik, 2005, p. 13). Same polarity questions have
preferred responses that are the same polarity of the question. They worked to point students’
attention toward an idea conceived by the teacher and made an assertion (e.g., “Is that a good
summary?” when the teacher is nodding her head yes). I explore SPQs in further detail in the findings chapters.

Understanding the densities and patterns of these types of assertive questions was important for understanding the variety of ways in which teachers used questions in order to assert meaning. Whether correcting errors or guiding students toward a particular response, these questions are situated within the authoritative-dialogic tension that imbues all discourse. Because analysis is insufficient if discourse, and in this case, questions, are decontextualized (Burman, 2003), I now move to a discussion of broader ethnographic qualitative procedures.

Secondary qualitative data analysis procedure: Ethnographic thematic analysis. A thematic analysis afforded me an iterative interaction of inductive and deductive approaches. Throughout the study, I read, re-read, and re-read again my transcripts and field notes. Analysis occurred throughout, and because of my emerging interests and insights into my analysis, my initial research questions changed over the course of the study. I became very interested in how teachers used not only Accountable Talk questions, but also how their questions worked to tell, direct, or provide cues to the students. I attribute this evolution in part to the fact that I read Koshik’s work throughout my data collection and analysis and also to the fact that there seemed to be interesting overlaps in how the questions functioned. Overall, my intent in my analysis was to reduce my data to a cohesive story and interpret it in such a way that tells the reader what my story means (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

In addition to my Accountable Talk and Assertive Question codes, I coded teacher interviews and video stimulated recalls (See Table 7). The purpose of this coding was to examine my data inductively and to organize it so that I could reference the teachers’ comments in order to provide context to the discourse. I developed broad codes of student behavior/learning, teacher behavior/learning/instruction, and the test. In the student
behavior/learning were two subcodes: positioning students positively and positioning students negatively. I tried to avoid treating these as crude contrasts; in many cases, one response from a teacher was coded as both. The subcodes for the teacher behavior/learning/instruction similarly could be applied to one section of discourse. Finally, the test was its own category, and it became an important theme to explore. Through this process, I was able to look for developing patterns and their contradictions, which allowed for ongoing theme development.

Table 7

**Inductive Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Codes</th>
<th>Student Behavior/Learning</th>
<th>Teacher Behavior/Learning/Instruction</th>
<th>The Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subcodes</td>
<td>Positioning students negatively</td>
<td>Orientation toward reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positioning students positively</td>
<td>Orientation toward learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments about discourse</td>
<td>Reflections for the future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the practice of questioning is extremely commonplace in everyday discourse and in classrooms, I have attempted to “attribute meanings and importance to patterns and regularities that people otherwise take for granted in everyday life—until a researcher points them out, highlights them, and gives them broader significance by associating them with other experiences, situations, and literature” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 214). In my findings, I hope to highlight the nuanced patterns within the mundane practice of questioning.

**Quantitative Procedures and Analysis**

Nested within my qualitative data sources are my quantitative data sources, which include: the observation protocol and video and audio transcripts, through which I created a coding scheme. My deductive codes of Accountable Talk questions and Assertive Questions
provided me a frame for understanding the extent to which teachers used these practices across the scope of the instructional cycle. By coding for such questions, I was able to identify the densities of practices and their shifts over time so as to address my research questions. To better understand the extent to which kinds of teacher questions differed by group, I used Microsoft Excel to conduct one-tailed t-tests of significance and Mann-Whitney U tests with the frequencies of codes.

As previously described, my primary purpose of coding was to obtain frequencies of questioning patterns. I first computed descriptive statistics of my various codes to include: frequencies, means, and standard deviations. I also calculated frequencies of the total number of teacher questions asked in each recorded lesson. After counting frequencies of Assertive Question codes, as well as Accountable Talk codes, I calculated percentages of each code out of the total questions in each lesson for the purposes of comparison across groups. Raw frequencies of certain question types would not suffice for comparison, as the frequency of questions asked in a lesson varied from lesson to lesson. I used line graphs to display the percentages of question types that make comparisons across each teacher’s two groups. The line graphs also show patterns and shifts over time, which provided me with sources for further analysis, especially when patterns were either notably similar or discrepant between groups.

I conducted significance tests for patterns that appeared to be especially discrepant across groups. This occurred with Heather’s Accountable Talk Questions and her Assertive Questions. It also occurred with Sharon’s Assertive Questions. To compare Heather’s use of question types across groups, I used a Mann-Whitney U test because the number of measurements, or lessons recorded and coded, was small. For Sharon’s Assertive Questions, I used a one-tailed t-test of significance. When conducting a significance test, it is first important to identify the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis claims that any observed
difference is due to chance. In terms of this study, the null hypothesis would claim that differences in teacher questioning patterns between her low and average group were merely due to chance. A second important step in determining significance is to develop a box model. Freedman, Pisani, and Purves (2007) claim, “Every legitimate test of significance involves a box model…A real difference is one that says something about the box, and isn’t just a fluke of sampling” (FPP, p. 478). A box model is a method for analyzing chance variability. The box represents the population from which the sample is taken. “Draws” taken from the box represent the sampling process. The sample should be representative of the accessible population and should allow for an estimation of the population with great accuracy. Recall that case study analysis does not employ a case sampling approach. I am not sampling cases; I am sampling questions that each teacher asks in her small group reading instruction. Instead of coding every question ever asked, I am taking a sample in the instructional cycle I observed.

Tests of significance apply to two independent samples. Two events are independent if the chances for the second given the first are the same, no matter how the first one turns out. Otherwise, the two are dependent. The Mann-Whitney U test compares the sum of rankings across groups, relative to the number of measurements taken, in the following equations

\[ U_1 = N_1N_2 + [N_1(N_1 + 1)/2] - R_1 \] and \[ U_2 = N_1N_2 + [N_2(N_2 + 1)/2] - R_2 \]

Where \( N_1 \) is the number of lessons for the low group, and \( N_2 \) is the number of lessons for the average group; \( R_1 \) is the sum of ranks for the low group, and \( R_2 \) is the sum of ranks for the average group.

In a \( t \) test of significance, \( t \) says how many standard errors away an observed value is from its expected value, where the expected value is calculated using the null hypothesis:

\[ t = \frac{\text{observed value} - \text{expected value}}{\text{standard error of observed}} \]
The p-value of a significance test is the chance of getting an observed value as big or bigger than the one computed for the expected value, given that the null hypothesis is true, and a small p-value (p < 0.05) indicates that the null hypothesis should be rejected.

**Role of the Researcher**

In this section, I provide information that outlines my position as a researcher in this study, along with my biases, expectations, intent of conduct during the data collection process, and my relevant history and background.

I took a predominantly etic perspective, as I was an outsider to the classroom and to the school. During observations, I acted as more of an observer and less as a participant. During small group reading instruction, I did not participate or intervene, aside from one occasion when Kristin had to leave the classroom to take care of matters in the school office. I sat with the students as they completed their work, but because the teacher was not present, this portion of the lesson was content logged, but not analyzed. I was primarily an observer, and I took the stance that I was someone who wanted to learn from these teachers, and that they had expertise to teach me. This stance was delicately balanced with my preconceived ideas about what I expected might happen and inequities I hoped to reveal, based upon the theories and literature that informed this study.

Reflecting upon my teacher education preparation and my teaching experiences, I realize just how pervasive the belief that knowledge resides within the teacher is. Locating knowledge within the teacher is extremely embedded culturally. This assumption is also evident by students’ actions regarding what is thought to be learning and where cognition is assumed to be. I remember watching students’ desperation for recognition when they “knew” the answer to a question posed by the teacher, especially students who didn’t frequently receive that kind of recognition. Some would raise their hands with pained looks on their faces, others would cause a commotion to get the teacher’s attention, and still others,
especially the students I worked with, would just merely walk up to the teacher and start giving the answer. Because of these observations, it is not difficult for me to conceive of “turn sharks” (Erickson, 1996) vying to display their competence, especially when the opportunity presents itself. Nor is it difficult to imagine “the whisperers” (Houssart, 2001) finding subtle ways to reveal their mathematical competence in a context that told them otherwise, even if the revelation was only for their own ears to hear. It seems as though regardless of our age or the situation, we all want to be perceived as competent in our day to day practices. Students are no different.

Despite assuming an etic perspective when conducting classroom observations, it is important to recognize that my insights are informed by my former status as a special education teacher. As a special education teacher, I had a collaborative relationship with general education teachers, but at times, it was a relationship with underlying tensions and contradictions. We were collaborative in that we spent hours after school, during plan time, and even during happy hour settings talking about students and their needs. Our conversation took a problem-solving tone, but it also was a way for us to share in each other’s struggles. But I was not always completely forthright with them about my frustrations with their perceptions of students. At times, I viewed them as referring students to special education because they saw students as abnormal or because special education was the help that ultimately benefitted them – they would then no longer be fully responsible for the child’s struggles. I even heard the teachers say in so many words, “I taught it; he didn’t get it; there must be something wrong with him.” One teacher said that she had to teach to the masses, and she couldn’t possibly teach to individual learners. It infuriated me when one high school science teacher told me that one of my students was “dumber than a box of rocks.” Much of the talk about students and their difficulties was centered on what was wrong with the child: the pregnant high school girl who was “loose,” the child with dirty fingernails who was
“neglected,” the student with a learning disability whose “brain synapses weren’t firing,” and so on.

Additionally, I became jaded to the systems that worked to sustain negative views of my students. I was extremely frustrated when I was not allowed to give an alternate reading test to a student who didn’t pass a level 6 on the DRA because he read “There it is” instead of “Here it is” on every page of the pattern book, which, by the numbers, put him at a Frustration Level, even though he was anything but frustrated after reading the book. He was so proud of himself upon finishing the book. And to me, he had very successfully read the book, especially because his word substitutions didn’t interrupt the meaning he derived from the story whatsoever. But alas, he remained in the lowest reading group in the class, much to my dismay, and most of all, to his. Formal and informal assessments were not accurate pictures of my students’ capabilities. In this sense, I am teachers’ and school systems’ biggest critic. On the other hand, I truly empathized with teachers when they voiced their frustrations to me. It is difficult when the overarching expectation is for every student to achieve in the proficient range on a state test. It is difficult when you are up against broader systemic issues. In this sense, I am teachers’ biggest supporter.

Verification Procedures

Researchers who use a case study approach are especially prone to bias because they have a good understanding of the issues at hand in the literature, and they can anticipate what to expect (Yin, 2009). However, one method to counteract this potential is to ask colleagues to offer alternate explanations, or playing “devil’s advocate.” Similarly, I established inter-rater reliability by asking one other coder to code approximately 10% of my recorded observations, selected at random. When discrepancies arose, a consensus was reached through discussion. Triangulation is also an important method of validating findings. By using a variety of data sources, I was able to situate the discourse within the activity context,
which allowed for multiple perspectives that contribute to a teacher’s questioning practices. I looked for confirming evidence, as well as disconfirming evidence of my hypothesis and my conclusions. Finally, embedded in my research design are methods for ensuring an accurate portrayal of the multiple cases. The video-stimulated recall sessions provided me with an opportunity for member-checking, or allowing the teacher to present her intentions and interpretation of the interactions.
Chapter 5

Situating the Question: How the Organization of the Activity System Shapes the Interaction

The primary research question I set out to answer in this chapter is *How do classroom teachers’ questioning practices during small group reading comprehension instruction differ between “low” and “average” groups, especially with respect to Accountable Talk questions and Assertive Questions and with students with learning disabilities?* I found that teacher questioning moves differ more by lesson activity than by student group or level and that the mediational tools of questions interact with other ideational tools, to account for differences in questioning practices; however, important differences occurred between low and average groups, which will be discussed in the following chapter. In describing the activity-level differences, I also characterize the ways in which Accountable Talk questions and Assertive Questions were used, especially with respect to shifts in the patterns I identified; thus, in this chapter, I also add to an understanding of my second research question, *In what ways do classroom teacher questioning practices during small group reading comprehension include Accountable Talk questions and Assertive Questions?*

In the midst of my data collection while observing teachers and their practice, I began to theorize that teacher talk might not differ according to the students in the groups, as I had originally thought, but instead based on the nature of the activity of the lesson. Teachers who facilitated very similar lessons across both the average and the low groups, differing only by the level of text used in the lesson, seemed to maintain similar questioning patterns. Likewise, when the nature of the lesson differed between the two groups, the talk seemed to differ as well. Studies have shown that teacher talk can be differential between teachers’ levels of groups (Applebee et al., 2003; Collins, 1996; Nystrand et al., 2001), but this analysis explores the importance of understanding talk by examining how the activity is organized.
Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT; Engeström, 1991) is useful for conceptualizing activity. Social life is organized by activities. It is how humans come to develop and understand themselves in relation to their social worlds. Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009) state that “Through activities we also transform our social conditions, resolve contradictions, generate new cultural artifacts, and create new forms of life and the self” (p. 1). Within Activity Theory, activities are understood as situated within a deep cultural and historical tradition, and are examined as points along a prolepsis trajectory of collective activities. The activities that I observed in each of the three classes are situated along trajectories of the cycles of observation, the course of instruction throughout the school year, each individual student’s schooling history, and each teacher’s histories both as a student herself and as a teacher. Individual actions cannot be understood without an examination of the activities in which they occur (Leont’ev in Lektorsky, 2009). Therefore, understanding teachers’ questions requires understanding the activities that shape them.

Activities are organized into activity systems, in which artifacts mediate subjects’ actions toward an object, or goal, one that leads to a particular outcome. The subjects are situated within communities, in which work, or labor, is divided among participants. The activity is organized by rules, whether spoken or unspoken (Engeström, 1991). The activity systems that I examine in this analysis are within each teacher’s two small groups. The degree of congruence across activity systems provides a systematic understanding of the kinds of talk that teachers use within each activity system.
Further analysis confirmed the initial hunches I generated while observing the lessons. As I initially conceived of the activity system, along with teacher questioning moves as mediators, the object of reading comprehension is mediated by a variety of tools, both material and ideational: the text, the goal of the lesson, and the teachers’ models of reading comprehension and student ability. Activity systems are anything but static, and their inner tensions and contradictions are what instigate change (Cole & Engeström, 1993).

Importantly, I explore the contradictions that exist within the activity systems in the final chapter so as to point to implications for future practice.

In this part of my analysis, I show how teacher questioning moves differ more by lesson activity than by student group or level. I argue here that mediational tools interact with each other, along with the rules, community, and division of labor within the activity system. Specifically, questioning moves as actions are shaped by other mediators that work toward students’ reading comprehension: the genre of the text, the teacher’s objectives for the lesson, and her models of reading comprehension and student ability. Two of the three teachers (Sharon and Kristin) conducted largely similar lessons with both their low and average
groups, and the third teacher (Heather) organized very different lessons with her low and average groups. Sharon and Kristin’s questioning practices are strikingly similar across both of their respective small groups, while Heather’s questioning practices show important differences. First, I provide profiles of each teacher, showing the relationship of teacher questioning practices within the activity systems of both the low and average groups, making within-teacher comparisons. I look especially at the ways in which ideational tools mediate their questioning practices. Then, I make comparisons across teachers, noting how patterns form based on teacher and activity alignments and contrasts.

Though teachers used different terminology, I use the terms low and average to describe the groups so as to make for ease of identification and comparisons across teachers. In doing so, my intent is not to perpetuate static categories of students as identity markers, but to highlight the ways in which the groups are organized, namely that they are grouped homogenously according to text level.

Sharon

Sharon’s groups were the first I observed among the three. Sharon is a White, veteran 5th grade teacher who gladly welcomed me into her classroom and “love[d] being observed” (SP Interview Transcript). She appreciated the opportunity to reflect upon her practices. On multiple occasions, Sharon spent part of her planning time visiting with me about various topics, from the students to school initiatives to best instructional practices. She appeared to genuinely enjoy teaching students reading and discussing stories with them, and she wanted her students to also enjoy reading (SP Interview Transcript).

During the time of the study, Sharon led six reading groups. Three were reading below grade level, one was at grade level, and two were above grade level. The above grade level groups generally ran themselves in literature circles, in which they each had roles to advance the discussion. For example, literature circle roles may include discussion director,
in which the student generates questions to pose to the group, or illuminator, in which the student shares passages of text that are especially interesting or puzzling, summarizer, or vocabulary wizard. I observed the high groups during the pre-screening phase, and in these groups, there was a lot of student talk. Students were overlapping each other, vying for their ideas to be in the discourse space. Sharon went back and forth between both groups as they met simultaneously. Sharon led guided reading instruction with her other groups, including the two groups I observed.

The students in the two groups that I observed for the study, one low and one average, were organized homogenously according to their level of text but heterogeneously in other ways. The groups were comprised of students of mixed gender and a diversity of ethnicities and races, but the majority of the students were White, reflecting the school-level percentages. The table below summarizes the demographics of the students in Sharon’s two groups.

Table 8

Demographics of Sharon’s Two Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low n (%)</th>
<th>Average n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>2 (67)</td>
<td>4 (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2 (67)</td>
<td>3 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
<td>1 (17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average group was twice the size of the low group, but the distribution of gender was identical (33% boys and 67% girls), and the majority of the students in both groups were White.

The low and average groups were similar in many ways, especially with respect to the mediational tools used by the teacher and the rules of the activity. Sharon’s object with both
groups was also very similar. Three students were in the low group, which Sharon called “The Mouse and the Motorcycle Group.” Two students, Megan and Garrett, had been diagnosed as having a learning disability, and the third student, Justina, was an English language learner. Justina received ESL instruction once weekly during the time of the small group lessons during this instructional cycle, and she was absent for two out of seven lessons that I observed. This affected her contributions to the discussion. In one lesson, after missing the lesson prior, Justina misunderstood the chapters that she should have read and therefore was unable to successfully answer questions because she did not read the correct chapters.

Rules/Lesson structure. During the instructional cycle I observed, Sharon led discussions with the small groups of students about the books they were reading. Her lessons with both groups maintained a relatively predictable pattern. First, Sharon would guide the students in a question-answer discussion, reviewing details from the plot from what they had read for homework prior to the lesson. Then, individuals would take turns reading the text aloud, the teacher included. During that time, Sharon would ask questions about the content of the text just read. This was usually the longest segment of each lesson. Sharon ended the lessons by asking students, “What do you want to know as you read on?” This was a way for students to anticipate future events and to think beyond literal details of the text, whether in the form of a prediction (e.g., “I think …”) or a question (e.g., Will…?”). Before the students left, she would assign chapters for them to read for the next lesson session. This structure was consistent between both groups, as well as across each of the lessons in the observation cycle. Her discourse structures with both groups, as noted by the observation protocol, were a mix between the pervasive IRE (Initiate-Respond-Evaluate) patterns and Instructional Conversations (Echevarria, 1995; Goldenberg, 1992), as described in the third chapter.

Objects. In the interview, Sharon described her goals for each group throughout the instructional cycle I observed. Groups were put together based on their DRA scores
(Developmental Reading Assessment), which is an informal assessment that measures students’ oral reading fluency by percentage of correctly read words, as well as their comprehension by a written summary and comprehension questions. The low group was reading approximately two years below grade level, right at the end of 3rd grade, according to Sharon. At the outset of the cycle, Sharon’s expectations for these students was to “talk fluently about the chapters” and to “look back in the story and prove some of the things they are saying [because] it’s a skill that they need later on for TCAP” (SP Interview Transcript). Her goals for the average group were similar, in that she wanted these students to use the text to prove their thoughts. For the average students, she also wanted to tie their reading instruction to their writing, specifically as a way to use the novel to provide examples of how to include details in their writing. However, they did very little writing during the guided reading instruction. This transfer was intended to occur during their writing instruction time. As a result of this object, the outcome was students’ discussions about the text’s plot.

**Mediational tools.** Multiple tools helped Sharon mediate progress toward both groups’ objects as stated by her, that of talking fluently about the text and using the text to support their claims. In order to contextualize Sharon’s semiotic tools of questioning, I examined material tools (i.e., the texts used in both groups) and ideational tools (i.e., Sharon’s meta-discourse, models of reading comprehension, and models of student abilities).

**Texts.** In the lesson that introduced the instructional cycle, Sharon led a whole group discussion with the class, introducing her new “genre,” animals. She asked various questions, addressing books that are realistic – fictional characters versus realistic fiction. She mentioned that their focus during this cycle is questioning, and she reviewed four types of questions: right there, think and search, author and you, on your own. She then gave the books to the students and met with the two groups. The low group was introduced to *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary, a book at an early 4th grade reading level, and
the average group was given *Gentle Ben* by Walter Morey, a book at an early 5th grade level. Both books have fictional animals as leading characters, which are both befriended by young boys. The focus of each plot is on the relationship between the animal and the boy. Early in the lesson cycle, one student with LD, Megan, reveals that in 3rd grade, her teacher had read the book, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, to the class.

**Semiotic tools: Sharon’s meta-discourse.** When reflecting upon her discourse during the semi-structured interview, Sharon spoke about her questions as being a way to check students’ understanding and whether they have read “carefully enough.” Sharon shared that her goal during the discussion is to get students to talk. She views questions as a way toward that goal, and she tries to ask questions at various levels:

I hope that I’m not just asking the questions that we call right there questions where they can just point to things in the book, and I’m hoping that I’m stretching their thinking to dig deeper into the meaning of the story and what’s going on in the story. Um, I’m hoping that I’m asking discussion type questions to get them talking and not just one-word answer, there’s only one answer to the question kind of questions…so the more I can get them to talk, the better I feel about how they’re interpreting the book and what’s going on in the group. (SP Interview Transcript)

Sharon also desired to create an even division of talk among the group members, as she noted in her Video Stimulated Response reflecting upon both groups. While watching the recorded lesson of the low group, which consisted of the two students with LD, she said, “Now I’m noticing that one student is talking over more, but as I, I’m trying to engage the other person and maybe I needed to stop one talking more than the other one.” Regarding the students in the average group, she noted that two of the girls were talking more than the other students, and the two boys in the group, Gilberto and Brandon, were disengaged. Sharon added that she “needed to, you know, do a better job of giving them the opportunity to talk.”
From the observation protocol, I had also noted that the distribution of talk in Sharon’s groups, especially her average group, was not consistently evenly distributed across students in the group.

**Model of reading comprehension.** During the semi-structured interview, Sharon talked about hoping that her students enjoyed reading and thus tried to choose a variety of books to “just give them as much contact with different types of books as I possibly can.” She reflected upon notions of reading comprehension as students being able to “form pictures in their head, almost run like a movie throughout.” She also described wanting to connect reading instruction and the act of reading to other disciplines, such as writing and even interpersonal relationships.

Sharon talked about a desire to connect reading to students’ lives. She stated: “I read a lot of books about bullying and um, a lot of books about kids from different backgrounds from them, a lot of diversity books, and have them looking at you know, here’s my life, here’s this kid’s life, you know, how are we the same, how are we different, you know, if this person was in the room with me, how would we get along” (SP Interview Transcript). She went on to add that the demographics of the school have changed over recent years, mentioning the ESL program that had been in place for six or seven years and the intensive behavior program that had been added to the school. In years past when the social dynamics of the class proved challenging due to conflicts between particular students during those years, Sharon used “a lot of different types of literature to help them cope and deal with each other.”

**Multiple meanings.** Sharon mentioned that background knowledge plays an important role when students are making sense of text. She disagreed with the notion that one correct interpretation of a text exists, and expressed value in diverse perspectives:
S: and when you have a group of kids who are so different, each one brings something else to the table, and you know, a lot of them will bring up something and the other kids will have kind of an ‘aha’ moment, ‘oh, I didn’t look at it that way.’
A: yeah
S: or I didn’t – I didn’t see it in that way.
A: right
S: and so it’s nice for them to hear other people’s point of views and see how they interpret that
A: uh huh
S: do they talk to the person who said it in a disagreement kind of a situation or
A: yeah
S: or-or are they enlightened by this new information and it kind of changes the way that they’re thinking
A: right
S: but yeah, there’s definitely many interpretations to the same book, or the same passage that people are reading. (SP Interview Transcript)

Sharon also mentioned the importance of background knowledge for comprehending text when she was reflecting upon the average group’s video recorded lesson. In that lesson, students were reviewing a part in the story in which the main character, a young boy, learned of his father’s danger at sea in Alaska from a CB radio. This part of the story was an important event, at the apex of the story’s climax. Sharon theorized that because the students did not have enough background knowledge about CB radios and communication systems in the book’s setting, their comprehension of the events during that part of the story was impeded.

**Model of student ability.** Before this book cycle, the low group had trouble reading each night, and Sharon mentioned that because of this, discussions in class were not cohesive. But during the period of my observations, Sharon was pleased at how the students were reading at night and bringing their books to class. Sharon attributed this change to the student-led parent teacher conferences that had recently been held and the messages she gave to parents: “[T]he students did a lot of talking about them and what their goals were, and they were pretty – I was pretty blunt to parents about how far behind their kids were and how
much on top of what they’re already doing they need to do at home to catch up…so I think that helped a little bit.” When asked whether this group could run itself like the high groups, Sharon responded, “I could see myself teaching some of the lit circle jobs to them, but I think I would still have to be a huge part of the Mouse and Motorcycle group at all times” (SP Interview Transcript).

Sharon described Megan as an auditory learner with a good vocabulary who comprehends well when she can listen to a story being read aloud, but has difficulty with comprehension when she has to read it on her own. Sharon had Megan’s older brother as a student, which seemed to be an important connection for Megan. She would often refer to her brother when making connections to the text – something the book’s character did or said reminded her of her brother, and these connections seemed to be a way that Megan could leverage her success as a participant in the activity. Sharon mentioned that Megan did “not have a lot of support at home” (SP Interview Transcript), but home was what provided relevance to Megan’s understandings of the text and to her contributions in the discussion.

Because Megan had already heard a reading of the book from her 3rd grade teacher approximately two years prior, she repeatedly was faced with the tricky task of making predictions based on what she had just read, all the while knowing what was to come.

Sharon’s consistent use of the review-anticipate-read-anticipate structure in her lessons meant that Megan was often asked to anticipate events while pretending that she didn’t know what she wasn’t “supposed” to know under the presumption that she had never read the book before.

1 T: alright. So what do you wanna find out what ha – what do you
2 wanna find out? As we read on
3 M: u:m. Does Ralph have a sister that is going to lose – I mean a
4 brother that is going to try and ride the motorcycle and then
5 ( )
6 T: So usually when we predict we predict off of what we read so
7 far. Where is that prediction coming from.
8 M: A silly prediction
9 T: uh okay, let’s get, let’s get more into what we’ve read so far
M: okay
T: and we’re asking questions now, we’re not predicting. What do you wanna know as you read on?
M: I wanna know if Keith’s dad returns with the aspirin jar?
T: (.) Again, you’re – [you’re pulling things out of the air
M: [That’s that’s. No, that’s in
T: His dad’s not. We haven’t even talked about dad yet, so you’re stepping ahead of us. What do you wanna know, G?

Megan’s knowledge of the book, under the activity’s rules and structure, became a liability rather than a strength, both in the discursive space, as well as in Sharon’s conceptualizations of her abilities. In one conversation after the day’s observations, Sharon initiated the topic of Megan having already heard the book before. She mentioned that she was trying not to ask her to make as many predictions so she wouldn’t give the book away (FN_SP_112912). From Sharon’s perspective, Megan shouldn’t verbally anticipate events in the story because she might reveal events to the others in the group, rather than because it might be a source of confusion for Megan, or more, because making predictions would be a false or inauthentic exercise for her. Memory is often a source of difficulty for students with learning disabilities (Swanson, 1994), and the task of pretending to predict while not giving the book away would be a challenge for even those who have minimal to no memory processing difficulties. Counter to what she was told, Megan was not “pulling things out of the air” (line 14) when she was attempting to anticipate a future event, but was remembering events in the story that were forthcoming, which was actually a great source of strength. She was situating the event within the trajectory of the plot, showing an understanding of how early events would lead to later events. But according to Sharon, Megan’s prior knowledge of the book was derived from the air, or in other words, from an unspecified, insignificant source.

When speaking about Garrett, Sharon mentioned that he had difficulties attending to comprehension while reading, likely due to his struggles with reading aloud fluently. This became evident in one lesson after the interview when he was reading text aloud to the group.
G: Um. Indeed. There were strong cause for grasping the handle of a motorcycle. Oh Betty do you suppose we could take him back to Wichita with us asked Mary Lou? My thirdy grade would

T: My thirdy grade?

G: My thirdy grade would love him. So //w- 

T: //Wait, wait, wait. What’s a thirdy grade? My thirdy grade?

G: ((laughs))

T: Are you sure that says thirdy?

Even after Sharon’s question signaling an error in Gavin’s response “My thirdy grade?” (line 5), Gavin continued to read the same miscue again. Sharon interrupted him again, asking, “What’s a thirdy grade?” and later “Are you sure that says thirdy?” (lines 7-8 and 10) so as to indicate to Gavin that he had made a mistake. Metacognition is a common struggle for students with learning disabilities in reading comprehension (Gersten et al., 2001).

Sharon’s model of student ability with the average group reveals some important differences from her conceptualizations of the students in the low group. As a whole, Sharon described the average group as more independent than the low group, however, not completely independent. Toward the beginning of the instructional cycle, Sharon asked the students in both groups to write down their thoughts as they read on sticky notes as a way to remember the events in the chapter or to document questions. Toward the end of the cycle, some students in the average group continued this practice, even when it was not required of them. In a conversation after one lesson, Sharon talked about how she needs to meet with this group every day because otherwise they forget what they read. She described the group as students with a mix of needs; some have strengths in comprehension and others have strengths with fluency. According to Sharon, this mix of strengths worked toward the students’ favor because they could teach each other, and they “enjoyed each other’s banter and work well together” (SP Interview Transcript).
Figures 3 and 4 show the similarities between Sharon’s low and average groups’ respective activity systems; the differences are highlighted in red print.

**Figure 3. Activity System for Sharon’s Low Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Sharon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Talk fluently about text, use text to support claims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Talk about Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Div. of Labor</td>
<td>T guides discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Low group: 3 students, 2 with LD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>IRE and ICs; Review-Anticipate-Read-Anticipate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Tools</td>
<td>4th grade level narrative, <em>The Mouse and the Motorcycle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semiotic Tools</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideational Tools</td>
<td>Model of Rdg Comp: movie in mind, diverse interpretations and role of background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of Student Ability</td>
<td>Low group is completely dependent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4. Activity System for Sharon’s Average Group

**Patterns in Sharon’s questioning.** In light of the similarities between Sharon’s two activity systems, an examination of Sharon’s use of Accountable Talk and Assertive Questions over time reveals the relationships of the talk to mediators, the lesson goals, and the activity. Figure 5 shows how Sharon’s percentage of Accountable Talk per lesson follows a nearly identical pathway for both groups across time. Each of Sharon’s small group sessions with both groups were held on the same day. This similar pattern suggests that Sharon asked similar rates of questions that held students accountable to the learning community, to accurate knowledge, and to rigorous thinking. On one day (Session 5), two out of the three students in the low group were absent, so Sharon elected not to hold a group lesson with the one person who was present. The figure below represents the trajectory of percentages of questions that reflected Accountable Talk in both groups across the entire
instructional cycle. The x-axis shows the number of lessons in the cycle, while the y-axis represents the percentage of Accountable Talk questions out of the total number of questions. The blue line represents the low group, and the red line represents the average group.

Figure 5. Accountable Talk Questions: Sharon

This pattern might be understood in multiple ways. First, because lessons were held on the same day, Sharon was likely in the same mindset with both groups, asking similar types of questions of both groups. Second, the primary difference in lessons between groups was the level of text, and Sharon’s lesson goals and model of activity were held constant. Because of this, the degree of Accountable Talk followed suit.

Lesson 2 has the highest point of Accountable Talk in both groups. In the low group’s lesson, Sharon asked questions that subsequently led to Sharon using Accountable Talk questioning moves as a way to ask students to expand upon their ideas and claims. For example, after asking students whether they felt they were closer to the main character named Ralph or Ralph’s mother, students responded and then were asked expansion questions (e.g. “Why?”) that required a justification of their claims.

T: okay. How are Ralph and his mom different from each other?
M: Um, Ralph likes adventure, and his mom…
Garrett interrupts: (worries)
T: anything else?
[The teacher and students continue to discuss various differences between the character Ralph and his mother.]
T nods. So if you had to make a connection, would you say you’re closer to Ralph, or are you closer to mom?
M and G: Ralph (Megan points intentionally and forcefully in the air)
→T: Ralph? Why would you say you’re closer to Ralph?
M: I don’t think about what I’m going to do…
T: so you just react without thinking about it first?
M: yeah
T: what about you Garrett?
G: mm.
T: who would you connect to more, mom or Ralph?
G: Ralph…because I don’t worry all the time or anything but um (shrugs shoulders) and says something more. (SP Video Content Log 11-8-12)

Sharon asked for justification of Megan’s view by saying “Why would you say you’re closer to Ralph?” but did not need to do so with Garrett, as he offered his justification without prompting. These types of questions that elicited reader connections and hypothesizing were also prevalent during the average group’s lesson number 2. One such question was, “If you were Mark, would you have done the same thing?” Similar to the low group, students gave responses and Sharon asked for justification, thus yielding a high percentage of Accountable Talk questions, relative to the percentages of the other lessons.
Also, students were seen self-selecting and even talking to each other.

T: why does Mark feel he has the right to set Ben free?
Marley responds and Brandon jumps in.
T addresses G: repeats question
G answers
T: If you were Mark, would you have done the same thing?
M: Yes
→T: even if the bear didn’t belong to you?
Others jump in
T: so I have some nos and I have one yes. What about you?
Macy: I don’t know.
T: Pick a side.
M: It would take me a long time to think about it.
B: I’d keep him.
T: if you had to make the decision right now…would you let the bear go or not?
Macy smiles: yes
G: I’m a yes
Brandon: I would keep him
T: you would keep Ben?
B: because …
→Marley: Why would you keep him?
B: I wouldn’t wanna let him go because what if they go find him…Benson, they’ll probably go
→T: but if you kept him, do you think they would find him?
B: mm
T: do you think it’s easy to find a bear?
B: it’s called the zoo.
→T asks G: Why would you let him go?
G: I would let him go because he’s a wild animal.
T revoices.
G: he doesn’t belong in a house
Marley: he deserved to be free. (OC: Ss self-select. What allows this to happen?) Macy echoes. (SP Video Content Log 11-8-12)

In both cases, the students had come to initiate their own justifications for their claims, and in the average group, Marley even held her peer accountable to rigorous thinking in asking, “Why would you keep him?” Students were engaging with the text in ways that allowed them to imagine how they might identify with the characters. Also, in both excerpts, Sharon drew from a list of questions in a teacher’s guide when posing the question that initiated the excerpt. As evidenced by these guides, which I obtained, the questions of “How are Ralph and his mom different from each other” and “Why does Mark feel he has the right to set Ben free” were pre-written. And in both cases, Sharon followed up by asking students to connect to the characters in the respective books.

These types of questions that require a reader’s connection to the text that situates the reader vis-à-vis the characters, their personalities and decisions, were essentially nonexistent in the lessons that constitute the lowest percentages of Accountable Talk in both groups (Lessons 4 through 7). In these lessons, Sharon’s questions were largely focused on reviewing the details of the plot. Sharon reflected upon the lessons that occurred on 11-29, which was lesson 7. Her perceptions of her questioning reflect the relatively lower points of Accountable Talk in Figure 5. At this point in both groups’ books, the plot had reached a climax, with crucial events taking place that Sharon wanted to ensure the students
understood. She mentioned that her primary goal in this lesson for both groups was “to make sure they understood important sections of the story as we’re getting closer to the end of the book” (SP VSR Transcript, p. 2). Sharon also reflected upon her questioning practices in relation to students’ comprehension, noting that she responds to students’ misunderstandings with more literal comprehension questions: “It seems at times I’m asking more Right There questions and kind of probing their thinking instead of stretching their thinking, but you know, then I get into having them feeling like the character…however, I think I do rely a little bit more on the Right There questions when I see that they’re struggling to understand parts of the story” (SP VSR Transcript).

In Lesson 7, both groups did not remember specific details of the text, details that Sharon held as crucial for understanding the overall plotline. In reflecting upon both lessons, Sharon noted these difficulties and her ensuing questioning patterns, more literal questions, or as she called them “right there questions.” More right there questions led to less Accountable Talk questions, as noted in Figure 5, and it also coincided with a higher percentage of Assertive Questions (AQs), as shown below in Figure 6. In this lesson, most of Sharon’s AQs were coded as questions with tags in both groups (7 out of 20 for the low group and 10 out of 17 for the average group). Tags are generally used when the teacher is conveying information to the students, but in the form of a question that checks for confirmation (e.g., “He also is a little nervous too, isn’t he?” or “So that’s what they’re talking about, switching it, okay?”). Because Sharon felt that the students were not recalling important information from the text, she used questions with tags in order to tell the students the information she thought was crucial for an understanding of the text.
Figure 6. Assertive Questions: Sharon

Generally, Sharon posed a higher percentage of Assertive Questions with the low group than with the average group (19% and 11%, respectively). The trend of asking a higher rate of Assertive Questions of the low group might be explained by the discrepancies within the functional activity systems, namely the ideational tools Sharon used to conceptualize her students’ abilities. Aside from the difference of the group members, the differences in activity systems were the text level and Sharon’s model of student ability for each group.

Consider lesson 1, in which the highest discrepancy of the rate of Assertive Questions occurs. Students in the low group were asked 9 Assertive Questions out of 40, while students in the average group were asked 6 AQs out of 99. Many more questions were asked of the average group, likely due to the fact that Sharon met with the average group for a longer period of time (26 minutes vs. 19 minutes), thus spending more time reviewing the content of the book. As I read both books at the same pace as the students, I noted that the content of Gentle Ben was much denser than the content of The Mouse and the Motorcycle. This is likely part of the reason that more time was spent discussing the content of the text. Most of the questions not categorized as Assertive Questions or Accountable Talk in the average
group’s lesson were questions that asked for information from the text (e.g., “Macy, what did you find out about Mark?” or “Are they in the city or in the outskirts?”). Assertive questions were used to direct and clarify content when Sharon perceived the students’ comprehension to be inadequate, and were often used to correct students’ errors.

In sum, the activity systems of the low and average group had important similarities. The same genre of text, model of reading comprehension, lesson structure, and similar instructional cycle goals were implemented with both groups. Because the activity was organized in such a way, the resulting talk was strikingly similar in the two groups, especially the Accountable Talk questioning patterns. The text used by the average group yielded a higher rate of questions that were devoted to reviewing the details of the plot. When the students had difficulty recalling events from the story, Sharon asked more literal, detail-focused questions. Accountable Talk questions followed higher-level questions, allowing students to explicate their thinking. The primary differences between the two activity systems were the level of text and Sharon’s model of student ability, that the students in the low group could not understand the text independently. This model worked in tandem with a higher Assertive Questioning rate with the low group, and both were used as mediators toward comprehension of the text.

Kristin

At the time of the study, Kristin was a White, third year 5th grade teacher who taught at Lucas Elementary School. This school had very similar demographics to the school at which Sharon taught, even though they were located in separate towns, roughly eight miles apart, shown in Table 9 below.

Kristin led five small groups for reading instruction and met with each group once a week. She referred to them by color: red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. The red and orange groups were her high groups and were using fiction texts; the yellow and green were her
average groups, and the blue group was her low group. I observed the green and blue groups, which were both using expository texts. At the beginning of my study, Kristin told me that she uses flexible groupings and tried to mix up the groups relatively frequently. The groupings did not change during my observational cycle. Like Sharon, Kristin organized the activity in both of her groups in very similar ways, with the level of the text being a primary difference.

Table 9

Demographics of Kristin’s Two Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n (%) )</td>
<td>( n (%) )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
<td>3 (43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>4 (67)</td>
<td>4 (57)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5 (83)</td>
<td>7 (100)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>1 (17)</td>
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**Objects.** Kristin’s lessons were focused on understanding various text structures of expository texts: compare and contrast, question and answer, using descriptive words, and cause and effect. In her instruction, Kristin referred to these structures as strategies that can be used to help achieve their goal of reading comprehension. Toward the end of the cycle of observation, Kristin decided to change course somewhat and work on summarization because the students’ DRA results indicated that students in both groups needed to work on writing summaries. Across the cycle of observation, the objectives for both groups mirrored each other, even though the lessons were not on the same day.

During the semi-structured interview, Kristin talked about how fluency was a primary goal for students in the low group and that they “actually have pretty good comprehension.” But because many of them received fluency instruction (e.g., Reader’s Theater) from another teacher, she wanted to build upon their comprehension during her small group instruction.
Kristin also mentioned writing as a struggle for students in the low group, thus a goal of hers was “to get them to write more.” She expressed that her goals for the low group were to “become more aware as readers” with nonfiction text because “that’s…the direction our curriculum is going” (KS Interview Transcript). Kristin intended for students’ awareness of text structures to transfer to their writing, similar to Sharon’s goals with her average group. She implemented techniques to help the students not “to be overwhelmed when they see a large body of text” by segmenting texts into sections according to headings and by learning how to underline important details. Like Sharon, Kristin wanted the students to be able to support their claims with specific information from the text.

Kristin expressed that her goals for the average group were very similar to her goals for her low group, the difference being that she used a grade level text for the students in the average group, versus a text below grade level for the students in the low group. She also indicated that she differentiated her expectations, wanting the average group to transfer their skills to a higher degree than the low group (e.g., writing a paragraph with a cause-effect relationship). Kristin wanted this group to use the text to “find answers to questions” and to use the focal text features in their writing.

Toward the end of the instructional cycle, Kristin decided to slightly change course with both of her groups and work on summarization. The state test was coming up, and Kristin was hoping to provide the students with practice synthesizing information and identifying the main ideas. Out of the six lessons I observed in each group, the last two were devoted to summarization. After the first lesson, Kristin expressed to me that teaching summaries was difficult and that she was trying to make the distinction between a summary and a retell, with a summary being synthesized to a greater degree than a retell. In the following chapters, I explore the tensions that existed as a result of the difficulties with teaching summarization.
Rules/Lesson structure. During the instructional cycle I observed, Kristin used a similar lesson structure with both groups. She began the cycle with relatively long small group lessons with both groups. The first few lessons of the cycle were an hour or longer. In these lessons, Kristin began by introducing the lesson objectives and eliciting students’ background knowledge of key vocabulary. She then guided the students in previewing the text, reading headings, looking at pictures and captions, making predictions, etc. Then, she moved into a segment of reading the text aloud, whether read by the students or herself and finished with an independent work session, during which the students would apply the comprehension strategies learned. Her shorter lessons typically did not involve as long of a preview or as much independent work.

Students in both groups were required to make bids when they wanted to talk. Kristin frequently reminded students to raise their hands when they had something to say. She maintained fairly strict control over students’ contributions and even regulated when students could not raise their hands. At times, students were told, whether verbally or nonverbally, to put their hands down in order to ensure that they were listening to whoever had the floor at the time. In one lesson, Kristin gave her rationale for why students should “practice good listening skills.”

T: good, excellent. You need to practice good listening skills when someone else is sharing out I know you might be excited about what you wanna share, but we also need to practice good listening, okay? So how do we show someone that we’re listening to them. How do we show [someone that
B: [and looking at ‘em
T: ‘kay remember we never raise our hand when someone else is speaking ‘cause then that just distracts that person and it shows that you’re more concerned about what you wanna say than what they’re saying
B: and other people
T: and then you might end up repeating what that person said ['kay so we need to
B: [no I mean um and distracting other people
T: yep
B: not just ()
T: alright um, Tanya can you tell me what Keagan talked about?
In this excerpt, Kristin explicitly explained the rules and behaviors necessary for participation to the students in the low group. Students should not raise their hands while someone else is talking because they should not distract the person, because they should not be more concerned about what they themselves want to say, and because they may otherwise repeat what has already been said.

These norms have hints of Accountability to the Learning Community; however, they function primarily as rules to be followed rather than norms that work to build collective knowledge and ideas. Michaels and colleagues (2010) describe Accountability to the Learning Community as students who are “not just obediently keeping quiet until it is their turn to take the floor, but attending carefully so that they can use and build upon one another’s contributions” (p. 2). Although Kristin’s reasons for encouraging students to listen to each other allow for students to understand the merits of affording others space to talk, they reflect the notion of discussion as a set of individual and discrete contributions that are made. This suggests that the primary goal of conversation is for individuals to successfully hold the floor. Although Accountability to the Learning Community involves respective and attentive listening with minimal interruptions, it also requires that students do so in order to create a collective line of thinking.

**Mediational tools.** Kristin used a variety of tools to work toward the object of comprehending nonfiction text. Her questioning practices were semiotic tools that she used to move students toward comprehension, but they were in turn shaped by other tools, such as the nonfiction texts themselves and what student abilities and needs she privileged during the instructional cycle.

**Texts.** Kristin used expository texts published by Lakeshore. The texts were laminated and were creased in the middle, creating a folder with sections of text on each of the four sides. They were part of a boxed kit, and Kristin had one kit at the 3rd/4th grade level and
another with texts at the 5th/6th grade level. The texts were written to target various components of text structure (e.g., cause and effect, question and answer). A teachers’ manual was included with the kit, and in it were graphic organizers that coincided with the various texts. Kristin consistently used the graphic organizers with her low group, but not as often with her average group. She thought that the graphic organizers were beneficial for the students in the low group because they offered “a non-intimidating way to just to start to get them to get their ideas down on paper” (KS Interview Transcript), as they needed support in writing. She chose nonfiction as a genre because this cycle was just before the state tests and because of the prevalence of nonfiction texts used in items on the TCAP. Kristin mentioned that she wanted to eventually lead narrative book groups with her low and average groups. “I feel like you can have so much richer discussion sometimes with those rich pieces of literature where you can really make interpretations and inferences and things like that, so I feel like I’ve been doing more of that with my higher level groups…” (KS Interview Transcript). For Kristin, fiction texts were tools that could leverage different kinds of engagement with text than nonfiction texts could do, tools afforded with her higher level groups.

*Model of reading comprehension.* The notion of fiction texts allowing for higher levels of talk and engagement with text came through in Kristin’s model of reading comprehension. During the semi-structured interview, she described reading comprehension as “not just being able to like go back and summarize what happened, but it’s being able to read between the lines and really understand what the author is trying to tell you.” She went on to describe reading comprehension as understanding how characters are feeling and not just being able to “spit back facts.” She embraced a dichotomous literal vs. higher-order / simple vs. complex notion of reading comprehension that involves both processes, but as separate and not interrelated.
Multiple meanings. In regard to whether multiple correct interpretations to the text might be made, Kristin felt that as long as students could support their ideas with information from the text, multiple meanings might be interpreted as correct. However, literal questions have either correct or incorrect answers. To Kristin, the text is privileged as the source for correctness in the process of reading comprehension.

Model of student ability. When asked about her expectations for the students in the low group, Kristin first noted their strengths in talking about their needs. She described them as being “very verbal” in my interview with her, but then noted that they struggled with writing their ideas down. Thus, her instructional goals were to have them write more as a connection to their reading. Kristin framed their writing needs in a way that positioned the problem as located primarily within the students and built on the premise of low test scores: “[They] comprehend really well too, but um, if you look at their DRAs, they didn’t get high scores because they don’t take the time – they don’t want to take the time to write things down, so um, I’m trying, I’m going to try to get them to be writing more about what they’re reading” (KS Interview Transcript). She pointed to what she felt was a lack of tenacity within the students because they do not want to take time to write. Despite Kristin’s anecdotal evidence that these students “comprehend really well,” the ultimate measure of their capabilities as readers was in a multidimensional assessment that ties the constructs of reading and writing together, thus penalizing students whose preferences and strengths were to verbally talk about the text. Thus, the desired outcome became improved scores on the DRA.

In Kristin’s low group were two students who had been diagnosed with LD, Samantha, who was also diagnosed with an Emotional Disability, and Audrey. One other student had just been taken off of her IEP before the start of my study. In other words, this third student was determined as ineligible for special education services. Samantha’s
disability label in reading was focused in the areas of basic reading skills and reading comprehension. She had scored proficient in the subcategories of literature and thinking skills on the state test the year prior, with an overall reading score of partially proficient. When talking specifically about Samantha’s needs and ability, Kristin described “scaffolded sentences,” which involved Kristin starting the sentence on paper and Samantha finishing it or filling in the blanks. Kristin implemented this “because she’s just really slow.” She went on to say that, “she’s really improved on her neatness this year which is good.” Audrey’s diagnosis of learning disability was focused only in the area of basic reading skills. She, too, had scored partially proficient on the state test the year prior in reading and was proficient in the subcategories of thinking skills and fiction and poetry.

After talking about her conceptualizations of her low group’s needs and thus her goals for them, I asked the same questions of Kristin about her average group. She responded by saying, “It’s kind of all of the same things but on a little bit deeper level, so with a more difficult text – a grade level text” (KS Interview Transcript). She described these students as less verbal than the students in her low group, but students who require differentiation in order to “deepen [their] instruction” and less scaffolding.

**Meta-discourse.** Kristin talked about her questioning practices as playing an important role in her instruction: “I’m really, really big on asking questions…I don’t like to talk at – teach a lot; I like to ask questions.” In saying, “I don’t like to talk at – teach a lot,” Kristin suggested that questions provide a way for her to engage in a dialogue with students rather than a monologue, or talking at the students, which she interestingly equated with teaching. For the low group, questions could be used in such a way to “scaffold” students’ understandings, and for the average group, these supports weren’t as necessary: “I don’t think I ask as many probing questions with [the average group]. I try to let them come up with them more on their own…I try not to scaffold things for them quite as much. I let them kind
of arrive at the answer on their own” (KS Interview Transcript). In Kristin’s view, a correct answer is a place at which students arrive, a fixed destination point. She also talked about the benefits of hearing a question or an idea rephrased from another student to help with the comprehension of an idea. When asked how Kristin uses questions as a way to informally assess students’ reading, she responded by talking about how her questions are a way to “see if kids are listening…and trying, attempting to understand” or to check “whether kids are kind of on task and doing what they’re supposed to.” Kristin characterized her approaches to questioning as trying to start with higher level questions, regardless of the group, and then if necessary, move down from the Bloom’s Taxonomy pyramid to scaffold. She also tried to use cross disciplinary connections to support students’ application of reading comprehension strategies. For example, she tied cause-effect text structures to the cause and effect relationships the students had been learning about during science instruction.

Kristin further reflected upon her discourse by talking about ways in which she encourages students to listen to each other. She described her scaffolding practices as related to questioning, “if a kid’s not understanding it, I like to have them rephrase what another child said to see if – even if they didn’t know it right off the bat, could they repeat what someone else said; were they listening” (KS Interview Transcript). Kristin considers the students in the group as a resource for each other. By asking students who are having difficulty making sense of the discussion at hand to rephrase another student’s idea, Kristin makes efforts to encourage notions of distributed cognition (Rogoff, 2003) within her groups. However, the goal of a collective understanding is paired with a tandem, and even overarching, goal of ensuring that individual students are held accountable to the behavior of listening. Kristin went on to say:

So, if they’re not understanding it from me, maybe they’re understanding it from a peer a little bit better, and then they can kind of just rephrase or repeat what a peer
said, so that’s another way I informally check to see if kids are listening, if they’re paying attention, even if I know they may not be understanding the content fully...were they listening and trying, attempting to understand. (KS Interview Transcript)

Kristin described her practices of holding students accountable to the learning community as a way to scaffold the discourse for students who might need additional supports. But her questions also functioned to hold the students accountable for their own attention and efforts to make sense of the conversation, much in the way of managing the students’ behavior and the way in which they participated.

Figures 7 and 8 show the similarities between Kristin’s low and average groups’ respective activity systems, and again, the differences are highlighted in red print. The components of the activity systems reflect Kristin’s perspective.

**Figure 7. Activity System for Kristin’s Low Group**
Figure 8. Activity System for Kristin’s Average Group

Patterns in Kristin’s questioning. Like Sharon, Kristin organized her instructional activity with both groups in very similar ways. She used the same genre of text, lesson objectives, instructional activities, and discourse structures in her low and average groups. And like Sharon, the primary differences between the two groups were the level of text and Kristin’s conceptualizations of the students’ abilities and needs. Again, the nearly identically-organized activities resulted in strikingly similar patterns of talk. This time, it was Kristin’s Assertive Questioning patterns that followed the same pathway over time, rather than her Accountable Talk questions (See Figure 9).
This pattern is especially significant, as Kristin’s lessons were not held on the same
day, like Sharon’s were. The corresponding lessons between both groups were held six days
apart. The lesson with the highest amount of Assertive Questions was lesson 5, which was a
lesson in which Kristin used the very same text with both groups with the same goal of
summarization. For this lesson, the only notable difference was the students themselves. The
goal of summarization yielded a relatively high rate of Assertive Questions in both groups.

A closer examination of the types of Assertive Questions used in Kristin’s lesson 5
reveals that in the average group’s lesson, 19 out of 34 Assertive Questions were tags (56%).
In the low group’s lesson, there was a high percentage of both tags (31%) and directives
(39%) in her Assertive Questions. In this lesson, Kristin generally used the tag, “okay” or
“’kay” after telling students about some sort of action that was going to happen in the future
(e.g., “I’m gonna model for you with this first section how I would do that, okay?” and
“What you guys are going to do is try to pull out those main points from each section as
we’re reading, okay?”). She used the tag “right” or “alright” after providing information
about the content of the text or when confirming a student’s response. In the context of this lesson, her statements were with respect to the main ideas of the passage (e.g., “So it’s really hot, right?” and “But they also pro-prevent or provide some more dangers for him, right?”). This was the case across both groups.

Kristin used a much higher rate of directives with the low group than with the average group (39% of Assertive Questions versus 3%). Questions as directives are similar to questions with tags that inform students of an expected forthcoming action, but instead of being a statement followed by a tag, directives are usually grammatically formed as a question, beginning with a verb (e.g., “Can you give specific examples of protection that he uses?” and “Is there a way you could reword that into your own words?”). Some of Kristin’s questions asked for information while functioning as a directive to perform an action (e.g., “How could you summarize that?”) or as tools to redirect students’ attention to the task (e.g., “So Bart, have you read that section yet?”).

After lesson 5, Kristin talked to me about how she felt that teaching summaries was difficult, and I concurred, offering reasons for why the task of summarization is complex. My field notes describe this interaction regarding teaching summarization as such:

She [Kristin] lamented about how hard it is, and I told her that I could empathize. I probably said a little more than I should have about my thoughts on it. I talked about how a good summary depends on the context and goal. KS said, ‘Yeah, a DRA will be different than if you’re just telling someone about it.’ I added that even that might depend upon the person you’re talking to and how much they know about the topic, etc. I also added that summarizing spans the Bloom’s Taxonomy of skills. DRA requires more detail than something more general, or a really good summary, in her words. She stated, ‘Students might write a really good summary but do bad on the DRA because it asks for more detail.’ (KS 2-21 Notes and OP)
This difficulty with teaching summarization is reflected in the lesson, based on the extent to which Kristin offered suggested summary statements in the form of a tag question or a question as a directive.

The high rate of questions with tags in this summary lesson points to the nature of the activity requiring that Kristin assert her perspective as to what information should be made known in the official discursive space. Questions with tags that function to direct students toward a certain action or task also reveal the task or skill orientated nature of Kristin’s approach to teaching students to summarize. This is corroborated by the prevalence of directives in the low group’s lesson. The fact that Kristin used a higher rate of questions as directives with her low group points to the ways in which Kristin used questions to “scaffold” these students’ completion of the task. To Kristin, scaffolding was necessary for the low students to arrive at an answer, and in this case, it was used to dictate what subtasks were necessary in the act of summarizing and in what ways the subtasks should be carried out. Her model of the low group students’ ability, that they require her scaffolded supports, interacted with the types of assertive questions she posed, questions that were directed the students toward a task, skill, or idea.

Interestingly, lesson 5, the summary lesson described above, also yielded the highest relative rate of Accountable Talk questions used by Kristin as well. The task of summarizing allowed for students to make claims about what they felt was important information from the text. These claims then could be followed up by questions from the teacher asking for students to justify those claims (e.g., “So why did you pull that out as a main point?”) or to encourage accountability to the community of ideas (e.g., “Avery, did you want to add anything?”) or to account for accurate knowledge (e.g., “Did it say that in the text though?”).
Across the cycle of observation four of the six lessons had nearly identical percentages. Lessons 1 and 3 have the widest discrepancies, with a higher percentage of AT questions in the low group in the first lesson and a lower percentage (0) in the third lesson.

![chart](chart.png)

**Figure 10. Accountable Talk Questions: Kristin**

A closer examination of lesson 1 reveals that a higher rate of Accountable Talk with the low group reflects the *kind* of Accountable Talk often used with the students in the low group. Some questions asked for students’ justification of ideas (e.g., “What do you mean by house frame”) or encouraged their use of the text to support their ideas (e.g., “What made you say ‘build stuff’?). Other questions reflected the practices that Kristin described in the interview, practices of asking questions to encourage students to listen to others’ ideas as a way to scaffold students’ comprehension and participation in the discourse. In addition to being used as a kind of accountability to the learning community, these moves were also used as a behavior management device, as evidenced in the excerpts below that come from my video content logs. Kristin had been away from the group just before this exchange as they worked independently. A few of the students were talking about their responses on a Venn Diagram worksheet, on which they were comparing and contrasting types of pyramids, as
described in their reading. The text was written specifically to point out the processes of comparing and contrasting.

→T listens. Then asks: Samantha, did you catch what they were talking about. Samantha shakes head no. (OC: She had been working on her own.)
T: Audrey was –
Samantha: I already…
(T points to her paper): This is something they have in common, and this is for something unique. (Samantha erases and looks at her reading.) (KS Video Content Log_12-7-12)

Kristin used the question, “Samantha, did you catch what they were talking about” not only as a way to encourage attention to ideas presented by the learning community, but also as a way to correct her errors. The fact that Samantha erased her work after Kristin pointed to her paper to comment on it signals that she needed to change her response.

Another example from the same lesson uses forms of accountability to the learning community as Kristin asks, “Who can help her with what the question was?” However, a closer look at the interaction contextualizes this question to reveal that Kristin attempts to do more than hold the students accountable to community’s line of discourse. Kristin had read the first section of the text, which was written specifically for the purpose of comparing and contrasting. This particular section is geared toward differences among various homes across the world and uses signal words and phrases such as “however” and “in contrast” every second sentence in the seven sentence paragraph, which comes after a two sentence introduction. This episode began with Kristin telling the students to underline similarities and differences as they read. After she began reading the section aloud, she stopped to tell Bart to be selective about underlining because underlining everything will not help identify important information. After reading, Kristin asked the group, “What are some similarities?”

The following conversation ensued, as documented by my content log.

T: what are some similarities?
B: they all built their homes to match what they’re going to do and how they’re going to live
Before this excerpt, students were first told to underline similarities and differences. Then they were told to consider important information. After hearing the section read, Kristin asked about similarities. The introductory paragraph described in general the considerations that people must make when building homes (i.e., weather, materials, and use). Bart responded with a statement that succinctly reflected these commonalities. Again, Kristin asked for other similarities, and Samantha offered a list of words that she deemed as “really important.” Immediately, Kristin asked whether Samantha heard her question, to which Samantha nods affirmatively but cannot restate it. She then reminded her that, “We” want to listen to the question and asked for someone to “help” Samantha with the question. After Audrey, the other student with LD in the group, correctly repeats the teacher’s question, Samantha is seen doing what appears to be marking on her arm.

These questions, which are designed to reflect accountability to the learning community, contribute to the higher rate of Accountable Talk in lesson 1 because in some ways, they encourage attention to inter-community dialogue. However, as will be explored further in the next chapter, they do more than merely holding students accountable to the learning community. They function as ways to alert students to errors or to manage behavior.
or to position students as certain kinds of learners. Questions that required students to respond to the meta-discourse, making the discursive features explicit, were mostly used with Samantha, one of her students with LD in the low group. These types of questions were virtually nonexistent in the average group’s lesson, aside from one attempt to manage the students’ behavior (i.e., “Avery, can you tell me what Elise just said?” used when Avery was whispering with Neal while Elise was providing a response).

Again, the activity systems of Kristin’s low and average groups held many similarities, which related to patterns of questions that held strikingly similar pathways across the lessons over time. Kristin’s rate of asking Assertive Questions was very similar in both groups, even though her lessons were not on the same day. The peak in Assertive Questions that occurred during both groups’ lesson 5 suggests that the shift in the lesson goals, as well as the text, the discursive activity, and the tools that were available led to a shift, even if a slight one, in her questioning. The two lessons that had discrepancies in their rates of Accountable Talk questions reveal the differences related to Kristin’s model of the students’ abilities and the ways in which to address students’ needs.

**Heather**

Heather, a White woman, was in her third year of teaching 5th grade at Lucas Elementary School, the same school where Kristin taught. She had previously taught at the secondary level before taking a leave from the teaching profession. The students in Heather’s groups were nearly homogenous in a variety of ways. As shown in Table 10, the low group had a higher rate of boys, and the average group was 80% girls. Not surprisingly, both groups were mostly White.

They were also homogenous in that Heather organized her reading groups by student needs based on the DRA. The average group read a novel throughout the instructional cycle I observed, and the low group was instructed in summary writing using a variety of texts
because of their responses on the DRA. Midway through the instructional cycle, Heather decided that the students in the average group also needed to work on summary writing, and so she focused some of her instruction with the average group on summaries. These were the recorded lessons number 1 and 3 of the average group.

Table 10

_Demographics of Heather’s Two Groups_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low n (%)</th>
<th>Average n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>4 (67)</td>
<td>1 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
<td>4 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5 (83)</td>
<td>4 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>1 (17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The activity systems of the two groups differed widely. Heather’s model of student ability and goals for the students were generally different. In addition, the texts used were different, as were the lesson objectives. On multiple occasions, Heather seemed to be concerned with what I wanted to see in my observations. She was careful to ensure that her groups were arranged according to whether the students were on an IEP and if their parents had provided consent to be included in the study, even though I had not asked her to do so. She also frequently expressed that she would like my feedback and my suggestions regarding her teaching, to which I typically responded that I would do so at the end of the study. During the semi-structured interview and the video stimulated recall with Heather, she frequently responded to questions in a reflective way, saying what she wished she would have done or would do differently next time.

It seemed as though Heather’s practices in this instructional cycle were arranged for my benefit. In one email, she stated, “I’ll continue to work to see if I can plan my schedule around your needs” (email, 11-4-12). In the semi-structured interview conducted midway
through the observational cycle, Heather indicated that she wanted to work on summaries for me and hadn’t thought through her instructional plan saying, “So if I were to redo it, I would really have a, I would have a plan for the whole, the whole unit, and I didn’t. I was just planning week by week.” An email correspondence with Heather from the day before my first observation in her classroom shows that her plan ahead of time was broad: “Tomorrow, I'm going to have the group summarize a couple chapters from our read aloud. This will be a small pre-assessment to see how well they can summarize two short chapters. Later I'll move into longer short stories and picture books. In the end, I will have them summarize a short story as their post-assessment.” Heather adapted this plan as the instructional cycle went on according to what she perceived the students’ needs to be and according to a general push toward nonfiction “because that’s what I’ve been told I should focus on” (HS Interview Transcript).

Outside factors seemed to inhibit the consistency and frequency of which I was able to observe. Students did not return parent permission forms within the timeframe that Heather and I would have liked, and thus, I was unable to record the first few lessons of Heather’s low group. Additionally, I was beginning to observe in her class during the time of fall and winter breaks, and teacher in-service days, 5th grade outdoor education, assemblies, and the like, interrupted a consistent schedule of observation. On the whole, my experiences observing Heather were disjointed.
**Figure 11.** Activity System for Heather’s Low Group

**Text:** a variety of narrative and expository texts  
**Semiotic Tools:** Questioning  
**Ideational Tools:** 
Model of Rdg Comp: varies depending upon the lesson focus; sum of its parts  
Model of Student Ability: students are dependent; developmentally/cognitively unable  

**Subject:** Heather  
**Object:** summarize text  
**Outcome:** written summaries  

**Rules:** IRE  
**Community:** Low group: 5 students  
**Div. of Labor:** T guides discussion

---

**Figure 12.** Activity System for Heather’s Average Group

**Text:** a science fiction novel  
**Semiotic Tools:** Questioning  
**Ideational Tools:** 
Model of Rdg Comp: varies depending upon the lesson focus; sum of its parts  
Model of Student Ability: students are independent; higher ability level  

**Subject:** Heather  
**Object:** use reading comprehension strategies; use text to support claims  
**Outcome:** Talk about text  

**Rules:** IRE and IC  
**Community:** Avg group: 6 students  
**Div. of Labor:** T guides discussion; students use roles
**Objects.** Heather’s instructional goals for the low group were to work on summarization and to help the students find the main idea of a passage. This goal was based on the students’ writing performance on their DRA tests, whether students “couldn’t write much at all” or “just gave some facts” or would “retell the whole story.” Heather expressed to me on several occasions that she was struggling to teach the students not to be “caught up in the details” (HS Interview Transcript). Her intent was to move the students toward independence over the course of the cycle, but felt that she encouraged independent work too soon. On multiple occasions, Heather expressed her frustration with the students’ lack of progress toward the object of learning how to summarize. She further corroborated the idea that her direct guidance was necessary for the students to reach the object by saying, “I felt like, like I have to do a whole summary every time, or they’re not going to get it” (HS Interview Transcript).

Over the course of the instructional cycle, Heather wanted the average group to incorporate reading comprehension strategies, such as making predictions, asking questions, and drawing inferences when holding literature circle discussions about their novel. She wanted the students to think beyond “surface level” understandings of what was happening in the plot, but also what the characters are thinking and how they might change over time. Like Sharon and Kristin, Heather wanted her students to use the text to support their claims. However, this was more of an explicit goal for the students in the average group than for students in the low group. In the recorded lessons 1 and 3, she decided to also focus on summarization with these students. Heather’s object for the average group differed widely from her object for the students in the low group, summarization.

**Rules/Lesson structure.** In both the low and average groups, Heather’s lesson structures did not maintain a consistent discursive pattern during lessons across the observational cycle like Sharon’s and Kristin’s did. In both groups, she held various
discourse structures depending upon the lesson. For example, some lessons were short reviews, while other lessons were extensive discussions. Some lessons included time in which the students worked on a written task related to the reading, while other lessons didn’t. This was true for both groups. Heather generally guided the discussion in both groups by using the IRE pattern of talk. Engaging in the discussion usually required Heather’s nomination, but the talk format of the average group’s lessons generally afforded the students the opportunity to initiate their responses. In other ways, Heather worked to maintain control of “the floor,” particularly while instructing the students in the low group. In some cases, students who had just provided a response had to re-bid for the floor (i.e., raise their hand) in order to answer a follow-up question directly related to the response just given.

**Mediation tools.** As Heather described her instructional approach to teaching students how to summarize, she lamented at how certain methods were not as supportive to the students as she originally expected. Graphic organizers, modeling, or summarizing “together,” the genre of text, and length of text were all tools Heather was hoping to use across the instructional cycle, increasing the degree of complexity as the cycle progressed. Heather used an approach to teaching summary of merely telling students to get the main idea. She relied on notions of modeling to show the students how to summarize and asked them to do the same.

**Texts.** Heather used a variety of texts with her low group to teach summary. She used chapters of the read aloud book she was reading to the students at the time, as well as a short narrative picture book that the students had heard previously, *Meteor*, by Patricia Polacco, and nonfiction articles from a children’s news magazine, *Time for Kids*. Heather used the book chapter, as well as the picture book, because the students had heard or read the texts before and were thus familiar with the plotline. When asked what role the text plays in the students’ summarization efforts, Heather did not reflect upon how text structures, genres, or
content may contribute to the extent to which students are able to extrapolate the main idea of a passage. Instead, she responded that she probably should have used texts that related more to what students were learning in other areas, such as science, because “maybe they just don’t have the background knowledge.” In this statement, Heather acknowledged the benefits of a connected and thematic instructional approach toward comprehension, but in doing so, claimed that the students were lacking in the kind of background knowledge necessary to comprehend the texts that she had chosen for them.

Heather asked her average group to read the novel, *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau. This is a 5th grade level science fiction book about a young girl and boy’s adventures in an underground city. Heather had read the book in previous years, but on a couple of occasions, during the interview and while working with the students, mentioned that she hadn’t “read the book in a long time” (HS Interview Transcript). This impacted her capabilities of determining whether students comprehended the text. In some cases, time during the lesson was devoted to figuring out whether information was found in chapter \( x \) or \( y \).

**Model of reading comprehension.** Heather viewed reading comprehension as something that changes depending on the purpose of the instructional activity. If her goals for the students were focused on vocabulary, then she was not as concerned about how well they might be able to summarize. Thus, reading comprehension “can look different depending on the lesson” (HS Interview Transcript). Instead of providing a definition or conceptualization of reading comprehension, Heather described how certain facets of reading comprehension might be privileged over others according to the lesson goals. She took an approach to understanding reading comprehension as a sum of its parts.

**Multiple meanings.** Like Sharon and Kristin, Heather disagreed with the idea that one correct interpretation of a text exists. However, she felt that multiple perspectives
complicated the learning for students. “That’s what makes it tricky though is because it’s way easier for kids if you can give them a black and white um answer” (HS Interview Transcript). She went on to say that in 5th grade, students are expected to being able to understand that text may be interpreted in a variety of ways, and as long as they are able to support their interpretations with evidence from the text, then they can hold a differing interpretation.

**Model of student ability.** Heather described the students in the low group as reading aloud at grade level but struggling with comprehension in some way. Heather’s assessment of her one student with a learning disability, Nathan, was that he frequently gave lots of details and had trouble synthesizing information. She attributed this group’s difficulties with synthesizing to a biological deficiency within the students in saying, “their ability to do that hasn’t been fully developed yet” and later stating, “cognitively, some of them aren’t there yet” (HS Interview Transcript). She also attributed the difficulties to her own degree of preparation in teaching summary as a focal point of instruction, saying she wished she would have done more research on how to teach summary.

When reflecting upon the video-recorded lesson of the low group, Heather described the students as being “not quite ready for independent work.” She commented on their off-task behavior when she was away from the group at points during the lesson, noting details such as how often students got up from the table. In her reflection, she frequently used language of change for the future (e.g., “should”), suggesting that this activity allowed her to think about her practice and her students in ways that she otherwise wouldn’t have done. She thought that the students needed more explicit instruction on how to take notes while reading, or that she should have modeled the task using the first section of text, or that she should have read the article before the lesson began. Heather also mentioned that the nature of her grouping procedure was contributing to the students’ off-task behavior, saying, “Maybe groups should be heterogeneous because this group of kids struggles to produce work.”
The students in the average group also had comprehension needs, according to Heather, but she described them in a different context. She mentioned that some of the students in the average group are “surface level readers” while others are “deep thinkers.” She thought that their characteristics as readers created a positive group dynamic, saying that the combination of students in the group allows the students to build upon each other’s thoughts and to engage in thoughtful discussions about the book. She referred to their developmental levels as being more advanced than the low group’s, saying, “they definitely have more skills and ability to take information and summarize it, even though some of them sometimes gave too much detail, like I think that they really understood that they didn’t always have to do that…they’re just a higher ability level” (HS Interview Transcript).

In comparing the two groups, Heather thought that the average group was much more independent and focused than the low group. As a part of her video stimulated recall, Heather noted, “Since I watched the summary video first, I’m realizing that it’s much easier to work with students who have a higher level of independence. I also think the reading material is interesting for this group.” In the semi-structured interview, which occurred before Heather completed the video stimulated recall, I asked Heather if she thought that differences in students’ discursive participation between the two groups was a result of the nature of what she was trying to accomplish, and she responded by talking about the nature of the students.

A: right, right, yea. To what extent do you think like, just in comparing the groups, the differences, do you think it’s the setup or the nature of what you were trying to accomplish.

H: well

A: that led to those differences

H: well, I think that the summary group was very resistant. They did not want to do the work. They did not want to be there, and they often said that out loud.

A: yeah, yeah

H: you know, you saw Deidra today.

A: yeah
H: so, I think just, it- they saw that other people in the class who were doing things that they wanted to do, and that really impacted their desire to even participate.
A: Right. Do you think they would have participated differently had they been doing like the novel, I know Deidra talked about ‘I wanna read a novel’ or
H: right, right. That’s the other thing is, I do want this group to read a novel
A: yeah
H: and maybe that’s my next step with them
Overall, when talking about her difficulties with the students in the low group,

Heather described the situation as being attributable to both deficits with the students, as well as deficits within her instruction. Yet, she talked about these two realms as separate entities. The deficits as traits within the students, as part of her model of their ability, likely would not be considered to be deficits with a re-organization of the learning system. Heather’s reflection of her practice frequently pointed toward the future and what she would like to change or wished she would have done, but she reified their difficulties by thinking about them as static traits within the students, rather than thinking about learning as an interaction with the environment.

Meta-discourse. Heather said she usually tries to ask open ended questions, but had a hard time with her low group doing so. She mentioned that she would “resort to yes and no answers” when it appeared that students were unable to respond to open ended questions. She wanted students to answer her open ended questions on their own and without a lot of “clues,” but in order to increase their participation, she asked lower level questions.

Patterns in Heather’s questioning. Because Heather’s lessons are organized in starkly different ways between the two groups, the patterns across time also show important differences. Heather used different texts, different structures and rules to the discussion; she held mostly different goals and expectations for the two groups, and had differing models of ability.

During some weeks, Heather’s two lessons occurred on the same day, while other weeks they did not. I did not have full permission to record the low group’s lessons until
midway through the instructional cycle, thus the lines on the graph below (Figure 13) represent the six consecutively recorded lessons of the average group with the four consecutively recorded lessons of the low group. Overall, Heather used Accountable Talk questions with the average group at a higher rate than with the low group, as noted in Figure 13.

![Graph showing Accountable Talk Questions: Heather](image)

**Figure 13.** Accountable Talk Questions: Heather

During the average group’s lesson 2, no Accountable Talk questions were asked, but this was a three minute long check-in lesson, in which only ten questions were asked, some about the content of the book and others about the logistics of which chapters to read next. Lesson 4 of the average group had the highest rate of Accountable Talk questions. This was another relatively short lesson (12 and a half minutes) in which Heather asked the students to make some predictions about what they thought would happen next in the story. She asked them to support their predictions on seven occasions, out of 28 questions, thus the rate of Accountable Talk questions in this lesson was 25%.

The following lesson for the average group, lesson 5, yielded the highest number of Accountable Talk questions across all of Heather’s lessons (n = 20), out of 100 questions. In
In this lesson, students received a piece of paper with a list of statements that referenced the book they were reading. The students were to determine whether the statement was a fact or an opinion. This activity allowed for multiple expansion opportunities in which the students could justify whether they thought a statement was a fact or an opinion. In other words, this activity allowed the students to make claims and to support those claims. Students were encouraged to listen to each other’s ideas and build upon them. One example is an exchange between Lawrence and the teacher.

L: I said, yeah, at the beginning I thought it was, I thought it was, um fact and then I read it again and decided it was opinion.
T: Did you change your mind for the same reason that Brianna chose her mind? I mean changed her mind?
L: uh kind of
T: why did you change your mind?

In this lesson, students were asked to engage in a rich task that afforded the students to provide their thought processes and hear multiple perspectives. As the lesson went on, students didn’t need the teacher’s cue in the form of a question in order to continue to provide justification for their claims. They merely did it on their own. These actions were coded as student-initiated Accountable Talk, and this lesson has the highest instances of them (n = 8) across all of the teachers and all of the lessons. For example:

T: ooh. What do you guys think about that one? Um, Lawrence, can you hand those to me? ‘Cause they’re distracting you. I’ll just hold it until the end of our session, mm kay? Thank you. So what do you think? Does anybody have an answer for number four? Is that [fact or an opinion?
V: [a fact because you could, you could prove that he dropped it?
T: okay, so you think it’s a fact?
V: and see the crushed bug
T: okay, what do you think, Brianna?
B: It’s a fact because there were people around him when it happened and he can and you can prove it with other peop- with the other people’s- they could hear it too I think and
In this excerpt, both Brianna (B) and Violet (V) provide their reasoning unprompted because it became a patterned norm within the lesson. The nature of the activity in this lesson allowed for this norm to quickly become adopted by the participants.

Across the low group’s lessons, there was very little Accountable Talk. Approximately 5% of total teacher questions or fewer were Accountable Talk questions posed to the students in the low group. Conversely, Heather asked Assertive Questions at a higher rate of the low group, on the whole (See Figure 14).

![Figure 14. Assertive Questions: Heather](image)

The average group’s first lesson contained the highest rate of assertive questions for that group. In that lesson, most of Heather’s Assertive Questions were statements with tags (n =15). The statements with tags worked to direct students toward a task (e.g., So next session, you guys can discuss it, ‘kay?), to confirm an understanding of ideas (e.g., “That was chapter 11, right?”), or to evaluate a student’s response (e.g., “But you might not want to say, ‘Lina went by and said hello’ because that’s a really small thing that happened, right?”). Although her tags worked in similar ways with the low group as the average group, Heather consistently used a high rate of statements with tags with the students in the low group.
With the low group, Heather’s tags seemed to also function as a way to make connections for the students. In one lesson, Heather conducted a group summary with the students, as she had done previously, and as she wished she would have done more of, based on her comments during the interview. In doing group summaries, Heather elicited ideas from the students as to what should be included in the summary. They provided their responses, and Heather would determine whether the response was acceptable, modifying as necessary. She used tags to remind students about her goals for summarization, connecting them to the broader lesson objective (e.g., “we can just you know be general, right?).

```
1 T: okay so we’ll just say that PR2 helps people (.) with lack of
2 mobility and because all those other things are detail, which
3 are great, but in a summary we can just you know be general,
4 right? People with lack of mobility. Okay. So. Does anybody
5 wanna ha- how do we conclude our summary? How do we finish –
6 what do we say in the very end to sum up this whole idea. Yes.
7 M: These robots are used to make um people’s life better and
8 safer?
9 T: okay, so it’s kinda the same thing we said up here. Robots are
10 being used to make our lives easier and safer, right?
```

Heather also used tags to rephrase what a student had just said. This is similar to the revoicing move (O’Connor & Michaels, 1993), in which the teacher broadcasts the statement from the student for consideration from the whole class (lines 9 and 10). Here, Heather’s tag statement, “Okay, so it’s kinda the same thing we said up here. Robots are being used to make our lives easier and safer, right?” connects the summary statement that Michelle offered to an earlier statement written as part of the summary.

In the following excerpt, Heather used a series of tags with Nathan, the student in her group with LD, in order to expand upon a point she was trying to make about how the title of an article can help students figure out the main idea.
Nathan provided an idea about what information from the title, *Robots to the Rescue*, could be gleaned regarding the information in the article, that the robots help people (lines 2-5). Heather then conjectured what connections Nathan may have made by saying, “Rescue kind of gives you a clue that they’re gonna help, right?” Her tag statement here provides a possible insight into Nathan’s thinking, and explicitly draws synonymic connections between the words help and rescue. The tag, right, then offers a discursive slot for Nathan to confirm or negate her assessment, to which Carter responds, “yeah.” She then adds two other tag statements, “Not that robots are gonna harm us, right?” and “[T]his article isn’t gonna be about the terminator, right?” These statements work to reinforce the relationship between the title and Nathan’s suggested main idea, specifically that the word *Rescue* in the title means help and not harm.

In addition to using statements with tags as Assertive Questions, Heather consistently used RPQs and SPQs with both of her groups. As previously described, RPQs (Reverse Polarity Questions) prefer the opposite polarity of the form of the question (Koshik, 2005). Koshik found them to be used in the context of error correction as a way to point toward an erroneous response made by the student. These questions are usually heard from the recipient as evaluative and
revealing a problem. For example, after Nathan had provided a response regarding the text,

Heather posed a Reverse Polarity Question, signaling an error:

N: When Nathalie was growing up in 3rd grade, she was bullied by this kid who would boss her around and tell her what—and spread rumors about her and that she was really lonely, but she, one day she tossed out, she tossed the bully into the trash can.
Col: Not one day. [Katie.]
T: [Well, did it say that she tossed the bully into the trash can?]
D: One day the bully tossed her into the trash can.
Col: yeah
T: oh, okay, so make sure you read those details correctly.

Here, the teacher and the students signal to Nathan that he had made an error in understanding the details of the text. The bully had tossed the victim, Nathalie, into the trash can, and Nathan reported that Nathalie done so to the bully. The reverse polarity to the question, “Did it say that she tossed the bully into the trashcan” is no, thus revealing Nathan’s misinterpretation. Out of all of the Assertive Questions asked, the percentage of RPQs Heather posed with both her low and average groups was relatively equal, asking them at a higher rate with her average group (13% of all AQ, compared to 8% with the low group).

Heather also used what I called Same Polarity Questions at a very similar rate with both groups, out of all of the Assertive Questions asked (23% with the low group and 20% with the average group). These questions functioned similarly to Reverse Polarity Questions, conveying a strong assertion from the teacher, but instead of revealing an error, they pointed toward a solution. Like RPQs, they functioned “as an expression of the speaker’s epistemic stance…that the speaker knows the answer to the question and knows it with certainty” (Koshik, 2005, p. 13).

But contrary to RPQs, preferred responses to SPQs have the same polarity of the question. Here, preference does not mean correct or incorrect responses per se. Preference in the Conversation Analysis literature refers to the structure of the adjacent pair (Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff, 1968),
that allows the second part (e.g., the student’s answer) to align with what the first part (e.g., the teacher’s question) seeks to accomplish. In the case of RPQs, the preferred response to “Did it say that she tossed the bully into the trash can” is “no” because Heather’s question sought to alert Nathan to his mistake. The response, “yes,” would be dispreferred because it does not align with what Heather was trying to accomplish. With SPQs, the preferred response is of the same polarity as the question and seeks to direct the listener’s attention to a specific place. Like adults in Western, mainstream cultures do when speaking to very young babies or toddlers (e.g., Saying, “Do you have a toy?” when the baby is holding a toy), Heather and the other teachers asked similar questions to direct students’ attention to an idea conceived by the teacher.

In one example, Heather was guiding a group summary with the low group. She had solicited ideas from the students about how to start their group summary of the book, Meteor, by Patricia Polacco. After writing their first sentence of the summary, Heather asked for a student to read it.

1 T: Alright, so A, will you read to me my first sentence.
2 A: In the beginning of the story, Pachaka
3 T, Ss: Patricia
4 A: [Patricia started
5 T: [Ooh! Wait, wait I forgot a word
6 C: Polacco
7 T: Patricia’s
8 D: house
9 A: Patricia’s house started shaking and a meteor fell from the sky
10 and landed in her front yard.
11 D: Can [I read next
12 T: [Does that sound like a pretty good summary of what happened
13 at the beginning of the story.
14 A: You need commas.
15 T: ‘kay. What happens. (.)

After the sentence is read, Heather asked, “Does that sound like a pretty good summary of what happened at the beginning of the story.” Her intonation is lowered at the end of the question, suggesting that she was not looking for a response but asserting the idea that it was indeed a
pretty good summary. Additionally, it is heard as an assertion. Aaron responded with a critique, saying, “You need commas” (line 14), which is a dispreferred response, as indicated by the fact that Heather neglected to address it because it did not align with what Heather was trying to accomplish. Heather’s SPQ functioned as sort of a transition move, a way to check that the work done thus far was sufficient before moving on. Instead of addressing Aaron’s comment about needing commas, Heather continued with what she was trying to accomplish by saying, “’kay. What happens.”

In another example, Heather asked two SPQs as a way to suggest the appropriate information to be included in the summary. The excerpt below comes from my video content log:

1  T: Deidra, you’re talking, and you can’t be listening. Let me ask you this, Aaron said something in his summary that if you don’t stand up and say something, nobody can help. Is that the same as what Lucas is saying that you have to stand up and help?
2  D: yeah
3  T: do you think it would be okay in our summary, just to be general? Because the main idea is that people need to stand up and say something. (Ss are not looking at T. D and C might be kicking each other under the table. Nathan is looking at his glasses up above his head.) So maybe we can just leave that general, main idea, that you need to stand – Collin and D – or nobody can help you, or that you need to stand up for others, right?
4  (OC: T gives away the answers here.)

Before coming up with the idea of Same Polarity Questions, I noted in my observer comment that the teacher used these types of questions to give away the answers. This excerpt comes toward the end of a lesson, around 33 minutes of a 39 minute lesson. Students appeared to be kicking each other, were talking and looking away from the teacher and her written summary on the easel behind her. Heather was trying to wrap up the lesson and was guiding the students through a summary statement of the last section. She paraphrased a response from Aaron and asked the students whether it was “the same as what Lucas is saying” (line 3). Lucas was a boy
in the article, and the text reads, “Lucas says he’s found that standing up to a bully usually helps” (Smith, 2013, p. 5).

In saying, “Is that the same as what Lucas is saying that you have to stand up and help,” Heather drew the connection for the students. Lucas said that individuals should stand up [to bullies] to help [the victims of bullying], which is similar to what Aaron had said in his summary statement, that if someone does not “stand up and say something, then nobody can help” (line 2). Her SPQ is explicit in highlighting the relationship between what Aaron and Lucas are saying by stating the similarities within her question, thus attempting to accomplish the connection of Aaron’s text-based statement. The preferred response was already given in the question. One student, Deidra, affirms this connection in line 4 by saying, “yeah.”

The question immediately following is another SPQ. Heather asks, “Do you think it would be okay in our summary, just to be general?” To disagree with this question would be dispreferred because it would contradict Heather’s efforts to relate the notions of summaries as general ideas of text. Furthermore, she continued by providing a summary statement for the students: “Because the main idea is that people need to stand up and say something.” Heather’s SPQs work to suggest to the students what to glean from the text as main ideas, which was the object of the lesson. It is toward the end of the lesson, and these SPQs are means of efficiency for guiding students through the lesson. In form, they may or may not elicit a student response but work to reveal Heather’s epistemic stance, bringing attention to an idea that the students should adopt as their own.

Heather used SPQs more frequently than did the other teachers, and from observing her questioning, I was able to develop and theorize how Same Polarity Questions function as assertions. Although Heather had relatively equal percentages of the subtypes of Assertive
Questions she posed of both groups (e.g., tags, RPQs, SPQs), her rate of Assertive Questions out of the total questions was much higher for the low group. Thus, in the low group’s lessons, the students were asked a higher rate of Assertive Questions. As noted earlier, in some cases, Assertive Questions worked to build connections and confirm students’ responses. In other cases, they merely told students “the answers” in the form of a question.

Over time, Heather posed consistently more Assertive Questions with the low group, which can be explained by her efforts to direct students’ thinking, as well as confirm, connect, and revoice students’ ideas. Although Heather’s tags were sometimes used authoritatively to assert or suggest, they were also used to amplify and confirm students’ contributions, as was shown with Nathan, the student with LD.

Heather’s activity system for the low group working on summaries was organized in such a way that increased the rate of Assertive Questions asked. Many contradictions are at work in her activity system, especially contradictions between her mediational tools (i.e., models of student ability, models of reading comprehension), and her object of summarization. In the following chapter, I explore how the prevalence of contradictions within this activity system created a space in which a high rate of Assertive Questions, authoritative questions with high degrees of direction from the teacher, were necessary.

**Across Teacher Patterns of Activity and Talk**

In comparing the average rates of questioning practices across all three teachers, Heather posed Accountable Talk questions with her average group at the highest rate out of all the teachers (16%). Table 11 shows that she also asked Accountable Talk questions of her low group at the lowest rate out of all the teachers (4%), using Accountable Talk questions at a rate four times higher with the average group than with the low group. The activity systems between both
of Heather’s groups were also the most discrepant, yielding the most differences. Aside from Heather’s low group, Kristin asked Accountable Talk questions at the lowest rate compared to the other teachers.

Table 11

*Mean Number of Questions per Lesson in Low and Average Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Assertive Questions (Percentage of Total)</th>
<th>Accountable Talk (Percentage of Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>9.1 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>14.0 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>24.3 (28)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* KS’s lesson with the 3 low students is not included.

All three teachers asked Assertive Questions at a higher rate with their low groups, albeit, Kristin’s difference was marginal (29% with the low group and 28% with the average group). This marginal discrepancy is consistent with the finding that her lessons were structured so similarly across both of her groups. Heather asked the highest rate of Assertive Questions across all of the teachers with her low group, working on summaries (35%). Overall, Sharon posed Assertive Questions at the lowest rate with her book discussions.

Because some important discrepancies were shown across groups, I conducted a one-tailed test of significance, making three comparisons: Heather’s Accountable Talk questions, Heather’s Assertive Questions, and Sharon’s Assertive Questions. Because the other comparison across low and average groups were similar (i.e., Kristin’s AT and AQ and Sharon’s AT), I did not conduct significance tests to detect differences. As Table 12 shows below, the differences in assertive questions between Sharon’s low and average group yielded a strong presumption that the null hypothesis could be rejected, according to the t tests of significance. In other words, the differences in questioning patterns for Sharon’s AQ were statistically significant.
However, using a Mann Whitney U test of significance with the question types across Heather’s groups yielded no significant differences (See Table 13). The critical value for determining significance is 2, and the U values from Heather’s comparisons were not lower than 2.

Table 13

*Mann-Whitney U Tests of Heather’s Question Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Assertive Questions</th>
<th>Accountable Talk Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather AT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather AQ</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon AQ</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *p*<.05. **p**<.01. ***p***<.001 one-tailed t-tests of significance

These tests are disconfirming evidence that differences in talk can be purely arranged by group activity. Group level talk is important to examine; however, comparisons are nuanced by multiple nodes of the activity system. Although Sharon conducted similar lessons with both of her groups, she had different kinds of goals for and conceptualizations of students’ abilities for her two groups, which likely contributed to the significant differences in Assertive Questions. She felt that her low group was much more dependent upon her as the teacher than the average group, and she stated that the low students would need her at all times. This perception of dependency, an ideational tool, is a nuanced but important way in which the activity systems of
Sharon’s two groups differed, showing that the functional system was not entirely the same across both groups.

After each observation, I scored the lessons according to an adaptation of the social organization of learning protocol, developed by Gutiérrez and colleagues (1999). The items I scored on the protocol were on a 1-5 Likert Scale, with one item to 4. The items reflect various aspects of the collective discourse and the extent to which it reflects the community’s attempt at constructing knowledge. The items and their rating descriptions are in the appendix. The total possible for each lesson was 69 points. Table 14 below provides the average scores per lesson, and lessons were scored even if they were not recorded.

Table 14

*Mean Scores per Lesson on Observation Protocol*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>47.3 (5.9)</td>
<td>47.9 (4.6)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>43.3 (2.2)</td>
<td>32.9 (4.5)</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>30.8 (2.4)</td>
<td>39.7 (7.0)</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.013*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.KS’s lesson with the 3 low students is not included. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001 one-tailed t tests of significance

Sharon’s average scores across the two groups were nearly identical (47.3 and 47.9) for the average and low groups, respectively. As evaluated by me, the discourse was very similar between these two groups, which reflects the similar activities and discourse rules/structures in both groups. However, these scores do not reflect the finding that Sharon posed a much higher rate of assertive questions with her low group, potentially because a micro analysis of individual questions allowed me to see patterns that were otherwise hidden within the overall patterns of talk. Perhaps not surprisingly, Heather’s average scores yielded a statistically significant
difference, suggesting that the discourse in her low group, with a score of 32.9, situated knowledge as within the teacher to a greater extent than in her average group (43.3). Kristin’s scores also yielded a significant difference, favoring the low group. As I scored the community’s talk in Kristin’s groups, I noted that students in the low group were more likely to initiate opportunities to interject ideas, without the nomination of the teacher. This was allowable sometimes and not allowable other times. My assessments of Kristin’s two groups were likely different because I especially attended to the ways in which the students in the low group asserted their contributions. Even considering the significant differences in scores in Kristin’s groups, these findings corroborate with the notion that the organization of the activity system is related to the amounts and kinds of questions teachers pose. The layer of analysis that the observation protocol affords is an understanding of how the discourse might differ, based on the community. The students in Kristin’s low group differed largely in how they engaged with the teacher; thus, the environment is not a determinant factor, as individuals exert agency within the system.

In conclusion, these data indicate that the organization of the activity system renders the kinds of mediational tools available, and in this case, teacher questions. Contrary to what I originally hypothesized, the data I collected in these multi-case studies indicate that questioning techniques and structures are more dependent on the activity system than they are on any perceived student ability. Conceptualizations of ability certainly bring to bear certain kinds of questions that are made available to the discourse, but it is the overall organization of the system and the activities employed that contribute to the nature of the talk that ensues.
Chapter 6

Assertive Accountable Questions: An Examination of the Tensions within an Un-strategic
Privileging of the Text-Reader Interaction

It is important for all students to be afforded opportunities to engage with text in ways that allow them to make claims, reason, and develop ideas through discussion with others. As previously described, teacher questions can be powerful tools that elicit such thinking. Accountable Talk® (Michaels, O’Connor, Hall, & Resnick, 2010) has been shown to yield rigorous classroom discourse across age levels and disciplines. By holding students accountable to the learning community, to accurate knowledge, and to rigorous thinking, Accountable Talk works to “sharpen students’ thinking by reinforcing their ability to use and create knowledge” (Michaels et al., 2010, p. 1). When holding students accountable to the learning community, teachers will encourage students to effectively listen to their peers’ statements and build upon each other’s ideas. Accountability to accurate knowledge involves providing sound evidence that support one’s claims, whether using the text or a prior understanding developed by the group. Finally, when students are accountable to rigorous thinking, they justify their claims by using a cogent line of reasoning.

The developers of Accountable Talk call for a better understanding of the relationship between talk, activity, and the nature of knowledge (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007), as two utterances with the same form may function very differently in different contexts (Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008). Likewise, multiple forms can accomplish the same function. Because much in conversation is implicit, interlocutors have to read between the lines to interpret meaning (Grice, 1975) based on contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982), and these cues play an especially significant role in learning through teacher-student interactions.
Conversational cues can be so entrenched in classroom discourse that students attend to these cues in order to provide the “correct” response (Billig, Condor, Edward, Gane, Middleton, & Radley, 1988) rather than responding purely to the content of the question. These imbued meanings shape and are shaped by the situations, institutions, and social structures that contextualize the interaction, and power asymmetries can exacerbate the extent to which underlying meanings play a role in the discussion (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

In this chapter, I relate my findings to both of my research questions. First, although the question, How do classroom teachers’ questioning practices during small group reading comprehension instruction differ between “low” and “average” groups, especially with respect to Accountable Talk questions and Assertive Questions and with students with learning disabilities? was primarily answered in the previous chapter, I point to important differences between low and average groups, in that the teachers were more likely to ask questions that reflected Accountability to Accurate Knowledge in form, but with assertive undertones, of students in the low group. Findings in this chapter are primarily to my second research question, In what ways do classroom teacher questioning practices during small group reading comprehension include Accountable Talk questions and Assertive Questions? Through this examination, I illustrate how in social practice, multiple meanings in discourse inform the context in which students are afforded opportunities to become certain kinds of learners. This is first applied to an understanding of one teacher’s questions during small group reading instruction in which Gilberto, a fifth grader in Sharon’s average group, is asked to defend a claim he never made in response to a false dichotomy set up by the teacher. Using concepts from sociocultural theory and discourse analysis, my analysis of the small group reading lesson is presented here as a telling case (Mitchell, 1984; Stake, 1995) that reveals how teacher questions
that are designed to hold students accountable to their claims actually impose authoritative ideas. I identify and describe how teacher questioning practices can take the form of asking students to account for their claims while simultaneously working to assert information. This case also shows how learner identities and abilities are implied through discourse.

Second, I situate the case in the broader landscape of my data, examining frequencies, densities, and interactions of Accountable Talk questioning moves and questions that function as assertions (Assertive Questions) across teachers and groups. In doing so, I work to uncover the multiple layers of activity that inform the interaction, building upon the findings presented in the previous chapter. As such, I show how patterns in teacher questioning are influenced not only by the students with whom she is interacting, but also by the nature of the activity, the genre of text, and the conceptualizations of learning, reading, and student needs with which she holds. Before presenting the results, I revisit cogent concepts in order to frame my analysis in this chapter.

**Conceptual Framework**

To make visible the connections between discourse, texts, and power as they relate to teachers and students, I draw on sociocultural notions of authoritative and dialogic discourse (Bakhtin, 1986; Wertsch & Toma, 1995). Because interaction is the learning environment (Erickson, 1996), the concepts of authoritative and dialogic discourse offer a way to describe the extent to which meaning can be communicated adequately (Wertsch & Toma, 1995). Authoritative and dialogic discourses generally refer to opposing modes and patterns of classroom talk (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007), differing by the extent to which varying ideas are acknowledged and considered (Scott, Mortimer, & Aguiar, 2006).

In authoritative discourse, a primary purpose is to focus the students’ attention on just one meaning or interpretation of a concept. This kind of talk often functions to establish a
collective account of meaning. As Scott and colleagues describe (2006), in dialogic discourse, a hybrid mix of the students’ views and the more established, disciplinary view is created. Talk is dialogic when it includes open discussion, authentic teacher questions, questions with uptake, attempts at clarification and elaboration, greater symmetry in teacher and student talk, and efforts to encourage students to respond to and build upon each other’s ideas (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Scott et al., 2006).

These characterizations of talk are consistent with the premises of Accountable Talk and provide a helpful lens for identifying places within conversation that have authoritative or dialogic characteristics. However, this distinction is not so easily made (O’Connor & Michaels, 2007). All talk is both authoritative and dialogic (Wertsch & Toma, 1995), and either/or dichotomies are not especially helpful in characterizing talk (Cazden, 2001; Lotman, 1988; O’Connor & Michaels, 2007; Wertsch & Toma, 1995). Further, communicative approaches should shift as the purposes of interaction shift (Burns & Myhill, 2004; Wells, 1998; Scott et al., 2006), and thus classroom conversation often ebbs and flows between talk that is primarily authoritative and primarily dialogic. It is important to situate talk within a contextual understanding of how forms of talk might function authoritatively or dialogically, so as to examine how utterances can marshal multiple voices and imbue underlying meanings.

I use Action Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA; Tracy, 2005) to explicate how teacher and student interactions provide the context for students to become certain kinds of learners. With an AIDA approach, points of tension are located within the talk and between the participants’ espoused ideals, their talking about their talk, and the talk that ensues. In the sections that follow, I approach this question by first identifying teacher questions that are structured in such a way to elicit students’ accountability to the learning community, to accurate
knowledge, and to rigorous thinking (Michaels et al., 2010). I also identified teacher questions that function as assertions, based primarily upon the work of Irene Koshik (2005), as described previously. Then, examining segments of interaction, I contextualize teacher questions within the broader conversation and lesson to understand how these questions function within authoritative and dialogic discourses.

**The Hunting Debate as a Telling Case**

The first analysis presented in this chapter exemplifies the complex relationship between question form and function. Questions that may be designed to elicit rigorous thought can imply a correct response, especially in contexts in which the locus of knowledge is assumed to reside primarily within the teacher. The data that inform the analysis presented took place during Sharon’s guided reading instruction of her average-leveled small group consisting of six students. The students in this group were reading on grade level according to an informal reading inventory given by the teacher. The book under study was *Gentle Ben* by Walt Morey, a story set in Alaska about a boy who befriends a placid brown bear, and in this lesson, the students were discussing the final chapters of the book.

Throughout the cycle of the book study, the students read two or three chapters as homework before discussing the events with the teacher and their peers the following day. Typically in each lesson, Sharon maintained a very consistent structure that consisted of first reviewing the previous lesson’s discussion, then discussing the chapters which were read as homework, then students posing questions pertaining to the subsequent chapters, then reading aloud sections of the chapters, and finally, making predictions about what will occur next. However, the lesson in this analysis was not typical; the discussion was guided by a set of written questions that the students had answered as homework the night prior to the lesson. The
discussion that ensued was not typical either, in part due to the nature of one of the questions posed. The question of interest required the students to evaluate an ethical question/dilemma. It was related to a point in the book about a character having the right to hunt on an island because he had a license. The question read, “Can a person be right with the law and still be morally wrong?” It is the interaction that follows that is the focus of this analysis. This topic for debate is situated in a community that is known for its activism regarding animal rights. In fact, one month after this lesson was observed, individuals in a neighboring community – but still in the same school district – held a candlelight vigil for an elk that was illegally shot in town by two off-duty police officers. The county in which the district is located holds the lowest percentage of hunting license holders per capita of the neighboring counties, according to 2010 data (Colorado Parks & Wildlife, 2010; Colorado Department of Local Affairs, 2010).

I present a detailed analysis of approximately four minutes of conversation that exemplifies the tension that exists within teacher questions that are designed to elicit rigorous thinking under an authoritative context. The conversation is divided into multiple shorter segments. Overall, findings show how some questioning moves work to align one particular student, Gilberto, a Latino boy in the average group, to claims that the teacher assumes to be his, when in reality are not, during a group debate. Infusing assertions within her questions, along with deictic language, Sharon positioned Gilberto as a learner who is separate from the rest of the group, despite his attempts to refute her assessments of his ideas. Within these moves and contexts, his claims are understood as invaluable, and over a four-minute time span, Gilberto is positioned as a learner whose contributions are not worthy enough to be understood as he presents them. The emotional severity of the separation is not lost upon Gilberto. He is seen toward the end of the conversation with his head in his hands, wiping his eyes.
Framing the Debate

This segment begins with the teacher directing the students’ attention to their worksheet with a list of questions that the students had been given the day prior. One student, Bailey, read one of the questions aloud, “Why did Jones have the right to hunt on the island? Can a person be right with the law and yet be [morally] wrong?” The questions were in response to the character Jones, a hunting guide, who assisted a man in the hunt for Ben, a large tame bear who is a leading character in the story. After discussing the first question, Sharon rephrased the second question within the context of the first. She engaged with two students, Bailey and Marley, and then framed the ethical debate. In the following transcript excerpts, an underline indicates emphasis, parentheses containing a period indicate a pause, and left brackets indicate overlapping talk. Some speech was relatively inaudible, so my best interpretation of what was said is inside a set of parentheses.

1 T: Can a person who is not breaking rules by hunting there still be wrong? (.)
2 Ba: No, because he’s not breaking any rules.
3 Mar: To other, to other people yes because to some people it could be like, it’s not right to kill animals for no particular reason,
4 Ba: yeah
5 T: ‘kay
6 Mar: so it may not be wrong to you, but it could be wrong to somebody else.
7 T: okay
8 Ba: Oh, so they won’t do it.
9 Mar: [yeah
10 T: so hunting for the purpose of [I need food is
11 Mar: [so they’ll say you’re so, you’re wrong
12 T: better than hunting for the purpose of
13 Mar: whatever
14 T: I’m killing the biggest thing to put it up on my wall.
15 Mar: Yeah (. ) You know you’re not breaking the law, but to other people, it’s [ wrong.
16 Ba: [It seems like you are breaking the law.
After the teacher situated the written question of “Can a person be right with the law and yet be morally wrong” in the context of the issue in the novel, hunting, Bailey took a legalistic approach in asserting that “no, [the person is not wrong] because he’s not breaking any rules.” Another student, Marley, embraced a more relativistic stance of ethics in saying, “…So it may not be wrong to you, but it could be wrong to somebody else.” Marley’s response highlighted the nature of right and wrong being in the eye of the beholder, as opposed to a static absolute to which all people subscribe.

The teacher then revoiced (O’Connor & Michaels, 1993), or reformulated, Marley’s claim, but in doing so, she imposed her own interpretation of Marley’s argument by adding specifics, changing its meaning slightly: “Okay, so hunting for the purpose of food … is better than ‘I’m killing the biggest thing to put it up on my wall.’” As O’Connor and Michaels (1993) note, the marker so indicates the presence of a speaker’s attempt to make an inference based on the previous speaker’s utterance. The original speaker is then afforded the opportunity to confirm or refute the warranted inference, thus placing both speakers on equal footing. However, here, in revoicing Marley’s claim, the teacher introduced the idea of hunting for food being diametrically opposed to hunting for decorative, or boasting, purposes. Marley had not mentioned either of these ancillary topics, and had only used the phrase, “kill animals for no particular reason.” Implicitly, the teacher proposed that hunting for trophy is what Marley had in mind. Trophy hunting is a reason, even if not a morally justifiable one in the teacher’s mind, yet the phrase ‘for no reason’ in this context functions as one that implies a misunderstood or unjustifiable reason. As such, the teacher leveraged the reasons for which killing animals may or may not be justified, thus framing the argument for discussion by imposing a false dichotomy of killing for food versus killing for decoration. Although Marley was afforded the slot to affirm or contradict the
teacher’s inference, in which she affirms it, the power asymmetries between teacher and student lend the default response to be affirmative. Without sufficient effort to build a discursive community in which students feel adequately empowered to refute the teacher’s revoicing move, the teacher’s inference trumps the claims on the table.

In the lesson prior, the students discussed the motivations behind trophy hunters like the character Jones. Gilberto suggested that these hunters “hang [the game] on their walls.” The teacher repeated Gilberto’s statement, confirming his response. In this previous lesson, Gilberto is a valued contributor, which is starkly different from what transpires in the present analysis.

Un/accountable to the Learning Community: Agreement, Disagreement, and Mis/aligning Students

In the segment that follows, the teacher asked students if they agree with the discussion on the table. She posed questions that take the form of a move that works to hold students accountable to the learning community, one that guides students to build upon or challenge another claim, i.e., Do you agree?

Previously, the teacher had defined the debate as one regarding the morality of hunting for food versus hunting for decoration. Here, the teacher summarized the issue by suggesting that trophy hunting, as the teacher conceptualizes it, is immoral, while one must need a “good reason” to hunt for it to be “okay.” Although this revoicing move came in the form of a question that allowed students to confirm or disconfirm her reformulations of the student talk, students did not
challenge her suggestions. In fact, when asked, none of the students disagreed with her assessment of the issue. Yet the teacher pressed further, and in line 28 she used the marker So to make another warranted inference about the students’ views (“So you’re all, you’re all against hunting?”). However, instead of aligning ideas, as the revoicing move is designed to do (O’Connor & Michaels, 1993), this inference further dichotomized the debate, now implying that being “against hunting” is morally commensurate with the idea that hunting requires good reason, and good reason cannot be for trophy. With this implication, anyone who is not against hunting, in a general sense, must not align themselves with the idea that hunters must have good reason to hunt. The teacher rearranged the argument to be even more polar than it was before, suggesting that those who like hunting will not agree with the idea that hunting for food is okay while hunting for trophy is wrong. Again, the teacher afforded students with a slot to affirm or contradict her assessment, as denoted by the rising intonation at the end of her utterance (line 28). This time, as shown below, Gilberto, who had already claimed to be in agreement with the group (line 27), positioned himself as someone who likes hunting, making visible the problem with the teacher’s assumptions.

**Un/accountable to Rigorous Thinking: Questions as Assertions**

Accountable to rigorous thinking involves “linking together claims and evidence (facts) in a logical, coherent, and rigorous manner” (Michaels et al., 2010, p. 5) so as to make a cogent and compelling argument. Teachers will press students for their reasoning by using moves such as, “Why do you think that” and “Say more” (Michaels et al., 2010, p. 31-2). In the continued conversation that follows, the teacher does just that; she presses Gilberto for his reasoning. Yet her questions function as doing much more.

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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>G:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>T:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If examined devoid of context, questions in this segment appear to be merely asking Gilberto to account for his claim that he likes hunting, a claim that functions as a statement worthy of interrogation in this conversation, based on the teacher’s narrow framing of the issue.

In line 33, the teacher asked, “So then why wouldn’t you be against what we’re saying?” Gilberto did not respond, which yields evidence that this question functions as an assertion that he should “be against what we’re saying.” Koshik (2003) uses Conversation Analysis to explain how some wh-questions function as challenges to a prior utterance, just as the teacher’s question does. She describes them as follows:

These wh-questions are able to do challenging because, rather than asking for new information, they are used to convey a strong epistemic stance of the questioner, a negative assertion. The utterances are designed as requests for an account for a prior claim or action, but by conveying a negative assertion, they suggest that there is no
adequate account available and, thus, that there are no grounds for the prior claim or action. (p. 51)

In asking the question, “So why wouldn’t you be against what we’re saying,” the teacher asserted that Gilberto should take an opposing stance to the ideas that have already been expressed. Not only is the teacher’s query a strong assertion that suggested that no grounds exist for his prior claim, it introduced a new opposition in the conversation by using the person deixis words, “you” and “we.” These words are points of reference that suggest relative proximity within the context of an utterance (i.e., “So why wouldn’t you be against what we’re saying). Through spoken language, Gilberto has been distanced away from the other students, and the teacher has aligned herself with them.

After Gilberto did not respond to her assertion, the teacher restated the argument, again using more deictic, assertive, and positioning language, which culminated in what Koshik (2002) calls a reverse polarity question (RPQ), “and if you are a hunter then you should be on that side of the statement, shouldn’t you?” An RPQ reverses its polarity, either from affirmative to negative or vice versa, conveying an assertion that suggests what is problematic about a student’s response. The tag “shouldn’t you” structurally prefers the response “yes,” suggesting that the acceptable response is to agree with the assessment given. Further, person deictic language (i.e., “you”) is used three times in this utterance, which positions Gilberto on a “side.” Moreover, the teacher physically placed Gilberto away from the rest of the group using nonverbal gestures. As she uttered the place deixis words “that side” within the phrase “that side of the statement,” she gestured her hand away from the table. On one hand, Gilberto has been challenged to justify his thinking, but on the other hand, he has been placed away from the group.
Gilberto tried to reposition himself by saying that he is not in fact against the other side, and in response, the teacher said, “You’re not. Why?” (lines 45, 47). Here again, she asked a wh-question that functions within an interesting tension of probing for reasoning and justification from the student while simultaneously conveying a negative assertion, that it is curious and implausible that Gilberto would not be against what they are saying, and thus no justification will be acceptable. In the next segment, Gilberto’s line of reasoning is in fact deemed unacceptable, as evidenced by the teacher’s response. He has been charged with defending his claims within a false dichotomy, while it was already determined by the teacher where he stands on the matter.

Gilberto offered his explanation, one that resulted in positioning him further.

48 G: I don’t want to make other people mad
49 T: You don’t want to make other people mad?
50 Ba: well it’s your decision
51 Mar: I mean you’re not against - It’s not like you’re going to go to jail
52 T: should you care, should you care what other people think?
53 G: I think so
54 T: You think so?
55 G: ((nods))
56 T: Why.
57 G: Because someone will get really mad at you and like call the police or something
58 T: but you’re not breaking any rules
59 Mar: Yeah, you’re not breaking any rules
60 Ba: You’re not doing anything wrong
61 T: So this area is okay to hunt in. It says, the law says that you’re allowed to hunt, so you’re not breaking any rules so just because I don’t like hunting, why shouldn’t you do something that you like?
64 G: (I don’t know.)
65 T: You don’t know? You wanna think about it?
66 Br: (Hunting is) wrong.
67 T: Brandon, which side are you on

He reasoned that he doesn’t want to make others mad. A couple of students suggested to him that it’s okay to make others mad (“It’s your decision” and “You’re not going to jail”), and the teacher followed up with another assertive question that made the same suggestion: “Should you
care what others think?” (line 52), implying that he should not care. Gilberto resisted aligning himself with this suggestion, by saying “I think so” (line 53). What is ironic is that in doing this resisting, he further separated himself from the teacher’s stance, along with the other students’ stance, but all the while was trying to claim that he was actually on their side, not disagreeing with them. The teacher again asked for justification in line 56, “Why” this time with a lowered inflection, signaling not curiosity but skepticism of his justification. He reasoned that someone could call the police, and the teacher responded by suggesting that he shouldn’t be worried because “you’re not breaking any rules” (line 58). Her further question, “Why shouldn’t you do something that you like?” is another RPQ that suggested that he should think that he can do whatever he likes.

In multiple locations, the teacher used questions that elicit justification from the student, “Why” questions. These types of questions reflect Accountability to Rigorous Thinking (Michaels et al., 2010), and typically allow for a transfer of responsibility of thought from the teacher to the student. However, the teacher paradoxically held all of the responsibility of thought in this excerpt, as she framed and re-framed the argument and continually pitted Gilberto against the rest of the group. As the teacher released the spotlight from Gilberto and moved to elicit ideas from other students, Gilberto can be seen bending forward in his chair, placing his face in the palm of his hands, and rubbing his eyes. It is unclear as to whether or not he was wiping tears, but these actions indicate that he was in need of a break from the conversation, a personal distancing initiated by him.

**Situating the Case in the Broader Landscape of AT and AQ**

All three teachers used combinations of Accountable Talk questioning moves and Assertive Questions in their discourse. I refer to these questions as Assertive Accountable
Within teachers, some patterns emerged. Out of Heather’s five Assertive Accountable Questions, four of them were asking for Accountability to Rigorous Thinking while making an assertion. All were used in the context of error correction. In looking at Kristin’s Assertive Accountable Questions, 17 out of 22 (77%) included a directive. The directives she used worked to assert an action that she desired in the contexts of either Accountability to the Learning Community (ALC) or Accountability to Accurate Knowledge (AAK). Some of these moves
were used as behavior management tools, and others were used as scaffolds for peer guidance, according to the teacher (KS Interview Transcript). Still others directed students to elaborate, and of course, worked to correct students’ errors. Sharon used AAQs to correct errors, to encourage them to hypothesize, and with the average group, to clarify. Across teachers, all three used Assertive Accountable Questions in the context of error correction, and perhaps the most significant pattern was that teachers pressed students in the low group for accountability to accurate knowledge while also conveying an assertion three times the rate of the average group.

I identified additional cases to explore that typify how Heather and Kristin also used Assertive Accountable Questions. As was the case in the hunting example, these questions worked to impose a “correct” response while also asking students to index their response within accountability to the learning community, accurate knowledge, or rigorous thinking. Finally, in this section, I examine episodes of talk in which Assertive Accountable Questions are posed to students with learning disabilities.

**Assertive contexts disguise Accountability to Rigorous Thinking.** In the first example, I show how a full episode of talk contextualizes the nature of a single utterance. Similar to the hunting example, the teacher elicited justification from students while maintaining an assertive epistemic stance and after imposing a false dichotomy. Heather was teaching a summary lesson with her low group using a nonfiction article from the Scholastic News magazine titled, *Robots to the Rescue*. At the beginning of the lesson, Heather instructed the students to read the article independently and write down main ideas of each section while she worked with other students not in the group. The students perused the article, commenting playfully at the various pictures in the magazine. After the students had spent some time working, Heather checked in with the students and asked if any needed help. Carter and Collin indicated that they did, and Heather sat
next to them at the head of the table. The first section is about a humanoid robot, and Heather asked a series of questions to guide the students toward understanding the main ideas of the section. She asked multiple assertive questions leading up to the question that functions as both an assertion and an elicitation for justification.

The discursive context of the question under analysis informs the way in which it functions. It can be understood as an assertive question, not only based on the structure of the utterance itself, but also based on evidence before and after the question. Before this excerpt, Heather discussed that the main idea of the article was that robots are helping to make humans’ lives both easier and safer. In this excerpt, the issue at hand posed by Heather was whether the humanoid robot helps firefighters’ lives to be easier or safer. She started by asking the students to conjecture the reason for why the robot is called a humanoid.

```
T: humanoid. Why would they call him a humanoid do you think.
Car: um
T: what does he look like (pause) does he look kind of like a human?
Right?
C: yeah
T: and he’s doing some things that firefighters do, right? So, so what’s the main idea there
Car: helping firefighters and ()
T: ‘kay, so ASH is this humanoid robot that is helping humans, firefighters right? To be what=are they, is it helping to make their lives easier or safer?
C: easier
Car: easier //and safer
D: ooh
T: easier and safer?
Car: mm
→T: how’s it making their lives easier
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form of a question (“Does he look kind of like a human?”), adding the tag, “Right?” at the end. She asked two more assertive questions using tags in lines 6 and 9-10 (“and he’s doing some things that firefighters do, right?” and “’kay, so ASH is this humanoid robot that is helping humans, firefighters right?”). The tag questions function as a way to explain the essential purposes of the robot, telling students the main ideas – and affirming Carter’s statements. In this context of error correction, Heather was quick to ensure that the students hear primary characteristics of the robot, thus leading them toward the main ideas of the section of text, the lesson’s goal.

She then revisited an earlier point made when reading the introductory paragraph about robots helping humans’ lives become easier and safer, asking whether this robot is “helping to make their lives easier or safer” (emphasis added). This question, although eliciting student ideas about the text, asserts that the qualifier easier is dichotomously opposed to safer. Collin chooses easier, yet Carter resists the dichotomy, saying that the robot is making life both easier and safer for the firefighters. His response is not accepted, but is instead questioned in line 15 (“easier and safer?”). Heather continued by asking, “How’s it making their lives easier,” with falling intonation. This question, when examined devoid of context, appears to be merely asking students to justify their claims. However it follows a series of assertions by the teacher that convey that only one of the two alternatives is plausible, thus indicating that it may be doing something more. In order to fully understand this question as an assertion, the subsequent discourse provides some evidence. First, Collin begins to reason as to why a robot might make firefighters’ lives easier.

18  C: well, they don’t have to like um, they don’t have to go in the
19  real firefighters
20  T: okay do you think that that’s something that’s easier? Or more –
21  safer ’cause
Again, instead of accepting Collin’s reasoning, she questions it (“okay do you think that that’s something that’s easier? Or more – safer”). Carter understands the two alternatives posed in this question as acting within the context of error correction and interrupts Heather saying, “safer.” Koshik (2008) claims that if teachers offer two alternatives when engaging in correction, the preferred answer is typically the second alternative. Carter, who has likely learned Koshik’s heuristic, decided that the second alternative was probably the desired response. Koshik writes:

> We have seen that, when alternative questions are used to initiate error correction, the order of the two alternatives is significant. The first alternative targets a trouble source, either by repeating a portion of the student’s prior talk or reading a portion of the student’s text, calling it into question and conveying that it should be reconsidered; the second offers the candidate correction. We have also seen that participants orient to this ordering as canonical by treating the second alternative as the preferred one. (p. 132)

The last sentence described Carter’s actions. He is oriented to this ordering as canonical and treats the second alternative as the preferred one. What Carter does when he changes his mind – from accepting both alternatives to confirming the second alternative – is precisely what McDermott and Raley (2011) mean when they say, “People enact and enforce the contexts in which and by which they reflexively organize their next behavior” (p. 374). When the context created by the participants as one in which the correct answer is the primary commodity, the students will reflexively organize their behavior in such a way that will increase their chances at attaining that commodity.

In the talk that follows, Heather guided them toward examining the details of the text that provide evidence toward safety as an important idea.
Heather responded to the students’ contributions by asking whether “it’s easier for a robot to be in that situation than a human?” (lines 35-36). Both students persisted in their thinking and responded that it does. She did not immediately correct their claims that the robot helps make lives easier, but did so when she concluded the discussion, shown below. Thus it can be understood that Heather attempted to guide the students toward the idea that the primary purpose of the robot is to make human firefighters’ lives safer.
Heather’s assertion that the main idea includes safety informs how earlier questions might be understood as ways to guide students toward this particular claim. Heather elicited the students’ ideas about the main idea, and after Collin provided a very broad idea (“helping uh firefighters”), Heather began to write Collin’s ideas and restated them in the form of an assertion with a tag (lines 43-45). She then told the students that there are other details “but the main idea is that he’s helping firefighters fight fires – be, be safe, you know?” This is another assertion with a tag that tells what she thinks is the main idea. In doing so, she revealed her intentions regarding what she wanted the students to say, that the firefighters are making lives safer, despite the students’ suggestions that it could be both.

There are few contexts in which a situation made safer is not also, at least in part, made easier. The very premise of creating safety ensures a sense of ease, for if someone is in an unsafe situation, he or she will certainly be faced with difficulties. Thus, by situating these two terms as semantically opposing, Heather created a discursive context in which this false dichotomy dictated the correctness of the students’ responses, and more, their comprehension of the text. An examination of the text as an artifact adds another layer of understanding to Heather’s actions.

Below is an excerpt of the article, which includes the introductory paragraph and the first section, which is about the robot ASH. It reads:

No matter what they look like, all robots have one thing in common—they help people.

Now scientists are taking some robots one step further. They’re making robots that help keep people safe.

Hot Job

Fighting fires can be dangerous, especially on a ship. That’s where ASH comes in. This robot will soon be battling blazes on U. S. Navy ships and submarines. ASH’s head has
sensors to detect fire. Its “eyes” are cameras that can see through thick smoke. Its high-tech arms can throw chemicals to extinguish flames and carry an injured person to safety. “ASH will perform the most hazardous tasks so that humans are not put in harm’s way,” says Victor Orckhov. He’s working on ASH at Virginia Tech University (bold print in original).

In the introductory paragraph, the final sentence claims that these robots are helping to “keep people safe.” Heather is likely using the text as a formula to guide students toward the main idea of robots being used to ensure safety. This formula includes an introduction that essentially tells the reader what meaning to take away, and Heather has embraced this meaning as the meaning to be described. Thus, her questions are asked with the answer already in mind. However, the two students constructed meaning, meaning that is not erroneous or beyond the text. They understood the robots to be making people’s lives both easier and safer and yet were guided toward only one “correct” meaning.

Another example of how forms of Accountable Talk can become largely overridden by authoritative contexts is in Heather’s lesson with the average group discussing statements related to the novel they were reading. They were trying to decide whether each statement was a fact or an opinion. This lesson presented a forum rife with possibilities for dialogic talk. The very notion of democratic and dialogic discourse is the idea that facts can be contested and challenged, through the development of new knowledge and new understandings, or even novel perspectives given to facts. Despite students’ attempts to embrace tensions within the fact-opinion dichotomy, Heather remained committed to a correct answer, epitomized by her comment in the video stimulated recall that began, “I wanted Lawrence to understand … that he can use context clues (cause and effect) to ‘prove’ the fact. I should have mentioned the cause and effect actions” (HS
Reflecting specifically upon Lawrence’s statement, “You can’t really prove it, but it’s not an opinion,” Heather saw this as an opportunity to think about how she could have better led him to the correct answer, rather than considering the possibility that Lawrence’s comment could have sparked a multiple meaning-filled, dialogic conversation about text. Because she wanted him to understand why his challenge to the issue was unworthy of debate, we see how authority was presumed to reside within the teacher in terms of what counts as knowledge and whose agenda is privileged, as well as within the assumption that fact and opinion is a dichotomous realm between which kids need to correctly distinguish. Disconfirming evidence suggests that Heather made some moves to transfer the responsibility of thought to the students, holding students accountable to their claims. In posing questions such as, “I don’t know. What do you guys think?” and “Does everybody agree with that?” and “So how does that support your idea that it’s an opinion and not a fact?” she held students accountable to each other and the ideas presented, as well as to rigorous thinking and accurate knowledge. In fact, this lesson had the second highest rate of accountable talk questions of all of Heather’s lessons, and even of all three teachers’ lessons. It was second only to a short lesson in which Heather primarily asked the students to make predictions about upcoming events and to support those predictions with evidence.

Although Heather disagreed with the idea that one correct interpretation of text exists, her discourse suggested otherwise, creating a tension between her espoused ideals about text and her practice. Despite Heather’s lessons that were rich sites for dialogic meanings (i.e., fact-opinion, theme, even summarization) and despite the fact that she told students that two different summaries could be “both equally good” (HS Interview Transcript), students were led to a single meaning, as confirmed by Heather: “I would say that that’s what makes it tricky though is
because it’s way easier for kids if you can give them a black and white answer…and I think that’s what makes reading comprehension so tricky in teaching, even summarizing so tricky because—… and I think that in my group maybe I made the kids feel like there was one way to write a summary” (HS Interview Transcript). Teachers were caught in the tension regarding the role of the text and what comprehension means.

**Assertive Accountable Talk with students with LD.** In order to understand how Assertive Accountable Questions functioned with students with LD, I chose case examples from Sharon and Kristin. Heather did not pose Assertive Accountable Questions with Nathan, her student with LD. These cases typify the interactions between the teachers and the students. Importantly, these interactions do not differ in significant ways from the Assertive Accountable Questions posed to students without LD. What can be learned from these examples is that the context in which the questions are posed helps to indicate the extent to which they mediate student learning.

**Sharon and Megan.** In the first excerpt, Sharon and her two students with LD were discussing a chapter of *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*. The conversation about the chapter’s plot took a slight diversion as the three interlocutors enter into a discussion about hypothetical events. A few turns before this excerpt began, Sharon had posed the question, “Would you go [look for the aspirin] if you were Ralph?” In this book, Ralph was a mouse who had befriended a young boy named Keith. Keith would give Ralph his leftover food until he fell ill. Keith’s parents were unable to go out and get him some aspirin, and Ralph took it upon himself to go out in search of aspirin, in part because he cared about Keith and in part because he wanted Keith to feel better so he could continue to bring food to his family. Garrett responded to Sharon’s question that he probably would go look for an aspirin if he were Ralph. She asked him why, and he responded:
As described in the chapter prior, at times, Accountable Talk came after Sharon’s questions that encouraged students to engage with text in ways beyond literal meanings. Here, Garrett justified his claim that he would go out to look for an aspirin for Keith because his actions would help not only Keith (lines 1 and 2) but also to help the other mice (lines 8 and 9). Garrett placed himself inside the character’s actions, understanding Ralph’s motivations and the broader contextualization of the plot. Beyond this talk that reflects Accountability to Rigorous Thinking, more conjecturing and theorizing about what could have happened in the plot ensued. Megan then addressed Garrett directly, an act that rarely happened across all of the groups, especially with the teacher present. And interestingly, she did so by challenging Garrett’s justification of his claim.

In Megan’s challenge, she imagined more than just the character’s motivation, as Garrett had done. She was able to place herself within the hypothetical realm of “what if” and theorized that because the boy and his family would not be staying at the hotel forever, the food that Ralph would bring would not last, so it would not matter if it stopped now or then. Here, Megan had taken reading comprehension to a level at which she questioned the motivations of a character, given the larger context of the book’s storyline, rather than merely inferring underlying thoughts based on more proximal events. Sharon’s initial question of “Would you go if you were Ralph?”
allowed her to imagine such possibilities. It opened up a space in which playful thought leveraged new constructions of meaning.

In the next section of the discourse, Sharon engaged in Megan’s realm of playful thought. She added to her line of thinking, playing with hypothetical ideas and suggesting additional considerations for an alternate storyline, as evidenced by the phrase below, “maybe they could” (line 14). Megan and Sharon then took more turns of discourse to hypothesize what the characters *could* do.

In asking, “but how are the mice gonna get into a plastic container” (line 22), Sharon challenged Megan by holding her accountable to rigorous thinking. In doing so, Sharon also suggested that there was an error in Megan’s thinking by pressing her to consider the extent to which her alternate storyline planning was plausible. Megan responded with her reasoning, as she continued to imagine an alternate set of events.
Megan built her argument that a plastic container to store food could in fact be used by the mice, despite Sharon’s assertion that it couldn’t. It was precisely Sharon’s Assertive Accountable Question, “but how are the mice gonna get into a plastic container” (line 22) that asked her to do so. Megan leveraged prior events to create new future meaning, given the present understandings, an *authentic* process of anticipation, as opposed to the inauthentic task of making predictions. She recalled Keith and Ralph’s agreement earlier in the story, that Ralph could ride the motorcycle at night and Keith could play with it by day, and thought it similar to an arrangement that hypothetically could be made with the food. Megan based her reasoning on previous exchanges between the characters in the book, unsolicited, thus exhibiting both accountability to accurate knowledge (i.e., the events prior in the text) and accountability to rigorous thinking (i.e., reasoning that past behavior might be used to predict future behavior).

And again, Sharon posed an Assertive Accountable Question to Megan, asking her to justify her claims while simultaneously suggesting there was an error in her reasoning (i.e, “Ah, but wouldn’t it go bad?”, line 33). It functions precisely as it was intended, doing the work of both an assertion and a request for Megan’s account of her ideas, as Megan responded with, “yes, I mean like common food like grapes, strawberries”. Although it is unclear whether Megan thought that fruit could be stored in an open plastic container without going bad, or whether this was the kind of food that would go bad, Sharon accepted her reasoning and continued with a question about the story’s plot. It is as if the purpose of her questions have been fulfilled, to have Megan make justifications for her claims, which came as a result of Megan’s initiative of an imagined storyline. Here, the text was not the object of discussion, but rather reasoning and engaging in possibilities beyond the text became the discursive goal. Entering into a playful
realm in which new ideas could be tried on came as a result of Sharon’s hypothetical question, “Would you go if you were Ralph,” and the realm was sustained by her Assertive Accountable Questions.

Sharon asked Megan Assertive Accountable Questions in other contexts and lessons, but the contexts were not quite so imaginative and dialogic. Instead, in other lessons, contexts were imbued with notions that correct meaning is not imagined, but found directly within the text. In the first example of this, Sharon asked Megan and Garrett to look back in a section of text and “find evidence of how Ralph is feeling right now.” In the story, Ralph, the mouse, had just ridden Keith’s motorcycle off of the nightstand and into the wastebasket. Keith is carrying the wastebasket with Ralph inside. Garrett responded to Sharon’s question first, choosing the sentence, “Ralph’s heart raced like a motor.” Sharon probed him for his reasoning, and Megan also interjected.

1 G: Um, Ralph’s heart raced like a motor
2 T: ooh. So when your heart races, how does - how are you feeling?
3 M: [uh:
4 G: [scared and nervous
5 M: scared, adventurous, sad
6 G: [no, scared and nervous
7 T: [no, not sad
8 M: scared and nervous
9 T: scared and nervous? Okay, Megan, what’s [your sentence
10 G: [I don’t think it’s
11 adventurous
12 M: U:m he wished he had not eaten so much - oh wait. If he had been if he hadn’t been so greedy, the core would have been thicker and he would have been thinner.
13 T: and so how does that sentence tell how he feels
14 M: he feels sad about being greedy?
15 T: mm:
16 G: uh
17 M: [or he feels
18 →T: [does it say that?
19 M: no, he either feels sad or: um (.) guilty
20 T: ’Kay. How ‘bout another sentence?
At the beginning of this excerpt, the overlapping talk indexes the dialogic nature of ideas being consistently presented, considered, and challenged. Megan’s suggestion that a racing heart signals the feelings of being scared, adventurous, and sad was challenged by both Sharon and Garrett. Sharon first responded to Megan by saying, “no, not sad (line 7),” and Garrett later interjected his opinion, “I don’t think it’s adventurous.” Garrett was not given the opportunity to reason why, in part because Sharon had just asked Megan for her sentence (line 9). Megan then read a sentence from the text and Sharon asked her to explain her thinking, just as had happened with Garrett. However, this time, rather than overlapping talk following the student response, a lull occurred. Sharon’s extended “mm” and Garrett’s “uh” signaled to Megan a need for repair or clarification. Just as Megan began to offer an alternative, saying, “or he feels,” Sharon asked, “Does it say that?” (line 20). This question not only challenged Megan to provide a justification, but it also challenged her reasoning, asserting that the text did not say that, as a reverse polarity question. The referent that in Sharon’s question is not about the sentence which Megan read; the text certainly says what she read, but it is rather about Megan’s claim that Ralph felt sad about being greedy. Sharon’s Assertive Accountable Question functioned as both an assertion, as evidenced by Megan’s response “no,” as well as a probe for accountability to the text. However, the tension in this exchange lies in the fact that Megan had already accounted to the text; the problem was not in the evidence provided, but rather in Megan’s interpretation of it.

Interestingly, the text in fact does say that. In the chapter prior, the author uses the word sad more than once to depict Ralph’s feelings surrounding his circumstances of being trapped in the metal wastebasket, where he remained during the conversation here regarding Ralph’s feelings (Cleary, 1965, p. 24). Megan’s inference could have been assuredly supported by the text, but instead was questioned in such a way that suggested the text could not support it.
Asking whether the text stated Megan’s claim is a direct contradiction to the original object of the discourse, which was to infer how Ralph was feeling based on evidence from the text. For the very definition of an inference is the notion that it is not explicitly stated in the text but is an idea formulated from it. Megan had provided evidence from the text (i.e., “If he hadn’t been so greedy, the core would have been thicker and he would have been thinner”). Megan recognized that Ralph’s attempts at hiding under the apple core were proving ineffective and that Ralph was regretting his actions of eating from the apple core. She inferred that he was sad, but then after Sharon’s challenge, refined her thinking to say he was feeling guilty (line 21), a response to which Sharon accepted, as indicated by her directed shift in line 22 (“’kay. How ‘bout another sentence?”).

The text was considered to be the authority on whether Ralph was feeling sad, guilty, scared, nervous, or adventurous. Although inferences are inherently derived from text, they are creations that grow out of interactions between the text and the reader. Sharon’s Assertive Accountable Question “Did it say that?” functioned as a way to tell Megan that the text did not say what she had claimed, removing Megan’s reasoning from the text-reader interaction of an inference.

One final exchange in which Sharon used an Assertive Accountable Question with Megan occurred in the context of anticipating future events in the story, a difficulty for Megan, as previously described. Sharon asked the students generally what they wanted to find out in the text they were about to read. Megan responded with a question that contained a future event, that Ralph’s relatives wanted to ride the motorcycle (Cleary, 1965), and Sharon responded with a question that both asserts and elicits accountability to accurate knowledge.

1 T: alright. So what do you wanna find out what ha – what do you
2 wanna find out? As we read on
M: u:m. Does Ralph have a sister that is going to lose – I mean a brother that is going to try and ride the motorcycle and then ( )
→T: So usually when we predict, we predict off of what we read so far. Where is that prediction coming from.
M: A silly prediction

Megan understood Sharon’s question, “Where is that prediction coming from” (line 7) to imply that she has made a mistake in her response. First, the statement immediately preceding the question, “So usually when we predict, we predict off of what we read so far” (line 6) functions to identify what is problematic about Megan’s response, that she had not based her response off of what was already read. However, Megan had already read, or heard read, the book from start to finish. Sharon’s use of the deixic word “we” in line 6 includes Megan into the group, but excludes her circumstances as an individual within the group, one who does not fit the experiences of the rest. Instead, the official position of the group is that the entirety of the book had not yet been read, a position that Megan is expected to attempt to fulfill. Sharon indicated that Megan’s response was problematic, but what is problematic is that the question ignores the fact that Megan does not fit the official position, but has already read the book. Below, Megan attempted again to anticipate future events while pretending she hadn’t already read the book.

T: uh okay, let’s get, let’s get more into what we’ve read so far
M: okay
T: and we’re asking questions now, we’re not predicting. What do you wanna know as you read on?
M: I wanna know if Keith’s dad returns with the aspirin jar?
T: (.) Again, you’re – [you’re pulling things out of the air
M: [That’s that’s. No, that’s in
T: His dad’s not. We haven’t even talked about dad yet, so you’re stepping ahead of us. What do you wanna know, G?

Again, Megan responded by anticipating a future event by saying, “I wanna know if Keith’s dad returns with the aspirin jar” (line 13). This is in reference to an event that occurs several chapters later, when Keith’s dad goes to look for aspirin when Keith gets sick. So, in anticipating future
events in the story, Megan based her prediction on information from the text, even though it was future and not prior text, and yet, Sharon told her she was “pulling things out of the air” (line 14). Megan tried to claim that she did base her anticipation off of the text, but Sharon corrected her to say that Keith’s dad hasn’t been introduced yet.

With Megan, Sharon used Assertive Accountable Questions for a variety of purposes and toward multiple functions. In the first example, she challenged Megan’s thinking within the context of imagining alternative events in the story. This imagining was followed by the leading question, “Would you go if you were Ralph?” The students were encouraged to place themselves in the text. In contrast, the second and third examples showed how the reader, Megan, was separated from the text, with the text being the authoritative understanding. Megan’s difficulty in responding correctly came in part because the questions were not designed to consider her as a reader.

**Kristin and Samantha.** In the middle of Kristin’s instructional cycle, she determined that her students in both groups needed help with summaries, based on their informal assessments. For one summary lesson, Kristin used the very same text with both her low and average groups. Her goal was also consistent in both groups, that the students would improve their comprehension by summarizing sections of the text. On the day that Kristin held the lesson with her low group, three students had to leave for instruction outside of the classroom because of a change in schedule: two students with learning disabilities and one English language learner. The following week, she conducted the summary lesson with those three students by themselves. Thus, this lesson occurred in three iterations with three different groups of students: the average group, low group, and the three students from the low group.
Table 16 shows that of the three lessons, Kristin posed questions in general at the highest rate (3.4 per minute) with the low three students, compared to 1.8 per minute with the low group and 2.3 questions per minute with the average group. As previously discussed, Kristin’s average percentage of Assertive Questions was similar with both her average and low groups across all of her lessons. In this lesson, the percentage of Assertive Questions out of total questions was the lowest with the low three students group and was the highest with the average group. This lesson is the same lesson presented in the previous findings chapter that showed it as the lesson with the highest percentage of Assertive Questions in both groups out of all the other lessons. (The lesson with the low three students was not presented in the previous chapter).

Table 16

*Features of Questions in Kristin’s Three Summary Lessons*

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Average Feb. 14</th>
<th>Low Feb. 15</th>
<th>Low 3 Students Feb. 21</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson Length</strong></td>
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<td>1:06:23</td>
<td>37:08</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Questions Per Lesson</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Number of Questions per Minute</strong></td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertive Questions</strong></td>
<td>34 (44%)</td>
<td>49 (40%)</td>
<td>44 (35%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(Percentage of Total Questions) per Lesson</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountable Talk Questions</strong></td>
<td>8 (10%)</td>
<td>13 (11%)</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(Percentage of Total Questions) per Lesson</strong></td>
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*Note.* The lesson with the three students is included in this analysis, but is excluded from other analyses.

In the lesson with the three low students, which included the two students with LD and one student who was an English language learner, Kristin posed six Assertive Accountable
Questions. Three were posed to Keegan, the student who is an English language learner, and three were posed to Samantha, a student with LD. The students were working on summarization skills, and in this excerpt, Kristin asked questions to keep Samantha accountable to the learning community, as well as to accurate knowledge, while simultaneously making an assertion.

The excerpt began with Kristin asking for examples of how the volcano mentioned in the article, Kilauea, is dangerous. Asking for examples came after Kristin declared danger as a main point. Audrey provided a response, and Kristin asked multiple consecutive follow-up questions.

Her final question is posed to Samantha, and Samantha responded by asking for clarification.

A common thread that runs through the needs of individuals with learning disabilities is that of clarity. Students may have difficulty processing information due to speed, complexity, etc. (Bender, 2004). The focus of the talk presented here moved quite quickly, at the teacher’s discretion, going from an overall goal of summarization to providing details, to then thinking about cause and effect relationships. After Audrey mentioned the volcano’s heat as an example of its dangerousness, Kristin asked, “So what happens as a result of that? That Kilauea’s very dangerous?” (line 10). Moving back away from the example of heat to a more macro idea, the danger associated with the volcano, Kristin switched the topic of conversation yet again. It is thus unsurprising that Samantha responded with a need for repair, asking, “(result) of what?”
Although Kristin described her questioning techniques as being used to manage students’ behavior and attention at times, it may not be the case that Samantha was not paying attention.

The processing demands in this exchange are great, given the abrupt changes in topic and the multiple, repeated questions. Therefore, it is likely that Samantha needed clarification about what Kristin was asking.

Kristin responded with a technique that she described during a semi-structured interview, that of asking students to restate or rephrase each other.

14 T: Can you ask maybe someone else what the question was?
15 S: What was the question?

To Kristin, this practice encourages attentive listening among the students, and offers additional opportunities for comprehension of an idea through repetition and paraphrasing. It maintains elements of Accountable to the Learning Community, as students are encouraged to listen and build upon each other’s ideas. As previously discussed, Kristin described her intentions of this technique as follows:

KS: um and I do it across all subject areas. I don’t like to talk at-teach a lot; I like to ask questions, um, and then I also like to have um, if I know a kid’s not understanding it, I like to have them rephrase what another child said to see if – even if they didn’t know it right off the bat, could they repeat what someone else said, were they listening,

Amy: yeah

KS: so, if they’re not understanding it from me, maybe they’re understanding it from a peer a little bit better, and then they can kind of just rephrase or repeat what a peer said, so that’s another way I informally check to see if kids are listening, if they’re paying attention, even if I know they may not be understanding the content fully

Amy: mm hm

KS: were they listening and trying, attempting to understand

Amy: right

KS: so, that’s a way that I informally assess whether kids are kind of on task and doing what they’re supposed to and um whether, and then that’s interesting too because sometimes I realize that as a result of that, that it might not be that they’re not uh. That my delivery isn’t good but that they just needed um, I don’t know, I’ve lost, I’m losing my train of thought right now, um, but they needed it rephrased in a different way by someone else, they needed to hear it from someone else or hear it um, approached from a different angle or what-not, so (-hh) I don’t know (KS Interview Transcript)
Kristin’s meta-discourse gives insight into her perspectives of how discourse functions within interaction. Listening to peers and maintaining attention to the conversation is a priority, and can be measured by the extent to which one person’s idea can be adequately repeated or rephrased by another. It was the responsibility of the student to attend so as to attempt to comprehend, suggesting that a breakdown in comprehension resulted from inattention. Further, Kristin described processes of communication, more specifically, her talk, as “delivery.” This lends insight to her conceptualization of teaching and learning, that talk delivers meaning, from one interlocutor to another, similar to the conduit metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981). Additionally, she equated talking at with teaching. Although students were held accountable to the learning community by Kristin’s encouragement of rephrasing each other, meaning was something to be received by the deliverer, and understood univocally (Wertsch & Toma, 1995)

In asking, “Can you ask maybe someone else what the question was?” (line 14), Kristin held Samantha accountable to the learning community, but she also asserted a certain authority. This question does not ask for a yes or no response, as the form of the question might do in other contexts, but it tells Samantha what to do in the next discursive slot. Just as Kristin maintained control over the focus of the talk, she maintained control over how students account for their own discursive participation. The fact that this Assertive Accountable Question functions as a participation management tool, used by the authority of the teacher, undermines efforts toward transferring the discursive responsibility to the community. After Samantha asked Audrey to repeat the question, Audrey responded with a question that was not Kristin’s most recent question (line 16). Audrey too had not correctly remembered Kristin’s question, thus requiring further need for repair.

16  A: What makes Kilauea so dangerous?
17  S: which can reach a scorching 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. Kilauea also
18     spits out poisonous gases that can burn your eyes and throat.
Okay, that was my question before—what are some specific dangers, my next question though was so what so what happens as a result of that? Because Kilauea’s so dangerous?

Although Samantha was able to successfully provide a feature that “makes Kilauea so dangerous,” as Audrey had suggested, Kristin needed further repair because it became apparent that Audrey also struggled to restate Kristin’s most recent question. It seems as though both Audrey and Samantha were bogged down by the twists and turns of the discourse, unable to process the information, thus requiring repair from both the students and the teacher. To scaffold the students’ response to her question, Kristin used a Designedly Incomplete Utterance (DIU, Koshik, 2002a), in which one speaker begins a statement for another, prompting the listener to complete the statement. In line 21, Kristin uses a DIU as a way to structure Samantha’s response by saying, “Because Kilauea’s so dangerous?” Samantha then provided a response that suggests a reasonable effect resulting from Kilauea’s dangers but creates another context for error correction.

... Because Kilauea’s so dangerous?
Um not very many people, um, um use— not — A lot of people like it, but they don’t want to get too close to it

→T: Can you show me where it says that in the text?
S: It doesn’t

T: Okay, so we always want to use the text.

In yet another effort to elicit a successful response from Samantha, Kristin held her accountable to accurate knowledge while also asserting that she had again made an error, saying, “Can you show me where it says that in the text?” (line 24). This question functions as a prompt to direct Samantha’s attention to the necessity of using the text to answer questions, from Kristin’s perspective, despite the fact that Samantha gave a logical and reasoned conjecture as to what might result from a dangerous volcano. Samantha responded immediately in saying, “It doesn’t” (line 25), suggesting that she was fully aware that her response was not taken from the
text. In other words, she did not need to spend time searching the text in order to follow Kristin’s directive, a directive that functions as a way to point to Samantha’s error. Kristin went on to prompt Samantha to look in the text in order to answer her question through a series of assertive questions. After three additional turns, Samantha finally provided an acceptable response about how the volcano photographer has to protect himself from the dangers of the volcano.

Because Kristin suggested that “we always want to use the text” (line 26), without specifying the context, the text was privileged over Samantha’s inference. It is implied here that the correct answers, or knowledge, is located within the text and thus outside of Samantha. So to successfully engage in meaning-making processes in this context of answering the teacher’s questions about the text during a lesson devoted to summarizing, students were discouraged from using their own knowledge. Accountability to accurate knowledge means that when making a claim, speakers “try to be as specific and accurate as possible, not just saying anything that comes to mind” (Michaels, O’Connor, Hall, & Resnick, 2010). Samantha appeared to be saying just something that came to mind, and in this example, she was held accountable to accurate knowledge, but less as a way to provide evidence for her claim and more a way to correctly answer the teacher’s question. When Kristin asked Samantha, “Can you show me where it says that in the text?” she was alerting Samantha of her misuse of knowledge, namely, her own reasoning, as preferred in this context. This question functions as a way to signal the importance of the text when making meaning in the discursive space. It also implies that correctly answering the teacher’s question, based on information presented in the text, is the goal of the discourse, rather than theorizing and inferring meaning.

An interesting convergence of contexts created the need for Samantha’s “errors” to be corrected: the orientation to the task of summarization, the reliance on the text to privilege
meaning, and the lack of clarity around the discursive foci. Although accountability to accurate knowledge and to the information presented in the text is important in the summarization process, the task of summarizing in this lesson, as well as the other summarization lessons, began from a context of error correction. Students had not written adequate summaries on their informal reading assessments and were thus in need of remediation. Because of this, Kristin was more likely to identify ways to remediate and delimit how summaries needed to be enacted by the students, thus reminding them, “we always want to use the text.” This created a space in which background knowledge essentially was not allowed. Yet background knowledge plays a very important role in how texts are understood, especially during the task of summarization.

Comprehending text involves meaning construction and not merely meaning acquisition (Duke & Carlisle, 2011). Kintsch (2007) describes schema theory and the ways in which readers use general knowledge, personal experiences, and word meanings to form mental representations of text. When reading text, mental representations are formed based upon the reader’s knowledge and experiences, creating schema structures to form clusters of information with which new information can readily be adapted. Schema structures are fluid, not static or fixed, and are context-dependent. It has been estimated that when students’ comprehension is measured based upon their background knowledge of the topic, their scores have the potential to improve by more than 50% (p. 327). This confirms the intertwined relationship between the reader and the text in reading comprehension. Because background knowledge is integral to comprehension, it is also thus integral to synthesizing information, or in this case, summarizing. The process of synthesizing information in order to demonstrate text comprehension is not unidirectional; that is, comprehension is as much a function of synthesizing information as summarizing information is a function of comprehension (Kintch, 2007).
If students are to “only use the text” when summarizing, then they neglect a crucial element of comprehension, and the text becomes the primary object to be acquired, rather than comprehension to be constructed. In such a context, the use of background knowledge is an error. When the reader does not have retrieval structures, or schema, related to the text, the process of forming a macrostructure, or main idea, is not automatic or inherent during comprehension (Kintsch, 2007). One additional layer that created the need to correct Samantha’s errors was the fact that this episode of talk began with a macro idea, a main point that works toward the overall goal of summarization (“So we find out that Kilauea is dangerous, right?”). However then, Kristin asked for details (“What are some examples of it being dangerous?”) and soon after asked for a cause and effect relationship.

**Summaries, Main Ideas, and Details**

During lessons devoted to summaries, it was not uncommon for both Kristin and Heather to ask for “examples,” “details,” or “specifics” related to the text, whether they were instructing their low or average group. This practice oftentimes negated their efforts at reinforcing “main,” “big,” “overall,” or “general” ideas. In some cases, after a student provided a big idea, the teacher would ask for detailed information. In this part of my analysis, I move away from examining teachers’ individual utterances that function as Assertive Accountable Questions to a broader understanding of how seemingly Accountable Talk practices can be juxtaposed with assertive and authoritative practices. Accountability to Accurate Knowledge requires that students accurately and adequately comprehend the text, so as to use that information to support their ideas. But as we will see, summarization as a manufactured comprehension skill to be mastered, with little instruction on *how* to summarize, created a space in which the teachers did not recognize when students did in fact state main ideas. The teachers then probed for details,
and thus assertive questions regarding summarization became necessary in order to redirect the discussion. Instead of holding students accountable to accurate knowledge, the teachers asked questions that held them accountable to the text, which overrode the object.

Kristin had determined that her students needed work with summarization because of their performance on the DRA. In one conversation after the average group’s last lesson of the cycle, Kristin lamented to me how hard it was to teach summaries. She was hoping to improve their scores on the DRA, but the summary part of the DRA required a certain level of detail. In my field notes, I wrote: “DRA requires more detail than something more general, or a really good summary, in her words. She stated, ‘Students might write a really good summary but do bad on the DRA because it asks for more detail’” (KS 2-21 Notes and OP). The distinction regarding what constituted an adequate amount or level of detail in a summary was not explicitly outlined for the students. They were merely told to find main ideas, only to then be asked to provide more detail.

In this section, I examine excerpts from Kristin’s three Hot Shots lessons described above with the average group, low group, and low three students group. Again, in this lesson, the students read and discussed a section of the article about the volcano’s dangers and the precautions the photographer had to take in capturing the volcano through his photographs. In all three lessons, the teacher used the word “specifics” or “details” when discussing the section. And in all three lessons, she asked for specifics with respect to the same content of text – dangers of the volcano and precautions the photographer had to take. What is interesting in these cases is that the students’ initial response was a big idea, but the teacher probed for specifics. In the third lesson taught by Kristin, which was with the three low students, Kristin seemed to catch herself while suggesting they think about specifics and switched gears, telling them that they should
give specifics when doing a retell and not a summary. In this section, I will examine an excerpt of talk from each of the three lessons that includes discussion from the same section of the text.

First, I examine the teacher-student talk in the average group, which took place first chronologically. Kristin started by telling the students to underline key information from a section of text that they might want to include in their summary. The text was divided into three main sections. Underlining text was a tool that Kristin frequently used in her lessons as a way to encourage text-focused understandings and discussion. She then reminded them to maintain their focus on the overall topic of the Hot Shots article, which was Lewis, the photographer, and his photography. As the students were working, Kristin looked around at various students’ writing.

She encountered Neal individually:

1 T: So why did you underline this?
2 N: Because, um, like it’s not about him, but it like tells how
dangerous the volcano can be.
3 T: okay so how could you summarize all of this information that they
said into like one sentence, do you think?
4 N: Um, you could just, um, the, how do you say that mountain’s name?
5 T: Kilauea
6 N: yeah, Kilauea has- has um has killed five people since 1983 ()
and um and taken away 200 homes.
8 T: [Okay, so could you summarize the section even more by just
saying that Kilauea has a history of being a very dangerous
volcano? Do you think you need those facts in there about the
homes and how many people it’s killed? Maybe not a summary, in a
retell you might wanna include those things, but in a summary
again you wanna really condense the information so you can
summarize that by saying, this is a really dangerous job because
it has a history of being a very um
9 H: [dangerous
10 T: [dangerous volcano, right?
11 H: For instance
12 T: So we might want to understand that it can be dangerous. It can
be a very dangerous [volcano
13 H: [but we don’t need to have
14 T: but we don’t need the specific facts that they give us about how
dangerous it is. Mm hm?
15 E: Um at times he gets within inches of bubbling lava, which can
reach a scorching two thousand degrees Fahrenheit.
T: good so good so we’re underlining specific dangers now. So it’s really hot, right? And he gets really close to it. What else is dangerous about it? So that’s one thing that’s dangerous=Vanessa, what’s another thing that’s dangerous about this volcano?

After Kristin asked Neal for justification as to why he underlined a part of the text (line 1), Neal responded with a superordinate idea, that “it tells how dangerous the volcano can be.” Then, Kristin asked him to summarize the section, and Neal responded with a detailed fact. Kristin then suggested a summary statement that directly reflected Neal’s initial response, in saying, “Could you summarize the section even more by just saying that Kilauea has a history of being a dangerous volcano” (lines 11-13). This functions as an Assertive Question that suggests a summary statement to Neal, one that reminds him of his initial idea. She immediately followed up with another assertion, “Do you think you need those facts in there about how many people it has killed?” (lines 13-14). Kristin answered her own assertive question by saying, “maybe not in a summary.” In line 24, Hanson began to add that “we don’t need to have,” and Kristin follows up by stating “we don’t need the specific facts that they give us about how dangerous it is” (lines 25-26). Here, Kristin’s assertive question functioned as a way to correct Neal’s error of stating a detail and re-harness his initial response regarding the volcano’s danger. It also functioned to tell Neal the answer.

Curiously though, after Elise read something she underlined, Kristin responded, “Good, so we’re underlining specific dangers now” (line 29), and the conversation continued about specific dangers, even though she had just told the group that they didn’t need specific facts about how dangerous the volcano is. This is a major and startling contradiction. The focus of the rest of the conversation is on specific dangers and precautions that the photographer takes.

Asking students to underline important information is potentially very confusing for the students. Their responses to the teacher were all grounded in and mediated by what they
underlined. Synthesizing information into a superordinate term or phrase might require the students to come up with a new superordinate term that was not mentioned in the text. Plus, macropropositions are not always given in sections of text (Duffelmeyer & Duffelmeyer, 1989; Horning, 1987; Kintsch, 2007; Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, and Pollini, 2009). So students are possibly underlining details.

In the discussion with the low group regarding the same section of text, which was the second iteration of the lesson, striking similarities can be seen. A student provided a superordinate idea, then Kristin asked for specifics, and the excerpt ends with Kristin suggesting a summary statement by using an Assertive Question.

In this lesson, the teacher began by telling students to go back and select the important parts that they underlined. Bart offered up an idea about the main idea of the section, that “Since
he gets so close, he has to take precautions” (lines 5-6). This is a strong synthesis statement of the section, neglecting only perhaps to mention something about the dangers of Lewis’s job. Just after Bart stated this main idea, the teacher asked the students to underline specific precautions the photographer takes. She later asked for other dangers, in addition to the fact that the volcano reaches 2,000 degrees. The students then wrote down these specific details in their graphic organizers. In fact, after Tanya wrote something, the teacher asked, “Now can you give specific examples of protection he uses?” The students, Bart and Tanya, started out with big ideas, and the teacher probed for more specifics. It is unclear as to what Kristin was hoping to accomplish by asking for specifics after students provided a main idea. It may be that she was hoping to provide confirmation that their main ideas were supported with details; however she had not made her discursive intentions clear. Further, students were not instructed on how to determine importance, or how to differentiate between detail and main idea, a dichotomy that is not as delimited or polar as presented in these lessons.

The following two short exchanges from the segments above with the average group and the low group are strikingly similar.
### Table 17

**Comparison of Average and Low Group Transcripts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Group</th>
<th>Low Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T: So why did you underline this?</td>
<td>T: Alright, so Zenith, what were some important things that you wrote down ()</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N: Because, um, like it’s not about him, but it like tells how dangerous the volcano can be.</td>
<td>T: Okay, so why do you think the writer includes that information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: okay so how could you summarize all of this information that they said into like one sentence, do you think?</td>
<td>Z: to show how dangerous it is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N: Um, you could just, um, the, how do you say that mountain’s name?</td>
<td>T: okay, so could we summarize that by saying, ’Kilauea is- Kilauea is dangerous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Kilauea</td>
<td>T: There you go. That’s a great way to summarize that point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N: yeah, Kilauea has has um has killed five people since 1983 () and um and taken away 200 homes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: // Okay, so could you summarize the section even more by just saying that Kilauea has a history of being a very dangerous volcano?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both lessons, the teacher asked the students to take detailed information from the section and relate it to a broader idea of the section (i.e., “Why did you underline this” and “Why do you think the writer includes that information?”). Both students noted that the detail supports the idea that the volcano is dangerous. Remarkably, students from both groups were able to state the macroproposition of the section after the teacher asked them to think about how the details fit within the larger framework of the text. Additionally, Kristin posed an assertive question to both students to suggest how they might summarize the text, using a designedly incomplete utterance.
with the student in the low group (i.e., “So could we summarize that by saying, ‘Kilauea is?’”) and a directive with the student in the average group (i.e., “So could you summarize the section even more by just saying that Kilauea has a history of being a very dangerous volcano?”). Kristin summarized for the student in the average group to a greater extent than she did for the student in the low group.

With the three low students, Kristin used similar kinds of talk as the other two lessons. The discussion about the section is approximately three times as long as the discussion with the other two groups with multiple interruptions. Here, I highlight the ways in which the teacher asked for specifics following a main idea given by a student, along with other similarities and differences as compared to the other two lessons. The excerpt begins similarly to the short excerpts described above in Table 17, with a student stating a detail, and the teacher asking him to relate it to a broader idea.

1 K: And it’s 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. (pause) Um, this volcano has ()
2 St: Mmm::
3 St: More than two hundred homes.
4 T: So what does that mean about Kilauea
5 St: It’s really hot
6 T: It’s really hot and it’s really?
7 St: [dangerous
8 K: [reaches 2000 degrees [Fahrenheit
9 T: [dangerous. Did you read all the way down
to this, so did you read all of this too?
10 K: yeah
11 T: Did you find out anything more about G Brad Lewis?
12 K: something (in) your eyes? This can burn your eyes
13 T: So how – always think about how does this affect G Brad Lewis and his photography.
14 K: That it’s really dangerous and he could get hurt
15 T: ‘Kay so what does he have to do?
16 T: be careful
17 T: what are some specific ways that he is careful? Go ahead and underline them.
18 ...
19 T: Um, okay so we find out that Kilauea is dangerous, right? So why
don’t you put that as a main point. What are maybe some examples
of it being dangerous? Something we read about, um Audrey what’s one thing.
A: that it can get up to 2000 degrees Fahrenheit
T: Okay so it’s really hot.

... 

T: okay, so we always want to use the text. Okay so why is it
telling us these things about how Kilauea’s dangerous?
[What happens as a result of that,
S: [(I don’t know)
T: related to Lewis and his photography? Can you look in the
paragraph? So it talks about the dangers here. What does it talk
about after that?
S: Lewis takes precautions to try to deal with Kilauea’s many
hazards
T: ‘Kay can you put that in your own words?
S: Lewis um tries to protect himself from all the dangerous things.
T: perfect. So because Kilauea’s so dangerous, Lewis has to take a
lot of precautions, or do many things to protect himself from
those dangers. ‘Kay so can we put that?

[Samantha talks about being tired, and another teacher enters the
room.]

T: ‘Kay so, the effect of that is? And you can include some more
specific things too that he does to protect himself or you could
summarize it kind of by - if we were doing more of a retell -
Kevin look here - if we were doing more of a retell we would
wanna include lots of specific details but we could just
summarize that by saying Kilauea’s very dangerous so Lewis has to
do many things to protect himself and that would be a way to kind
of summarize all that. Yes Jeremy?

Early in this excerpt, after Kristin asked Keegan how the new information he learned affects Lewis and his photography, the following exchange occurs:

K: That it’s really dangerous and he could get hurt
T: ‘Kay so what does he have to do?
K: be careful

This short exchange, which occurs at the beginning of the excerpt, essentially summarizes the whole section. But immediately after this, the T probed for “specific ways he has to be careful” (line 19). After asking a series of a few more detail-oriented questions (e.g., “Why does he have
to wear protective clothing”), then Kristin said, “So we find out that Kilauea is really dangerous, right? So put that as a main point.” After that, she asked for examples of how it is dangerous.

Later, Samantha read a sentence from the text that summed up the whole section in line 39 (“Lewis takes precautions to try to deal with Kilauea’s many hazards.”), but it was not accepted. Instead, the teacher asked her to paraphrase it. Her response is a paraphrased big idea (“Lewis um tries to protect himself from all the dangerous things,” line 42). After Samantha offered this big idea, Kristin “revoiced” (O’Conner & Michaels, 1991) her response, changing the form a bit, and then directed the students to “put that” (line 45). A few lines later, the teacher again suggested to students what they should write: “…we could just summarize it by saying, ‘Kilauea is very dangerous, so Lewis has to protect himself’” (lines 54-56). Kristin caught herself suggesting that they include specifics and then retracted and suggested that they only include specific details if they were doing a retell (line 52). Kristin’s summary of ‘Kilauea is very dangerous, so Lewis has to protect himself’ is very similar to the big ideas that Keegan had offered at the beginning of this excerpt and that Samantha had offered. This suggested summary is also similar to big ideas offered by students in the other groups, shown in Table 18.

Table 18

*Main Ideas Provided by Students during Summary Lesson*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Main Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>“Because, um, it’s not about him, but it tells how dangerous the volcano can be.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bart</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>“I have kind of a thing. Um, since he gets so close and he takes precautions, well he does all that so he takes a lot of precautions for that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenith</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>“to show how dangerous it is?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha, student with LD</td>
<td>Low – 3 students</td>
<td>“Lewis um tries to protect himself from all the dangerous things.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keegan, ELL</td>
<td>Low – 3 students</td>
<td>“That it’s really dangerous and he could get hurt…be careful.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is also interesting to note that in all three lessons, students had identified these big ideas in the beginning of the excerpt, only to have the teacher probe for specific information, and then suggest a summary statement at the end.

To summarize, Kristin’s approaches to teaching students to synthesize information into a summary or main idea of underlining information and asking for specific details contradicted the goal. She didn’t discursively accept students’ offers of big ideas or synthesis statements about the section of text, as indicated by her immediate request for specifics. This often happened toward the beginning of the conversation about the section. In all three lessons, Kristin asserted synthesized ideas for the students, whether through statements or Assertive Questions.

On occasion, Heather similarly probed for details after a student had just provided a big idea when teaching summarization. I provide one example of an interaction with Nathan, the one student in Heather’s low group with LD. I chose this example in order to show similarities across teachers’ questioning practices when the lesson goals are the same. The students were recalling events from the book *Meteor*, by Patricia Polacco. They had read the book, or heard it read, multiple times, and in this lesson, Heather was conducting a group summary. She stood near an easel, while the students sat at a table with a paper containing pictures and main ideas of the book, which they had completed the lesson prior. Heather was asking students to describe the main events of the story, so that she could write their ideas on the easel to create a group summary, as she called it.

In this excerpt, Nathan responded to Heather’s question, “What happened next,” with a statement that synthesized a portion of text. Heather responded by asking if anyone could add to his idea.

1 T: Nathan, what happened next?
Rumors started running around town about the meteor in their front yard? Can anybody add any more to that? Deidra.

After asking if anyone could add to Nathan’s response, the conversation became more specific. Heather asked questions about the events the students were putting forth. She then revoiced the students’ ideas, saying, “kay everyone in town called each other and had different stories to tell, right?” (line 16). Here, Heather summarized their conversation for the students. This summary statement is what she wrote on the easel as part of her group summary. Yet it is not more summarized than Nathan’s initial response of “Rumors started going around town.
about the meteor in their front yard.” As indicated by Heather’s questioning patterns in this excerpt, Nathan’s response did not include information that Heather deemed necessary to include; however, it was a synthesis statement that went unrecognized as such.

These excerpts from Kristin and Heather are further evidence toward the nature of the activity influencing the kinds of talk, as explicated in the previous chapter. The object of summarization was usurped by the object of the text. Asking students to replicate the details of a text may serve to achieve a common understanding about the information of the text, but in these summary lessons, a focus on details overshadowed the instances in which students were stating main ideas. Although underlining information in the text served as a way to familiarize students with the content, it neglected the ways in which the structures of text can or cannot be conducive to generating main ideas.

Text structures play a specific role when the reader is deliberately or naturally generating a main idea. Within various types of text structures, the ability to identify an explicit main idea is different from identifying an implicit one. In other words, locating a topic sentence or a macroproposition is not the same as generating one when none is stated. Additionally, the ability to identify a global main idea, one that encompasses an entire passage of text, requires different skills than identifying local, or within-passage, main ideas (Wang, 2009), which is typically what the students in these lessons were required to do.

Although both Kristin’s and Heather’s catalyst for teaching summary lessons was because of students’ performance on the DRA, an informal reading inventory, Duffelmeyer and Duffelmeyer (1989) found that informal reading inventories are not suitable for assessing the understanding of main idea identification because passages vary in text structure as well as sentence characteristics that contribute to a clear main idea. The two characteristics that the
authors identify to be conducive to identifying or generating a main idea include the presence of a main idea in the passage, whether stated or implied, and passage unity. Horning (1987) reports that whether text propositions are explicitly stated or implied, readers are able to remember both types. Yet when readers are required to make inferences from implicitly stated propositions, the process of generating a macrostructure, or main idea, takes longer and requires more effort.

*Marked texts* refer to texts that include an explicitly stated macroproposition, or big idea. Kintch (2007) describes this process:

> Readers apparently need extra time to figure out the topical status of these sentences when they are not given a linguistic cue…It turned out that the subjects who read the marked texts wrote significantly better summaries than the subjects who read the unmarked texts. Linguistic marking not only allowed readers to process the texts faster but also helped them to write better summaries. Topic marking thus appears to be a powerful means for facilitating macroprocessing. (p. 178-179)

Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, and Pollini (2009) recommend that texts for young students should be purposefully written from a text-processing perspective. The article used in Kristin’s summary lessons, *Hot Shots*, in a Scholastic News magazine, was certainly written with explicit macrostructures, or main ideas. Take, for example, the section of text that was discussed in the examples above:

*Risky Business*

Kilauea may be a popular spot for tourists, but like all active volcanoes, *it can be dangerous*. Lava from the volcano has swallowed more than 200 homes and killed five people since 1983.
Working as close to the action as Lewis does is particularly risky. At times he gets within inches of the bubbling lava, which can reach a scorching 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Kilauea also spits out poisonous gases that can burn your eyes and throat. And when it rains, the steam that rises from the molten lava can be blinding.

Lewis takes precautions to try to deal with Kilauea’s many hazards. He wears heavy-duty clothing that protects him from the heat and carries a device called a respirator to avoid breathing in volcanic fumes. He even chooses his footwear with safety in mind.

“I wear boots with the soles sewn on, not glued, or they would melt off,” he explains. (Modigliani, 2013; bold print in original; italics added)

Each of the three main paragraphs includes an introductory sentence that captures the overarching ideas, which I emphasized using italics. The words dangerous, risky, and precautions, are all superordinate terms that encompass the details that follow. But because students were not made aware of these text structures or even the notion of superordinate and subordinate concepts or terms, they were underlining information haphazardly, thus resulting in misguided discourse.

In this chapter, I hoped to capture the tensions between how the interaction of the text and the reader were un-strategically and inconsistently privileged in the lessons. All three teachers privileged discussion about the text as separate from the reader and from the goals, which will be further discussed in the following chapter. This tension created the need for the teacher to assert her ideas and control the discourse, even when it went counter to her goals. Although they are single utterances, Assertive Accountable Questions were sites of interest that
index the kinds of complexities in teacher-student discourse that work to maintain the location of knowledge within the teacher while maintaining a form that does otherwise.
Chapter 7: Discussion

The Trouble with Seeing the Forest for the Trees when the Text and Test are Ends

In this study, I examined the extent to which three 5th grade teachers’ questioning practices differed across their low and average groups, organized homogenously by reading level, looking especially at accountable talk questions and assertive questions. As discussed in the previous two chapters, my data reveal that the organization of the activity system is associated with teacher questioning practices, as the talk shapes the activity, and the activity shapes the talk. Although previous research has theorized the relationship between activity and dialogic discussion (Applebee et al., 2003; Dewitt & Hohotenstein, 2010), in this study, I showed explicitly how patterns of talk follow strikingly similar trajectories when the teacher is the same and when the activity is the same. Importantly, this implies that it is not merely the students and their varying profiles that determine the nature of teacher questions among low and average groupings.

I also explicated the complexities of form and function, as questions can be designed to elicit accountability from students while also interjecting authority. Assertive questions were proxies for contexts of error correction and authoritative ideologies, and were used at higher rates with the “low” groups, which include students with learning disabilities, across all three teachers. Based on this discrepancy, I conclude that the organization of the learning was such that the semiotic tools available came largely from a context of error correction. The “low” students’ engagement with the text was more likely to be seen as in need of fixing, which is problematic regardless of the reasons for which this came to be. These students were less able to bring their strengths and their individual agency as readers to the reading process, and it was
deemed necessary that their engagement with text be corrected or meaning imposed. An examination of questions as assertions in the context of the episodes of talk, of the lesson, of the activity, and of the teacher’s espoused ideals shows how the teacher works to maintain her position as the gatekeeper of knowledge. A reorganization of the learning would render new tools to become available (Cole & Griffin, 1983).

This study contributes to the field of special education by showing how certain talk moves (i.e., teacher questions) index larger global layers of the instructional interaction. It further examines how disability can be constructed in the learning environment when the text is privileged as the object. In using the concept of Assertive Questions (Koshik, 2005) from the field of Conversation Analysis, I examine authoritative discourse in an educational setting in ways that have not been done prior, especially with respect to students with learning disabilities. Merging the Accountable Talk (Michaels et al., 2010) and Assertive Questions (Koshik, 2005) literature, I have newly identified Assertive Accountable Questions as a category of question that exemplifies the tension inherent in authoritative and dialogic discourse, as theorized by Scott and colleagues (2006). Finally, I contribute to the literature on classroom discourse by presenting a nuanced comparison of teacher talk in low and average groups, one that examines the talk as interacting with other mediational tools within the activity system. This comparison considers factors other than just the organization of the students as potential reasons for differences in talk.

In this chapter, I discuss such implications and possibilities for how the system might be reimagined and reconstructed to allow for access to more dialogic forms of talk for students with learning disabilities, as well as opportunities to display their full capabilities as readers. Importantly, re-situating the way in which the text operates within the activity system can work
to rebuild learning. Instead of being objects, the text, test, talk, and models of student ability are mediational means by which to strategically organize and re-organize the system of learning.

I uncover contradictions and tensions within the discourse and systems of activity so as to identify opportunities for reconstruction. An understanding of an institution’s situated ideals, along with participants’ espoused ideals, provides ways to identify the extent to which those values align with their discursive practices (Tracy, 2005). This allows for an examination of the tensions that imbue the talk. As presented in the chapters prior, tensions existed within the text-reader interaction, resulting in the text being inconsistently and un-strategically privileged over students’ interpretations of it. In this discussion, I explore these tensions both descriptively and theoretically, so as to offer ways in which teachers’ systems might be reorganized. I propose new understandings of how questions might function within activity as an organized system that mutually constitutes the ebbs and flows of dialogic and authoritative discourses. I build upon understandings of teacher questions as tools that mediate and hypermediate learning, as well as revealing the minute to minute ways in which dis/ability is realized through discourse.

**Tensions**

The following are tensions that became most pertinent to my findings. (1) The object of reading comprehension was overshadowed by objects of the text. (2) Similarly, the test was used not as a mediator, but as the outcome. (3) Teachers’ discourse practices were not always aligned to their espoused ideals, as they had described them in their interviews. (4) Finally, these tensions created a context for within-question tensions, in which questions functioned both as elicitations for collaborative, accurate, and cogent reasoning while also conveying an assertion.

**The text as the object.** In the comprehension process, readers create mental models based upon the textbase that is formed, models that are built upon knowledge and experiences
(Kintsch, 2007), and who readers are as cultural beings (Kintsch & Greene, 1978). It is an interactive process, in which multiple voices are brought to bear upon understandings that include how the information might be used, and additionally, how the reader might critically analyze underlying ideologies at work in the text (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Studies have shown the relationship between cultural practices and interpretations of text (Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, & Goetz, 1977; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, & Anderson, 1981), and the reading process is not without a consideration of the reader’s purposes for reading, use, and orientations toward the content.

Within systems of activity, group members work toward a shared object, but this object is often unstated or even unrealized. Although reading comprehension was the stated object in each group, the text became the object. As evidenced by teacher questioning practices, the text was treated as a neutral entity to be obtained. Thus, the act of comprehending was lost in the act of achieving the object of the text. As Engeström (1991) states, “When the text becomes the object, the instrumental resources of the activity are impoverished…” (p. 249), the students’ cultural resources for understanding the text were diminished, as epitomized by Kristin telling Samantha, “We always want to use the text.” In this study, all three teachers’ expectation of the students was to use the text to support their responses. However, in most cases, the responses were not claims or novel ideas constructed by the readers, but rather, they were literal meanings lifted from the text that were provided in service to the teachers’ questions. Students were afforded limited opportunities to make claims, given the activity. Although the text is certainly a valued source of knowledge, in most cases when students were asked to use the text, they were merely finding answers to the teacher’s questions. The text was assumed to hold dichotomous correct meanings, rather than to be a tool for interaction with the reader, the text, and the learning
community. This resulted in an authoritative interactional context and thus authoritative questioning, giving insight about where the location of knowledge was presumed to reside.

Across all three teachers, students in the low groups were prone to a discursive space in which the distribution of knowledge was more likely to be assumed to be within the teacher, as evidenced by the higher rates of assertive questions with those groups. They were also more likely to be asked to account to accurate knowledge while simultaneously being subjected to the teacher’s assertions – three times more likely than were the students in the average group. This suggests that not only was the location of knowledge assumed to reside within the teacher, but it was also assumed to be found in the text, as if the text was a static object to be obtained. In other words, the location of knowledge was not presumed to be located within the students in the low groups.

As explained in the chapter prior, several examples exemplify tensions of how the text was privileged in how students with learning disabilities interpreted it. In saying, “Does it say that?” Sharon challenged Megan’s inference of how the character was feeling, even though she had provided evidence from the text to support her claim. It implied that Megan’s inference was inadequate because the text didn’t “say that,” contradicting the function of an inference and removing Megan’s understandings of how a mouse might feel when he was trapped alive and in plain sight of humans – sad. His life would be likely to end in the near future. It belabors the point to note that the text had in fact mentioned the word sad in previous chapters in reference to how the mouse felt when first landing in the metal wastebasket. Although Sharon was eliciting textual evidence for Megan’s claim, she was also asserting a stance that Megan needed to revise her response. Her question functioned as such, as evidenced by Megan’s revision.
Also, given Megan’s difficulty anticipating future events because she had already heard the book read, making predictions became a manufactured use of the text for her. Suggesting, “Usually when we predict, we predict off of what we’ve read so far,” and “Where is that prediction coming from?” did not consider Megan’s orientation to the book as a reader. This inflexible use of the text required Megan to take a position toward the text that was not her own, but rather the group’s position.

Samantha, another student with LD, attempted to complete Kristin’s designedly incomplete utterance (DIU), “Because Kilauea’s so dangerous?” by responding that people might want to see it but they wouldn’t get too close to it. Kristin held in her mind the way in which she wanted the students to respond and the specific cause and effect relationship she was trying to elicit. Even though Samantha had responded with a reasonable conclusion, Kristin posed not only a directive beginning with “Can you,” but also an indication that her response was not accurate (i.e., “Can you show me where it says that in the text?”). Kristin further told Samantha, “We always want to use the text.” Because Samantha could not foresee the exactitude of what Kristin had in mind when she designed her DIU, she opted to respond by inferring a plausible effect resulting from the volcano’s dangers, likely even based upon what she had read previously that the photographer was allowed into places on the volcano that were off-limits to tourists.

These examples show how the discourse can contradict the comprehension processes or lesson goals and how text can become over-privileged as the ultimate authority on meaning. In analyzing the episodes of talk in which teachers posed assertive accountable questions that pressed for accurate knowledge, I was able to think about what reading comprehension seemed to mean in these spaces. If the text is to be used as an object that has the final say in a correct interpretation of it, students are inevitably going to “get it wrong” at some point in their
engagement with the text. This speaks more to whose and what knowledge is privileged, rather than the whence and how (Klemp, McDermott, Raley, Thibeault, Powell, & Levitin, 2008) of students’ understanding of the text and how it relates to their worlds. When it is the teacher whose knowledge is privileged or when the text is what is privileged, the text then becomes a capsule, and end in itself to be replicated, unchallenged, with one interpretation. Remediation, by way of fixing what is seen to be inherently wrong with the reader, is then the approach that is available to teachers. The teachers in this study had access to the correct interpretation – or at least control over what should be incorrect – and their job was to guide the students to this interpretation. Under this notion of what it means to comprehend, there is almost no choice but for teachers to hold deficit views of students, especially students who engage in true comprehension, relating the text to their social worlds. Luke and colleagues (2011) define reading comprehension “as a lived and institutionally situated social and intellectual practice, rather than exclusively as an internal cognitive operation…Further, ‘meaning-making’ here does not necessarily entail a verification or celebration of literal and inferential meanings, but a critical analyses of their possible origins, motivations and consequences” (p. 6). Across all three teachers’ lessons, the primary goal was a verification of a particular meaning of the text, due to the nature of the activity, especially for students in the low groups.

Consistent with a cultural and historical perspective on reading comprehension, Luke and colleagues (2011) advocate for increased “attention to substantive community, cultural and disciplinary knowledge bases” (p. 158) when teaching students how to comprehend what they read. Communal, cultural, and disciplinary knowledge bases inform what it means to know or comprehend. Within these bases, authoritative contexts may emerge; however, true dialogue has seedlings of both authority and dialogicity (Scott et al., 2006). Comprehension is not void of
what a community values as true or interpretations based upon cultural understandings of actions. The end goal is not just about comprehension in itself, as in autonomous views (Street, 1984), but in engaging students in understandings of their local communities and cultures, across sociopolitical, historical contexts and domains.

This view of comprehension, which privileges the learner along with the text, may be so absent from classrooms in part because of the dilution of the purpose of education that has come from the era of testing and accountability.

The test as the outcome. All three teachers used the DRA to organize their groups homogenously according to text level and to make various instructional decisions. For Heather and Kristin, improvement on the test was their desired outcome of their summary lessons. Because of this, summary lessons were error correction from the start, based on the test. This resulted in authoritative interactional contexts and thus authoritative questioning. This practice begs the question, when does data-driven decision making become teaching to the test? Although the teachers were basing their instruction on students’ performance on an informal reading measure, their primary purpose was for students to score higher on the test. Yet this created contradictions within the instruction, especially for Heather and Kristin, as they toggled back and forth between what constituted a main idea and what was a detail that should or should not be included in a summary. This was further complicated by the lack of explicit instruction of how to synthesize information, which resulted in the teachers summarizing for the students. These pressures around the test as an outcome are evidence of the testing regime in which teachers exist today. Modern testing practices are filled with tensions. In his book, Teaching by Numbers, Peter Taubman (2009) captures the paradoxical nature of standards and accountability. From the statistical impossibility of all students meeting grade level standards, to the punitive hierarchy
created among the very groups meant to be helped by standards, to teachers’ powerlessness resulted from surveillance that is intended to provide autonomy, the contradictions are endless. Further, local policies, such as SB-191, require an evaluation of teacher effectiveness that is based partially on student test data. The stakes for teachers are beyond merely evaluative scores; they hold implications for attaining tenure and salary raises. Thus, the student outcomes on tests matter – significantly – to teachers in this context. These global tensions result in more local ones, in which improved test scores become the primary desired outcome, rather than improved learning.

Espoused ideals vis-à-vis the discourse. As Tracy and Robles (2009) note, “Questioning is one of, if not the, central communicative practice of institutional encounters” (p. 131). In the institution of western education, questions have been a quintessential feature of what constitutes schooling. An examination of teachers’ questioning practices vis-à-vis how teachers talk about their discourse and their espoused ideals help to identify sources of tension that can work to reconstruct the ideals in practice. In this section I summarize the tensions surrounding the three teachers’ conceptualizations of reading comprehension, as well as their students’ abilities, as compared to the discourse that ensued.

Situated model of reading comprehension. All three teachers expressed that they conceived of reading comprehension as not one singular meaning or interpretation of text. Although there is evidence that they worked toward this, for example, Heather’s suggestion that multiple summaries might be okay or Sharon’s practice of asking students whether they agreed or disagreed, there is also evidence to the contrary. Teachers’ stated conceptualizations of reading comprehension were in contrast to certain practices, specifically related to the role of the reader. They expressed that multiple meanings may be interpreted from text; however, their
practices tended to imply that a univocal response, or one correct meaning, should be applied to a text. By focusing on literal and even inferential meanings, little room was made for bringing forth multiple voices with varied understandings. Of course, these small group lessons do not comprise the whole of the teachers’ literacy instructional practices. But they do comprise the kinds of instructional decisions teachers made when providing more focused and tailored instruction for groups of students.

An analysis of the discourse, and specifically, the questions, reveals how teacher assertions worked to suggest and direct meaning. Assertive kinds of questions occurred largely in contexts of error correction and were posed at higher rates with the low groups. Further, when questions elicited accountability to accurate knowledge in form but were assertive in function, they were three times more likely to be posed toward students in the low groups than toward students in the average groups. This suggests that in these contexts and for these students, teachers held conceptualizations of the text as static. And although questions elicited textual support for students’ ideas, their function indicated that in those interactions, teachers perceived meaning as something delimited and attainable, rather than negotiated, contested, or constructed.

Another tension-filled espoused ideal related to the text was in the role of background knowledge when making meaning. In some cases, background knowledge became a liability, and not a strength. Whether regarding Megan’s previous experiences hearing the book read aloud, or Gilberto’s enjoyment of hunting, or Samantha’s inference, background knowledge was essentially back-grounded, or placed as irrelevant or unnecessary. All three teachers noted the importance of background knowledge in the process of reading comprehension. On separate occasions, both Heather and Sharon theorized that students might be struggling to comprehend because of inadequate background knowledge. Kristin linked the act of accessing prior
knowledge to higher levels of thinking. In fact, she stated the following while reflecting upon her two lessons in the video stimulated recall in response to the question, *What does reading comprehension mean to you, specifically with respect to nonfiction text?*:

I think it’s just being able to not just answer questions and recall information, but again, it just goes back to being able to make connections to texts, to access prior knowledge, to really show that they’re engaged with the text at a higher level, than just being able to regurgitate information, um, so what new questions do they have as a result of their reading, where can they make connections to their real lives, um, why is this important for them to know, um, all of those things are a part of reading comprehension and really understanding the text, um, on a higher level rather than just basic literal comprehension.

At times, this rang true, as Kristin asked students if they already knew meanings of key concepts. But, as already described, at times, her discourse was in direct contradiction to the importance of background knowledge. Background knowledge was inconsistently privileged as important for the meaning making process, and it was to be leveraged when the teachers felt it was necessary to be leveraged, or when it was helpful to obtaining the correct interpretation.

I had asked the above question about nonfiction text was because when talking about her model of reading comprehension, Kristin shared features of text that reflect fiction and narrative genres (e.g., infer characters’ feelings). She initially described reading comprehension as engagement with underlying themes or inferences. Fiction texts were thought to allow for higher levels of thought but were only used with high groups, which is an example of how the Matthew Effect (Englert & Thomas, 1987; Stanovich, 1986) unfolds; the rich get richer while the poor get poorer, due to differential instruction for homogenous groupings of students. Further, Kristin’s notion of what constitutes higher levels does not consider the extreme complexities of
summarizing nonfiction text. The act of summarization, or even posing literal questions, was assumed to be simple. Just as Cole and Griffin (1983) describes alphabetic principals as being assumed to be simpler than other kinds of meaning-making, when letters and sounds are anything but simple, summarization is not easy, nor is it a prerequisite to other kinds of engagement with text. As will be discussed below, the students were seen embracing dialogicity and multiple meanings when teachers attempted to dichotomize meanings.

**Situated model of student ability.** All three teachers held varying degrees of deficit views about students in the low group. Both Sharon and Heather described the students in the low group as dependent and requiring a permanent presence from the teacher. Heather further described the students as not ready cognitively and developmentally to approach summarization tasks. In the semi-structured interview, Kristin talked about the low group students’ strengths before talking about their difficulties. However, she went on to describe their academic needs as deficits within the students. These narratives that the teachers told about their students as readers may have been a primary contributor in the higher rates of assertive questions with the students in the low groups. They were viewed as more dependent, thus requiring more direct and authoritative guidance from the teacher. Thus it is plausible that this need for direction manifested in higher percentages of questions that functioned as assertions. These models of ability that place deficits as inherent traits within the students likely would shift if a shift in instruction would occur that did not necessitate such teacher correction; the models of ability then would not necessitate a view of deficits.

**Students embrace diverse texts and ideologies.** Tensions within the authoritative and dialogic continuum were not only made evident by the teacher’s questions, but also by the students’ resistance to singular meanings. Within activities that allowed for multiple views to be
expressed, students from both low and average groups seemed to want to explore the tension at hand, making teachers’ assertions that much more obvious. Authoritative and dialogic discourses are not polar opposites and are instead a dialectic. As Scott and colleagues (2006) describe, at times, the teacher imposes authoritative meanings and then students explore it dialogically. Other times, dialogicity requires some degree of authoritativeness in order to organize students’ learning. And even other times, the tension between the two is found in multiple layers of the interaction, including the goals, the conversational topic, down to individual utterances.

The nature of the question that introduced the conversation around the hunting debate is one that is pervaded by a tension between authoritative and dialogic discourses. Students were asked to evaluate one’s moral standing in relation to legalities, a realm that is rife with potential for a rich dialectic between authoritative meanings (i.e., the law) and dialogic meanings (i.e., morality). Both the content and the functions of the discourse give rise to this dialectic. Interestingly, the students seemed to embrace the tension while the teacher worked to maintain a rigid framework for engaging the issue.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, both Marley and Gilberto approached the ethical question by resisting either-or dichotomies. Marley asserted, “So it may be wrong to you but it could be wrong to somebody else,” proposing the idea that laws are not indicative of universal truths. She recognized the multiple voices at play in the ethics of hunting. We have also seen how Gilberto resisted the teacher’s assessments of his views and advocated for the idea that someone who likes hunting, as he does, can also agree with the idea that hunting for food is better than hunting purely for trophy. Within the cultural practice of hunting, this “tension” is actually not so radical, as the teacher makes it seem. In fact, hunting purely to obtain a particular body part or the entire body for show purposes without harvesting the meat is illegal and is
generally referred to as poaching, not hunting. Further, it is not uncommon for hunters to use the meat from the animal and mount parts of its body as decoration. This idea is not acknowledged or accepted by the teacher until another student, Bailey, claims that she is on both sides in response to the teacher’s question as to whether “anyone else [is] on Gilberto’s side?”

The teacher then engaged with the idea that hunting for trophy is not diametrically opposed to hunting for food or for “good reason,” as she so heavily suggested while addressing Gilberto. A shift occurred in the teacher’s assertions. She directed students to “think about some of the clothes [they] wear.” Moving the discussion away from hunting to killing animals in general, the teacher helped the students imagine situations in which animals might be used for multiple purposes, purposes that are now implied to be “okay.” One major difference in this segment compared to the one prior is the student making the claim. No longer is Gilberto trying to align himself with the idea that hunters might hunt for multiple purposes; Bailey has aligned herself on both sides of the false dichotomy set up by the teacher. Immediately following, the teacher lead students to consider the tension she created.

The semi-structured interview makes visible the teacher’s meta-discourse and her orientation to institutional goals (Tracy & Craig, 2010), which contradict the discourse that unfolded in the lesson. She states:

At the very beginning of the year, I worked really hard to allow kids to understand that it’s okay to have different interpretations, and it’s okay to express your opinion, and it’s also okay not to agree with somebody. It’s okay to have opposite and opposing positions or ideas about something because we’re all different, we all come from a different background, we all have different knowledge that we’re bringing to the table. (SP Interview Transcript)
Although the teacher saw herself as encouraging multiple interpretations and opinions, in this particular lesson, that was not the case. Despite her intents to create a dialogic space in which students engage, authoritative ideologies pervade the learning environment.

Another example shows how students challenged dichotomous meanings within rich, dialogic contexts. As described above, a student in Heather’s average group, Lawrence, had questioned the options of choosing merely between fact and opinion by saying, “You can’t really prove it, but it’s not an opinion.” Here, he pointed to the tenuous requirement of thinking about facts and opinions as static truths. Proof, as those of us who dedicate our work in research are so familiar, is a contested construct, dependent upon discipline, methodology, design, etc., and it is always negotiated with the subjectivity of those doing the proving. Lawrence noted that a so-called fact might be difficult to prove, embracing the tension of the requirement of having to choose between two choices in a false dichotomy. Later in the conversation, the students were mixed in their responses to the following statement: To Lina, this sounded far less interesting than an undiscovered city, but she didn’t say so. Brianna couldn’t decide and reasoned that “Well, maybe there was proof, like um that she thought that?” Brianna had considered that it might be true that someone had a thought, thus the fact of the thought renders this statement a fact. Other students chimed in saying that one can’t prove others’ thoughts, revealing a stint of a dialogic exchange among students. Heather then suggested, “Is that her opinion?” The object of this lesson was to correctly decipher between a false dichotomy, fact and opinion. Yet the activity was rich for potential to encourage students to develop reasoned arguments for claims. Students’ resistance to the black and white meaning should encourage teachers to understand that students, even in upper elementary school, can and will embrace and negotiate the grey. It is precisely in the contradictions and tensions that expansive learning occurs (Engeström, 2001).
Mediating Dis/Ability

When dis/ability is understood to be an interaction between the individual and the cultural and social environment, competence is not a static trait within the student, but it is rather a product of students’ agency as learners as they negotiate their participation with the learning context. Because interaction is the learning environment (Erickson, 1996), students’ abilities and disabilities can be examined as socially assembled according to the discourse in which they engage and are jointly engaged. This study provides an interrogation of teacher questions as semiotic tools that mediate students’ access to rich forms of participation through talk. In the context of reading instruction, the text became an important point of contradiction between the discourse and the object of comprehension. Through a close examination of questioning patterns and functions between teachers and students, I explicate how “people together create their worlds with each other in real time” (McDermott & Raley, 2011, p. 374).

Although it is not uncommon for students with learning disabilities to face language-related difficulties when reading and discussing text, (Feiker Hollenbeck, 2011), they are still capable of achieving rich literacy practices with the support of the teacher, as long as the support does not do too much of the cognitive work for the students (Mariage et al., 2000). These students typically have just as many strengths to bring to bear upon the practice of reading as they have difficulties and will use higher levels of discourse when afforded the opportunity (Echevarria, 1995, p. 551). In explaining the difficulties of understanding the nature of learning disabilities, Shaywitz (2003) exclaims, “I am emphasizing the strengths of the dyslexic [a form of learning disability] because there is often a tendency to underestimate his abilities. The reading problem is often glaringly apparent while the strengths may be more subtle and overlooked” (p. 36). Often, these students’ abilities to reason are strengths, and they should be
given ample opportunities to do so, not merely because it reflects a strength of the student, but also because thinking and reasoning gives rise to rich and authentic engagement with text.

When interactional contexts constrain opportunities for dialogic meanings with respect to the talk and the text for students with learning disabilities, a teacher’s role can become directive and not accounting for the social and cultural nature upon the act of reading. As Dewey (1916/2007) notes, “Those engaged in directing the actions of others are always in danger of overlooking the importance of the sequential development of those they direct” (p. 25). If an understanding of students’ development is foregrounded by their needs, or struggles, then an important opportunity can be missed in building upon existing capabilities and strengths. Further, if ability is conceived of as something that purely exists within an individual, then the ways in which ability is constructed by the social and cultural environment are likely to be misunderstood as insignificant. Certain questions can be important indices of how ability is conceptualized and arranged in a learning space. In this study, questions pointed toward how Megan’s ability was positioned without consideration of her unique orientations to the book. Inconsistent conceptualizations of what constitutes a summary created questions that suggested appropriate responses that rejected students’ inferences in the summarization process for Samantha and made Nathan’s response that represented an adequate synthesis unrecognizable. Questions rendered these students’ disabilities as real and crystalized their struggles as readers.

I do not want to suggest that a teacher’s role is to never be directive. A teacher’s careful direction is critical in ensuring that students engage in rigorous and rich learning. For example, in the scope of the lesson cycle, it was important for Sharon to clarify the students’ misunderstandings as a result of not being familiar with a CB radio so as to continue in an extended discussion about the key events of the plot, even if that led to fewer Accountable Talk
questions. Further, Assertive Accountable Questions request an account of students’ thinking, even if they might be heavily pervaded by a teacher’s imposition. Sharon’s Assertive Accountable Questions to Megan in the context of hypothesizing allowed Megan to imagine alternate events and construct new meanings. An important balance between direction and authority must be maintained. As Freire (1985) notes, “The difference becomes antagonistic when the authority of the educator, different from the freedom of the pupil, is transformed into authoritarianism” (p. 76). When the authority of the text or of the teacher usurps the opportunities of the students to take risks or construct novel meanings from the text, then a sort of authoritarianism has been applied to the meaning making process. If students with learning disabilities are instructed in such a way that resembles blind obedience to authority, much in the way of remedial approaches to fix the students, then direction becomes authoritarian.

As the construct of learning disability is pervaded with judgment, it is important to consider how notions of ability are realized through discourse. This is not to say that learning disabilities are purely the construction or imposition of the teacher, but rather, the kinds of discursive practices that teachers afford students are indicative of the ways in which ability is assumed to function among participants. Students with or without official designations of disabilities can become abled or disabled as a function of the interaction as situated within larger social and cultural discourses. With a “hermeneutical whiff of racialization” (Erickson, 2004, p. 99), I conjecture that Gilberto’s racial identity is an important consideration in contextualizing the positioning that he experienced. Although Gilberto was not in special education at the time of this study, his interactions in the hunting debate hold the potential to foreshadow how he might be disabled through discourse. The disproportionate representation of students of color in special education has long been a concern (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Not only are students of color
more likely to be placed in special education than their White peers, but they also have a higher chance of being segregated and placed in more restrictive environments once there (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Over a short time, Gilberto became a learner whose contributions were ushered out of the conversation. Because Gilberto is Latino, the linguistic and ideological methods of placing him away from the group in this interaction is a worrisome foreshadowing of how he may continue to become separated throughout his experiences in school. As Tracy and Robles (2009) note, “[Q]uestioning as a discursive practice is a central vehicle for constructing social worlds and reflecting existing ones” (p. 131).

Conclusions. The text, test, talk, and models of ability should all be tools. As with all tools, there are affordances and constraints to consider, and tools are most effective when used purposefully and strategically, not whimsically or uniformly. Accountable Talk questions, Assertive Questions, and those that do both (AAQs) are tools and should not be dismissed from a teacher’s toolkit. Posing assertive questions is a cultural act and is embedded in the institution of western schooling. Ochs (1992) studied “Baby Talk” among White middle class mothers from the United States, as compared to the talk between mothers and children in Samoa. She found that U.S. mothers accommodate their children in their speech, and conversely, Samoan children are expected to accommodate their elders and care givers. By slowing their speech, or using extensively simplified talk grammatically and semantically, or using the child’s made up words, among other practices, U.S. mothers accommodate their children in their talk. As Ochs argues, this indexes their gender status in U.S. society as people who accommodate others, while Samoan children were socialized to do the accommodating. Because the three teachers in my study were White women from the United States, two of them mothers, it can be reasoned that they themselves have been socialized into speaking to children, their students, in accommodating
ways. Assertive Questions accommodate because they simplify the meaning that is to be interpreted in the discourse.

With higher rates of Assertive Questions posed to students in the low group, teachers assumed a stance that the students needed accommodating, and the context created was one in which students’ errors were to be found and corrected by the teacher. Meaning was thus simplified by the teachers for students in the low groups. Of course, Assertive Questions functioned as efficient tools for simplifying meaning, as they consistently performed in the way that they were intended. Yet the problem is not entirely in the use of these questions as tools; the problem is that these questions served as proxies for pervasive contexts of error correction for students in the low group. Assertive Questions became the mediating devices that were made available, due to the context of the activity (e.g., error correction), thus yielding questions that worked to impose. When the context is designed to make error correction primary, as so happens when the text is thought to be a static object or when deficit-laden depictions of students pervade, the tools available become limited to ones that simplify meaning, even when lesson topics and contexts would have otherwise allowed for dialogic meanings. If dialogic renditions of reading comprehension were the object, then the text, the test, and the talk would be mediating devises, and not the object or outcome. Thus, re-mediation, or a reorganization of the functional system, would render new mediating tools, new questioning practices, to become available (Cole & Griffin, 1983).

**Implications for Reconstruction**

Re-mediation can allow for new questioning practices to become available. With instructional practices that are conversely remedial in nature, from the context of error correction, questions are more oriented toward students gaining basic skills, which can translate
into attempts to fix or remedy the problem. When literacy is viewed as an autonomous set of skills and behaviors to acquire and thus being assumed to transfer across contexts, genres, and even cognitive ability, the goal becomes filling a void or fixing a problem. Similarly, in remedial approaches, assistance is generic, low level, and non-strategic, just as with hypermediation (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2002) and next-step assistance (Griffin & Cole, 1984; Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007). Students are in homogenous groups, and readiness models are used, just as they are in this study. However, re-mediation involves a reorganization of the functional system, consisting of the following: basic activity, joint activity, generative, multiple forms of assistance, heterogeneous, rigorous, challenging, strategic assistance (Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009).

Because authoritative contexts disguise accountability to accurate knowledge, the learning community, and rigorous thinking, teachers might make several considerations when reorganizing the activity system. In practice, teachers should first, use questions as a way to distribute the location of knowledge, and design activities that allow for this opportunity. However, activities alone will not ensure this kind of distribution. Consider Heather’s fact and opinion lesson with her average group. The lesson by itself did not ensure dialogic forms of talk, but rather, students were led to rigid meanings of fact and opinion related to the text. In order for dialogic forms to occur, an activity that incites students’ evaluations and claims, along with careful questioning practices that embrace and even seek out tension, need to imbue the learning environment.

Second, understand the complexity of how dialogic forms might include assertive functions. Merely asking students to account for something may not transfer responsibility to them as learners if the context is overly authoritative or authoritarian. Even when the three
teachers held conceptualizations of text as having multiple meanings, their discourse suggested rigid understandings at times, as exemplified in Sharon’s question to Megan, “Does it say that?” and Kristin’s question to Samantha, “Can you show me where it says that in the text?” Teachers should interrogate the functions of their discourse, understanding what their questions do in the interaction. Because communicative cues are so implicit (Grice, 1975), the complexity of questions’ form and function may not be readily apparent to those who have not thoughtfully considered their discursive moves. It is important for teachers to understand that their discourse practices matter. Their most important instructional tool is talk, and it is necessary for teachers to develop a sensitive awareness of language socialization in their classrooms.

Third, this awareness needs to be at work in the preparation and reflection processes of instruction. Teachers should plan questions ahead of time that allow for students to imagine themselves within the text and that aren’t designed for one correct interpretation of text. Thinking of rich problems or questions in the moment can prove to be difficult, and as Michaels et al. (2010) suggest, ask the following while preparing a lesson, “Is this question or problem rich enough to sustain an extended group discussion? Will I be able to orchestrate a coherent conversation, helping the kids build up a coherent line of reasoning in response to this question?” (p. 13). Teachers may need practice with adopting new practices of questioning, as so much of their existing practices are deeply embedded.

Having teachers reflect upon their lessons proved to be very insightful, not only to me as a researcher, but apparently also to the teachers. This allowed them to think about the discourse that otherwise is ephemeral. Through the video stimulated recalls, teachers made comments such as, “Although I said this one was tricky, I don’t feel like we spent enough time discussing why it was tricky” (HS VSR), “It’s easy to call on the students whose hands are raised, but um, I need
to make sure that I’m including all the students in the conversation or in the discussion” (KS VSR), “I think I do rely a little bit more on the right there [type] questions when I see that they’re struggling to understand parts of the story” (SP VSR), and “Maybe the groups should be heterogeneous” (HS VSR).

Additionally, when thinking about re-organizing the activity system, it is important to recognize who constituted the community. Groups were organized homogenously according to text level, and while more heterogeneous groupings would allow for ways in which to re-mediate (Gutiérrez et al., 2009), I would be remiss not to acknowledge the similarities in talk when the activities proved similar. These similarities are a kind of access to general education, which is a signature feature in the law regarding students with special needs. The discourse was not differentiated purely according to the students, but functioned in more complex ways, considering the activity and the tools made available. This study points toward how in policy and practice, access to general education for students with disabilities might refer not only to placement or content, but also to activities, discourse, and kinds of thought. Access to general education is typically applied as access to content or standards or placement, but program planning for students with learning disabilities should include considerations of access to activities and certain kinds of thought so that students have opportunities to build upon their strengths and to display their true competence.

Based upon this study, professional development should attend to how teachers might reorganize their functional systems in place, so as to make new questioning practices available, especially for students with learning disabilities. Through professional development, teachers can develop an understanding of how the functional activity systems in their classrooms might be re-mediated so that students can be abled in a variety of ways. Teachers should first consider ways
to privilege the reader in the text-reader interaction, in both instruction and assessment contexts. This means that conceptualizations of reading comprehension must move beyond mere notions of understanding literal and inferential meanings. Of course, literal and inferential meanings are part and parcel to comprehension; however, they are not ends to the meaning making process, as is commonly reflected in measures of reading comprehension (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2002). Students must have ample opportunities to connect, conjecture, and make claims without always being indentured to what the text “says.” Further, multiple means of assessment should always be considered when gathering information about students’ reading comprehension (Klingner, 2004). Teachers should not allow an assessment to be the single most important factor that informs instruction because assessments are limited in their scope of what information they provide.

Second, professional development efforts should help teachers organize contexts so that questions can mediate complexity of thought. Limiting questions to being categorized as either higher- or lower-order negates the usefulness of various question types, and it neglects the situated notion of a question within its context. These binary categories further do not attend to the various forms and functions of utterances and are not useful by themselves, for example, as in a list of “good questions to ask.” In professional development, teachers should examine transcripts and consider the functions of questions so as to recognize how questions, as situated, perform various tasks in conversation. When questions are considered to be strategic moves or tools with which to gain information about students’ learning, students will be given opportunities to be assessed according to their potential, but more importantly, it will afford them experiences with text that help them to more acutely participate in the heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) that comes with engaging in text.
Third, as discussed above, reorganize the learning system and think about how the different layers as collective forms of mediation become available (Stone & Gutiérrez, 2007). Some of these layers are at the activity or group level and others at the individual student level. As a dialectic relationship, the various layers inform one another. Activity or group-focused layers include: the use of the test, the use of the text, lesson goals, considerations of approaches to reading comprehension, and understandings of dis/ability and its construction. Micro layers include: discrete questioning moves and conceptualizations of individual students. Importantly, as this study shows, the test, the text, and talk should be used as tools and not as objects.

Crucially, teachers should consider sociocultural notions of dis/ability. Instead of locating the disability as solely within individuals, understand how activities and context might perpetuate or even disable. Gutiérrez et al. (2009) note, “Here, a sociocultural approach challenges long-standing views that disability is located within individuals; it instead redirects the focus on developing situated notions of competence, ability, risk, disability, and difference as being culturally mediated” (p. 223). An examination of teachers’ questioning practices may provide insight as to how disability is enacted in an instructional space and has the potential to help teachers and researchers understand how to consider situated notions of competence.

As the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) increase their presence in the United States school system, this focus on the text will likely only become more and more pronounced in classrooms. One 5th grade CCSS for both informational and narrative texts reads: “Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Although accountability to accurate knowledge certainly requires this kind of attention to sources of evidence for claims, the text can become misused as
the overall authority on meaning, rather than as a tool for negotiating meaning. In a policy brief written for the International Reading Association, Snow and O’Connor (2013) challenge the movement toward close reading, as driven by the Common Core State Standards. In it, they contest the conception that attention to the text levels the playing field because it eliminates the need for cultural capital and background knowledge by calling this conception out for what it is, a fantasy. Claiming that close attention to the text levels the playing field is akin to thinking that giving all baseball players the same kind of bat levels the playing field, or that lining up the runners on the same track equalizes the competition. It is obvious to those who know anything about the sport that this is an obscenely ridiculous suggestion because it neglects any consideration of the actual athlete, her history, culture, experiences, and propensities toward the sport. How is it that close reading as a method for leveling the very vulnerable playing field of school learning has made traction as a legitimate approach? But unfortunately, this approach does not remain as merely a policy suggestion; it is being applied in classrooms, as this study shows.

When the text is the ultimate authority on meaning, the forest cannot be seen for the trees. This is true both for the teacher who is organizing the learning, as well as the student who is constructing the meaning. Even though reading necessarily entails the reader’s perspectives and prior understandings, the students as readers will be prohibited from doing so in the official space. They will be asked to neglect a part of the reading process as natural and necessary as breathing is to life. Not only will students be prohibited from considering how the text applies to their prior selves, they will also be prohibited from a consideration of their future selves and how they might apply or use or challenge the information presented in it. Teachers will feel the need to hypermediate the learning (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2002), or to offer unnecessary and nonstrategic
assistance, as any perceived breakdown in comprehension will be directed toward the reader and not the instructional environment.

The process of reading comprehension is never without the reader. As Bakhtin (1986) theorizes, “With *explanation* there is only one consciousness, one subject; with *comprehension* there are two consciousnesses and two subjects…Understanding is always dialogic to some degree” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 111). What is important to reading comprehension is examining who or what is doing the “saying.” The phrase, “the text says,” is commonly used by teachers, students, and even standards, as is written in the Common Core State Standard quoted above. It provides some insight as to how reading comprehension is pervasively conceptualized, that the text does the saying. However, it is not the symbols of ink on paper that say; it is the authors and readers of text who do the saying. We, as educators, should rethink the phrase “the text says” when teaching students to comprehend. Instead, we might ask students what they have to say about what they read or how they might respond to the author or how they might write themselves into the text.

Given the high-stakes climate around standards and accountability, teachers, policymakers, and assessment developers should be careful to understand the difference between the text as an object and the text as a tool. Merely using the text to answer a question about it indicates that students can effectively negotiate the cues (Billig et al., 1988) and the rules of the discursive space, rather than their own learning. But using the text in service to a novel idea, claim, or construction of meaning indicates that students can fluidly write, create, and say.

**Limitations**

Case study research is not generalizable to populations but to theory (Stake, 1995); therefore a limitation of this study is that findings from this study do not imply that all teachers
use higher rates of assertive questions with their low groups, or that all White 5th grade teachers from the United States do, or that Heather, Sharon, and Kristin do across all of their interactions with their reading groups. Instead, findings have more implications for how to interpret what these talk patterns mean in this time and space, specifically how tensions between authoritative and dialogic discourse are realized in teachers’ questioning practices. Although the relationships I identify in the findings cannot be assumed as causal due to the observational design of the study, they are important for thinking about future research that could more intentionally examine links between activity systems and talk.

Another limitation is that the video stimulated recall provided teachers’ reflections on only one or two lessons. Some key analyses of discourse, such as the hunting debate exchange, did not include the teacher’s reflections upon it. Further, my story had not yet been developed at the time of asking teachers to talk about their discourse, and I had not narrowed in on significant interactions upon which the teacher might lend some insight. Similarly, I did not ask the students to reflect on the discourse or the texts. This would have provided some insights into their understandings of the extent to which they were constructing meaning.

Finally, it is not my intent to vilify the teachers in this study. Although I have pointed toward tensions within their practices, the whole of who they are as teachers is not defined by these tensions. Each teacher demonstrated a great passion for teaching, an effort to include students with disabilities in their classrooms, and most importantly, showed evidence toward desire to establish relationships with their students. They wanted their students to learn and develop, and they each were committed to improving their practice as educators. Teachers today are under pressures of policy and practice that limit their autonomy as professionals. Instructional decisions are always pervaded by larger societal forces that drive education. Thus,
the tensions presented in this study are not merely the responsibility of these three teachers; they are the responsibility of all of us who identify as educators.

It is important to understand that these teachers’ individual actions are situated within the larger systems that surround them. The tensions within their instructional practices are a symptom of a system pervaded with contradictions and tensions (e.g., high stakes testing, misguided understandings of the purpose of reading instruction, teacher effectiveness systems, etc.). The necessary response, therefore, is to consider the multiple layers in all activity, and the findings of this study implicate all of us in the educational system, from teachers to professors to legislators.

**Future Research**

Future research is necessary to examine the effects of dialogic questioning practices, such as those that emulate Accountable Talk questions on reading comprehension outcome measures for students with learning disabilities. Studies should examine whether teachers who receive professional development regarding using talk, text, and tests as tools, along with a framework for building upon their students’ strengths as readers, increase in their use of Accountable Talk or decrease in their Assertive Questioning. Other research questions include the extent to which assertive questions are used at various age levels of students, or posed toward students with Autism, or used by male teachers. Finally, future research should examine questioning practices over time to understand how shifts in instructional cycles relate to shifts in questioning. Ultimately, more research is needed so as to advance the agenda of ensuring that students are afforded opportunities for high quality and deep engagement with text and with others.

**Conclusion**
By examining elementary teachers’ questioning practices as units of meaning that are situated within larger episodes of discourse and broader institutional systems and ideals, I was able to provide new understandings of the kinds of tensions inherent in predominantly authoritative texts. In univocally-premised instruction, questions that are designed to elicit dialogic forms of talk can function as ways for the location of knowledge to be maintained as within the teacher. Further, if the text is not used as a tool with which to critically engage with content, but rather as the object, the reader assumes the superficial position of bystander to the reader-text interaction with only the capacity to observe or receive, and the text maintains sole authority on meaning. The exhibited tensions within the talk can be tied to global problems within systems of accountability, that have led to high-stakes systems of evaluation, what counts as learning, and whose knowledge is privileged. In such a system, dis/ability becomes more important for identification and correction, rather than a consideration of variance as valued and normal (Annamma, Boelé, Moore, & Klingner, 2013). However, if systems can be rebuilt so that students require less error correction and more learning, dialogic spaces will open so that all voices can be brought and heard at the table.
References


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Gallimore, R., Goldenberg, C. N., & Weisner, T. S. (1993). The social construction and


Appendix A
Interview Protocols: Semi-structured Interview and Video Stimulated Recall

Semi-structured Interview
- Describe group A’s comprehension/reading in general.
- What expectations do you hold for group A during this instructional cycle?
- Describe group B’s comprehension/reading in general
- What expectations do you hold for group B during this instructional cycle?
- To what extent do you consider questions as a way to informally assess your students’ reading?
- Would you say that your discussion/questions during these books is pretty typical, compared to discussions about other genres of books?
- What does reading comprehension mean to you?
- Would you agree or disagree with the notion that there is one correct interpretation of text? Why?
- How would you describe the questions you ask of your students?
- What goes through your mind when a student doesn’t answer your initial question in the way that you are wanting?

VSR Example (Given to Sharon)

Directions:
1. Simultaneously start the video from 11-29-12 and the audio-recorder.
2. In general, when something interesting happens, stop the video and talk about it into the audio-recorder.
3. Specific Questions
   a. Mouse Group
      i. As you begin the lesson, what is your primary goal in the conversation?
      ii. At about 05:20, you say to Garrett, “So you would go to help Keith and so what was the part about food?” What would you say you are trying to accomplish when you ask him about “the part about food?”
      iii. At about 07:30, you ask the question, “and who traps him?” How would you explain what unfolds in the conversation? What do you think is the primary source of their difficulty?
      iv. What evidence do you see that the students are engaging with the text at higher levels?
   b. Ben Group
      i. As you begin the lesson, what is your primary goal in the conversation?
      ii. You start this lesson by mentioning Ben’s escape and Mark at the dock. In some other lessons, you begin by asking them something like, “So what do
you want to tell me about Chapter X?” Was this difference intentional? If so, please explain.

iii. At about 03:58, you ask the question, “who finds out that information? And how?” How would you explain what unfolds in the conversation? What do you think is the primary source of their difficulty?

iv. What evidence do you see that the students are engaging with the text at higher levels?
Appendix B
Observation Protocol and Description of Items

Social Organization of Classroom Talk (Teacher Questions) during Reading Instruction Protocol

Observer ____________________________  Lesson Date __________  Time _________
Teacher ____________________________  Lesson Objective ____________________________
Text ____________________________  Instructional Activity ____________________________

1) Spatial Arrangement

Seating:

2) Names of Focal Participants

A ____________________________  B ____________________________  C ____________________________
D ____________________________  E ____________________________  F ____________________________

3) Instructional Arrangement (circle one from each column)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>small group</th>
<th>whole class</th>
<th>individual work</th>
<th>other ____________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teacher defined</td>
<td>student defined</td>
<td>negotiated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organization of Talk and Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4) Questioning/Discourse Pattern (Strict IRE vs. Instructional Conversation)</th>
<th>5) Speaker designation (T nominates vs. self-selection)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6) Teacher Response (non-acceptance/acceptance)</th>
<th>7) Generating sub-topics (T selected/co-construction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8) Division of Labor - length (T does talking vs. Ss do talking)</th>
<th>9) Division of Labor - thought (shift of responsibility from T to S)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10) Degree of heterogeneity (homogeneous questions vs. heterogeneous)</th>
<th>11) Expansion options (no expansions vs. incorporations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 12) Extent of participation  
(few students vs. whole group) | 13) Script alignment with learning goal  
(Never/Always) |
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 NA</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 14) Preferred learning goal/question goals  
(correctness/efficiency vs. shared knowledge and participation changes) | 15) Implied Answer  
(Teacher known vs. unknown) |
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characteristics of Student Responses**

| Student Response Characteristics  
(correctness/guesswork vs. inquiry/exploration) | Student Response Turn Orientation  
(to teacher vs. to each other) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Index of Coding Schema  
Gutiérrez, et al. (1999)

1) Spatial Arrangement

Physical Configuration

This category is used to indicate the nature of the physical configuration of Teacher and Students and the number of participants present during the designated activity.

2) Names of Focal Participants: Relevant for students with LD

3) Instructional Arrangement

Column one is used to indicate the nature of the instructional configuration used during the designated lesson activity. The possible categories used are: Individualized Work, Small Group, Whole Class, or other.

Column two is used to indicate if the Instructional Configuration is teacher defined, student defined, or negotiated.

Organization of Task and Participation

4) Discourse Pattern: This category is used to describe the overall nature of the pattern of discourse used for Teacher/Student interaction.

Point (1) is used to indicate a strict teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation discourse pattern. The nature of the student response is short (one word or one phrase) and no response elaboration is encouraged.

Point (2) is used to indicate a strict teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation discourse pattern. The nature of the student response is short as in point 1, however, some student generated elaborations occur for purposes of clarification.

Point (3) is used to indicate the occurrence of a relaxed IRE discourse sequence with more student responses occurring in between the teacher initiation and evaluation. Student responses are characteristically longer and the teacher allows students to elaborate.

Point (4) is used to indicate the occurrence of relaxed IRE discourse sequence with more student responses occurring in between the teacher initiation and evaluation and student responses occasionally build on previous responses (chained) and contribute to the construction of shared knowledge.

Point (5) is used to indicate a discourse structure that is characterized by predominantly chained utterances and chained events. Students and teachers build on one another’s responses in a manner that closer resembles a conversational discourse structure.
5) Speaker Designation: indicates who is designating the next speaker (Teacher vs. Students).

Point (1) is used to indicate strict adherence to teacher/student selection of speakers (e.g.: students must raise their hands to bid for access to the floor and teacher selects).

Point (2) is used to indicate the predominance of teacher selection of speakers, but there are occasional instances of student self-selection (e.g., students must raise their hands to bid for selection, but some students speak without bidding).

Point (3) is used to indicate speaker self-selection being primarily teacher designated, but there are frequent instances of student selection.

Point (4) is used to indicate self-selection (both Teacher and Students) being frequently negotiated, but the teacher occasionally reverts to designating the next speaker.

Point (5) is used to indicate the absence of speaker designation, but speaker selection is locally negotiated by the participants (e.g., no hand raising, no choosing by designated leader, turn-taking without explicit/marked designation).

6) Teacher’s Response to Student Contributions: indicates the manner in which the Teacher responds to student contributions.

Point (1) is used to indicate no instances of Teacher acknowledging students’ contributions.

Point (2) is used to indicate some instances of Teacher’s acknowledgement of students’ contributions by responding to the student.

Point (3) is used to indicate some instances of the Teacher’s acknowledgement and incorporation of these utterances into the lesson discussion.

Point (4) is used to indicate regular instances of Teacher’s incorporations of students’ contributions. Teacher builds upon this type of student contribution for conducting the ongoing lesson discussion.

Point (5) is used to indicate routine instances of Teacher’s acceptance and incorporation of students’ contributions. Both Teacher and other Students respond to and build upon this type of student contribution.

7) Generating Related Sub-topics: This category is used to describe the manner in which sub-topics are generated in the course of a lesson activity.

Point (1) is used to indicate a high frequency of teacher generated sub-topics for discussion. Students are directed to engage in interaction only on these topics. Teacher strictly maintains discussion on these topics by sanctioning or ignoring students’ attempts to introduce sub-topics.
Point (2) is used to indicate some instances of teacher’s acknowledgement of student generated sub-topics.

Point (3) is used to indicate some instances of teacher’s acknowledgement of student generated sub-topics, but also some instances of teacher utilizing student generated sub-topics for discussion.

Point (4) is used to indicate some instances of teacher and students negotiating the ongoing sub-topics of discussion.

Point (5) is used to indicate regular instances of teacher and students co-constructing sub-topics for discussion throughout the course of the lesson activity.

8) Division of labor - length

Point (1) is used to indicate a predominance of teacher talk. Teacher turns are typically longer than student turns. The teacher/student (all student talk combined) word count ratio is probably 2:1.

Point (2) is used to indicate a predominance of teacher talk. Teacher turns are typically longer than student turns. The teacher/student (all student talk combined) word count ratio is probably 3:2.

Point (3) is used to indicate a fairly even distribution of teacher and student talk. Student turns are about as long as teacher turns. The teacher/student (all student talk combined) word count ratio is probably 1:1.

Point (4) is used to indicate more student talk than teacher talk. There is typically more than one student turn in between teacher turns, and student turns are typically equal or longer than teacher turns. The teacher/student (all student talk combined) word count ratio is probably 2:3.

Point (5) is used to indicate a predominance of student talk. Student turns are longer and more frequent than teacher turns. The teacher/student (all student talk combined) word count ratio is probably 1:2.

9) Division of labor – responsibility of thought from t to S

Point (1) is used to indicate the teacher does the thinking for the students. This may include a strong presence of modeling, questioning that contain correct responses, thinking aloud, explicit/direct instruction, and telling.

Point (2) is used to indicate attempts by the teacher to guide the students to do the thinking through the use of questioning. However, questions are overly guiding, and include the correct answers or are strong hints toward a correct answer.
Point (3) is used to indicate a mix of teacher and student thought, with the teacher doing most of the guiding.

Point (4) is used to indicate T questions that turn questions back to students (e.g., how could you figure that out?)

Point (5) Ss ask each other questions and take turns leading the conversation.

10) **Degree of heterogeneity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>predominantly (&gt;90%) one question type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(80-90%) one question type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(65-80%) one question type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(55-65%) one question type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>an even mixture of lower- and higher-order questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11) **Expansion Options:** This category is used to indicate the nature of expansion options which occur during Teacher/Student interaction within a discrete lesson activity.

Point (1) is used to indicate the absence of student generated expansions of the lesson topic. Expansions which do occur are Teacher generated (i.e. Teacher expands on the current topic, includes teacher reformulations). No student generated topic expansions are allowed.

Point (2) is used to indicate teacher elicitation of some student topic expansion.

Point (3) is used to indicate some instances of teacher’s acknowledgement of students’ topic expansions and student initiated topic expansion.

Point (4) is used to indicate not only some instances of the teacher’s acknowledgement of students’ topic expansions, but also some instances of Teacher and/or other students’ incorporating this expansion into the ongoing lesson discussion.

Point (5) is used to indicate regular instances of Teacher and/or other students incorporations of student-generated topic expansions into the ongoing lesson discussion (i.e. multidirectional expansions).

12) **Extent of Student Participation.** This category is used to describe the extent to which all members of the student body participate in the ongoing lesson discussion.

Point (1) is used to denote a relatively small number of core students who comprise the Teacher and Self-designated respondent group throughout the lesson activity.

Point (2) is used to denote a slightly larger number of core respondents who interact with the Teacher throughout the lesson activity.
Point (3) is used to denote a respondent group which is comprised of about half of the student body present during lesson discussions.

Point (4) is used to denote a respondent group which is comprised of most of the student body present during lesson discussions.

For small groups:
   (1) Half or fewer responded
   (2) Most students responded
   (3) All students may have responded, but disproportionately.
   (4) All students proportionately responded

13) Does the script match the learning goal:

Point (1) is used to indicate that the script never matches the learning goal.

Point (2) is used to indicate that the script rarely matches the learning goal.

Point (3) is used to indicate that the script sometimes matches the learning goal.

Point (4) is used to indicate that the script often matches the learning goal.

Point (5) is used to indicate that the script always matches the learning goal.

14) Preferred Learning Goals: This category is used to describe the goal of the instructional activity as indicated by the discourse. This category specifically examines the preferred contribution to the discussion.

Point (1) is used to indicate that the implied goal is to contribute specific “right” answer to the teacher’s questions. This goal is revealed through the predominance of a strict discourse structure in which the teacher/student initiates test-like questions for which there is only one correct answer.

Point (2) is used to indicate the implied goal as being correct student contributions with more opportunities to share correct information. This goal is revealed through a discourse structure in which the teacher initiates a combination of test-like questions and more open-ended questions for which there are several plausible answers.

Point (3) is used to indicate the implied goal as being a combination of contributions relaying correct information and shared knowledge. This goal is revealed through the predominance of a discourse structure in which the teacher/student initiates questions for which there are several correct answers.

Point (4) is used to indicate the implied goal as being the emphasis on shared knowledge, but still includes some desire for correct information. This goal is revealed through a discourse structure
in which the teacher/student initiates questions for which there are no specific answers in combination with questions that are constructed based on previous student responses.

Point (5) is used to indicate the implied goal as being the arrival at an understanding or shared knowledge. This goal is revealed through a discourse structure in that is predominantly characterized by chained utterances and chained events. Questions initiated by either teacher/student are constructed based on previous student responses.

15) Implied Answer

Point (1) is used to indicate a predominance of questions for which it is implied that the teacher is seeking a particular (preferred) response. This will be evidenced by a high degree of Reverse Polarity Questions (e.g., He did? Isn’t that…?) and by general dissatisfaction or even surprise at student responses. When students share responses or thinking, the teacher evaluates the response.

Point (2) is used to indicate…Even if multiple responses would be acceptable, there is still a sense that the teacher holds acceptability/preference in evaluating responses.

Point (3) is used to indicate a balanced combination of questions for which it is implied that the teacher is seeking a particular (preferred) response with questions that signal the teacher’s authentic curiosity.

Point (4) is used to indicate more authentic questions to which the teacher does not know the answer. They may be largely procedural or “dead ends” (no elaboration) (e.g., “What section are you working on now?”)

Point (5) is used to indicate a predominance of questions for which the teacher is not seeking a particular (preferred) response, but questions are rather imbued with authentic curiosity (e.g., “What do you think about…”). The teacher may even problematize one univocal interpretation.

Characteristics of Student Responses – evidence of Implied Learning Goal

Point (1) is used to indicate that the implied goal is to contribute specific “right” answer to the teacher’s questions. This goal is revealed through the predominance of student responses that indicate guesswork, as evidenced through raised intonation of responses and short, rapid strings of answers to questions that aren’t related).

Point (2) is used to indicate the implied goal as being correct student contributions with more opportunities to share correct information. This goal is revealed through a discourse structure in which the students attempt to contribute the “right” answer, along with contributing some responses for which multiple meanings are possible.

Point (3) is used to indicate the implied goal as being a combination of contributions relaying correct information and shared knowledge. This goal is revealed through the predominance of student responses for which multiple meanings are possible.
Point (4) is used to indicate the implied goal as being the emphasis on shared knowledge, but still includes some desire for correct information. This goal is revealed through student responses for which multiple meanings are possible, as well as response that indicate inquiry and exploration (make conjectures, take risks, ask questions, find evidence for or against proposed theories).

Point (5) is used to indicate the implied goal as being the arrival at an understanding or shared knowledge. This goal is revealed through students providing responses that indicate inquiry and exploration (make conjectures, take risks, ask questions, find evidence for or against proposed theories).

**Student Turn Orientation**

Point (1) is used to indicate that the students always orient their utterances to the teacher and never to each other.

Point (2) is used to indicate that the students often orient their utterances to the teacher and rarely to each other.

Point (3) is used to indicate that the students sometimes orient their utterances to the teacher and sometimes to each other.

Point (4) is used to indicate that the students rarely orient their utterances to the teacher often to each other.

Point (5) is used to indicate that the students never orient their utterances to the teacher, but always to each other.
Appendix C
Codebook

CODING TEACHER INTERVIEWS

I coded the teacher semi-structured interviews and video stimulated recalls inductively, trying to think of codes as large, open categories for now, knowing that I can go back through and create more fine-grained codes as necessary and relevant. My primary research questions are NOT answered in the interviews per se, so I am thinking of these data sources as information to provide context to my findings. For example, I will likely dig deeper into the teachers’ orientations toward reading and learning, noting especially the differences that emerge between the two groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definition/Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Behavior/Learning</td>
<td>Positioning Students</td>
<td>Teacher’s comments describe student difficulty, struggle, challenges, etc.</td>
<td>“The summary group was very resistant. They did not want to do the work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td></td>
<td>“To get them to write about what they’re comprehending or understanding about what they’re reading, that’s a struggle for them.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“One of them does not have a lot of support at home.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Positioning Students</td>
<td>Teacher’s comments describe student strength</td>
<td>“and sometimes she makes these connections and I’m like ‘wow’…”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positively</td>
<td></td>
<td>“She’s super verbal and can comprehend…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“They’re finally starting to step up and take control over that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NONE ASSIGNED</td>
<td>Repeated Responses</td>
<td>Teacher repeats an idea. This is especially necessary for SP’s Video Stimulated Recall. She thought she lost her first recording of her responses and started over, summarizing everything she had already stated.</td>
<td>“They were more engaged than the summary group.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences Between Two Groups, Explicitly Stated by the Teacher</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Average group is more engaged.</td>
<td>“This group is a little better with that skill, but they still need to practice…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reread</td>
<td>Average group is better about going back to text</td>
<td>“they definitely have more skills and ability to take information and summarize it, even though some of them sometimes gave too much detail…they’re just a higher ability level.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Teacher Reflection</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Average group is more independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“This group is much more independent and focused than the summary group.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think the Gentle Ben group is closer to running themselves than the Mouse and the Motorcycle group.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text Genre</td>
<td>High groups do fiction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The difference is that we’ve really been working on nonfiction with this group...but I’m hoping to do fictional book groups with them, and I feel like you can have so much richer discussion sometimes with those rich pieces of literature...so I feel like I’ve been doing more of that with my higher level groups...”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Behavior/Learning/</td>
<td>Teacher reflects upon her views toward reading comprehension, makes comments about her instructional goals about reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>“my overall expectation was to really get this group to look at literature, look beneath the surface, look between the lines, not just focus on plot, and so, they’re at a level where they can really start analyzing stories and not just reading them on the surface...”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“it’s not just being able to like go back and summarize what happened, but it’s being able to read between the lines, and really understand what they author is trying to tell you and um how the characters are feeling...”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“I think kids interpret text based on their background knowledge and where they’re coming from...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orientations toward Reading</td>
<td>Teacher reveals her orientations toward learning in general, not related to specific student behavior</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I try to expose these kids to vocabulary and conflict and plot and theme and inferences through my large group lessons, so I do address them so that they’re not completely missing out on it.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“What I have found that works best for them is to write important details on sticky notes...”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments about Discourse</td>
<td>Teacher reflects upon her discourse</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“talk fluently about the chapters”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The questions they ask tell me a lot about how much they are understanding.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflections for the future</td>
<td>Teacher makes comments about changing her instructional behavior (“should” or “next time”)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m not sure this group understands the difference completely. That would be the next step with this group.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NONE ASSIGNED</td>
<td>The Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments about formal and informal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“now we’re doing nonfiction right before TCAP...”</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
testing NOT assessment through conversation

## CODING LESSONS

### Categories and Codes that emerged during the content logging process (described above)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definition/Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **NONE ASSIGNED**  | Question       | Utterances that prompt a student response AND utterances that  
• end with a rising intonation  
• begin with interrogative words  
• begin with a verb  
• end with a tag  
• have a disjunctive form  
• contain embedded questions  
• use alternative forms  
Counted as one excerpt – when T poses a question, then directs it to a student, repeating it.  
IS NOT:  
Calling on students  
Questions directed toward the whole class or others not in the group  
When T begins to ask a Q, but changes direction and makes a statement UNLESS a S responds to the initial question | • What is ...?  
• Can you ...?  
• ... right?  
• You do or do not ...?  
• I’m curious if you ...  
• The question is ...  
“What’s the important information the author included? D, what’s one thing?  
Vanessa?  
“what does he – he photographs the volcano Kilauea and moving lava, which is part of that volcano. Good.” |
| **Conversation analysis and Assertive Questions** | Reverse Polarity Question | Intended response is opposite polarity | “Did he really think that?” |
|                    | Counterpoint justification | The T is asking the S to justify a claim that she doesn’t agree with. In asking the question, she signals/imposes the “correct” univocal response | “Why can’t you prove it?”  
“But why aren’t you on that side of the argument?” |
|                    | Two alternatives | In error correction: first is problem, |
|                    |                | |
|                    |                | |
|                    |                | |


| DIUs | Fill-in-the blank | “and…”  
“meaning…” |
|------|-------------------|----------------|
| Same Polarity Question | Intended response is the same polarity  
NOT when Ss provide elicited, substantive information, like “Are there other things we can include?”  
When T suggests a response in a rising intonation – asking a question | “Is that a good summary?”  
“So maybe they’re famous photos?” |
| Tag | Statement followed by a tag | “We talked about that last week, right?” |
| Directive | T tells students to do something in the form of a question | “Can you …?”  
“How could you summarize that?” |
| Wh- Questions | Designed to request an account for a prior claim, but negative assertion suggests no adequate account is available | “Why would you think that.”  
“Where’d you get that idea.” |
| Accountable Talk | Accountable to Learning Community | Ts and Ss explicitly link ideas to others’ ideas, making consistent efforts to ensure that all participants understand the ideas and positions shared during the whole-group discussion. To receive a high score, needed evidence that teachers/students are listening attentively, paraphrasing, and building ideas upon one another’s contributions. |
| Accountable to Accurate Knowledge | Ts ask Ss to support ideas with evidence based on text. “When speakers make an observation or claim, they try to be as specific and accurate as possible, always maintaining | • Who can put into their own words what Keisha just said?  
• Does anyone else want to add on?  
• Can you explain what you meant when you said…?  
• Take your time. We’ll wait.  
• Jorge, I haven’t heard from you yet. Go ahead.  
• Hold on. Let John finish his thought.  
• Who agrees/disagrees with what Ann just said?  
• Who wants to add on to what Ann just said?  
• Did you hear what Ann just said? Can you repeat that in your own words?  
• Did everyone hear that? I can’t hear you.  
• How do you know that?  
• Can you give me some examples?  
• Where did you find that information?  
• Can you show me which part of the text tells you that |
attention to evidence, truth, and the community’s accumulated knowledge.” Often supported by the teacher’s attempts to tie a current contribution back to knowledge accumulated by the class previously. “The raters coded talk moves as AAK when the teacher and students engaged in describing factual information based on the text or supported their claim with evidence based on the text.” **BUT I’m going to think of it a little differently:** In these reading groups, almost everything could be considered “describing factual information based on the text.” I’m going to look for when there are explicit links. Not just general questions about information in the text b/c that’s everything basically. And it’s NOT when the T is directing Ss to the text to lead them to the correct answer/ in error correction. In other words, NOT ‘go back to the text to answer my question’ BUT ‘go back to the text to back up your idea.’

| Accountable to Rigorous Thinking | Ts ask Ss to explain their thinking, to promote students’ clear reasoning to support their ideas, and students’ elaboration of their logic. Speakers explain their thinking, or are asked to explain their thinking by using rational strategies to present arguments and by drawing logical conclusions. “If

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>information?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What do you mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does this connect?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Why do you think that? |
| Can you explain that more? |
| Say more about that. |
| So what does that tell us? |
someone makes a statement intended as a claim or a conclusion, then that person must supply the evidence that led to it.”

Questions are weak when the teacher does not follow up on students’ contributions when the students present their ideas, and are strong when teachers press students to explain their thinking.

May need to go back through and double check AT codes in KS lessons, but as of 9-6, I am NOT going to consider “why” expansion questions that review the plot as ART. There needs to be an explicit attempt to have students **make a claim about their own idea** (NOT a detail from the text) and justify it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>NOT going to consider statements with a tag as part of the series if there is T talk in between the tag and another question. B/C tags are pretty rhetorical and often there is no discursive slot after a tag. Same goes with other rhetorical questions preceding non-rhetorical questions (Trying to capture the times when there are questions to which students do NOT have the opportunity to respond – b/c if the T asks H-O questions but follows up with L-O questions, then the H-O Qs may as well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOT:</td>
<td>T: Does the mom want him to go? M: No T: Why, M?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES:</td>
<td>T: If you were Ralph, would you have gone? M: yes T: Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See below for examples.
not have been asked. Makes a difference in understanding the frequencies.)

Also, may have to watch the video to determine discursive slot. Students may provide nonverbal communication to T, especially to yes/no questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Question Type</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 in series</td>
<td>First question of series</td>
<td>What does it mean if you comprehend something?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 in series</td>
<td>Second question of series</td>
<td>What does it mean if you comprehend something?...What does it mean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 in series</td>
<td>Third question of series</td>
<td>What does it mean if you comprehend something?...What does it mean...When you’re – here listen – when you’re doing Daily Five and you get to the end of a page when you’re reading to someone, what do you have to check for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 in series</td>
<td>Fourth question of series</td>
<td>What does it mean if you comprehend something?...What does it mean...When you’re – here listen – when you’re doing Daily Five and you get to the end of a page when you’re reading to someone, what do you have to check for? Check for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Question of Series</td>
<td>Assigned to either the second, third, or fourth question – whichever one is the final question. There is a clear discursive slot, or an opportunity for students to respond, after this question.</td>
<td>What does it mean if you comprehend something?...What does it mean...When you’re – here listen – when you’re doing Daily Five and you get to the end of a page when you’re reading to someone, what do you have to check for? Check for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>